



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

A monthly eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 22 ~ June 20, 2006

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About Associational

Associational is published monthly by the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, an organization of churches, groups and individuals that advocates for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in the life and ministries of Baptist churches.

Please contact us for permission to reprint contents.

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From the Executive Director

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I can't recommend to you more highly Mahan Siler's new book, Exile or Embrace. I purchased the book shortly after meeting Mahan in person at the Alliance of Baptists Convocation in Birmingham, AL, and in one day, I read it cover to cover. Couldn't put it down! For me, a life-long Baptist, it read like a novel - full of congregational and denominational drama!

Exile or Embrace is an absolute MUST for pastors and congregations beginning the discernment process over becoming welcoming & affirming, and/or joining the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists. Included in the book is a study guide designed for an eight-week study.

Consider the following excerpt (pg. 166) on possible resistance from within a congregation over becoming welcoming & affirming:

Resistance to this conversation may be in the form of questions, such as; "Why bring up a subject best left alone?" "Why now, not later?" You may hear it in statements: "I'm feeling pressured to discuss a topic that is uncomfortable for me." "This is a political issue and doesn't belong in the church." "Even discussing this will legitimize homosexual behavior." "We'll lose members over this." "I don't have time for this."

Working with the resistance is a crucial aspect of your leadership. This challenge is true with any proposed change. But talking about sexuality, in particular homosexuality, is very personal and private. The resistance will likely be pronounced.

Exile or Embrace is available at www.Amazon.com. Mahan Siler is happy to serve as a coach for pastors or lay people working through the discernment process. Please contact me at 608-255-2155, or ken@wabaptists.org, and I'll put you in touch with Mahan.

With love,
Rev. Ken Pennings
Executive Director

It's Not Too Late to Register for Tapestry

Daily Registration Available at the Door

June 26-29
INDY ~ Indianapolis, IN

A Join Gathering of



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists



Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance



The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns

**Joint Gathering of
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and
Affirming Christians**

**Tapestry 2006:
*Live, Love, Laugh and Lead***

**June 26-29 ~ University of
Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN**

Each day of the gathering will lift up the empowering aspects of what it is to be a person of faith in an affirming Christian community through keynote speakers, worship, workshops, and opportunities for group discussion and meditation. The sponsoring organizations are The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB), Gay Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance (GLAD), and The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns (Coalition).

Register today at www.tapestry2006.org

A Great Awakening of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

July 21–22, 2006, Northampton, MA

Hosted by First Churches (W&A), 129 Main St, Northampton, MA, 01060. Contact Bruce Baker at <mailto:bpenke@aol.com>, (617) 669-2974.

In a relaxed informal setting, connect with others through story-telling, information-sharing and breaking of the bread. In the historic church of Jonathan Edwards, we will explore the transformative spiritual experiences of the welcoming church movement—a great awakening for our own time.

FRIDAY 6 pm: Meet-and-Greet Reception, 7:30 pm: Welcome & Evening Vespers, 8:30 pm: Dinner and fellowship around town

SATURDAY 8:30 am: Continental Breakfast, 9 am: General Assembly, 9:30 am: Small Group Storytelling, 10:15 am: Break, 10:30 am: Topical Small Groups, 11:30 am: Great Awakenings in the Welcoming & Affirming Church Movement (Led by AWAB Director Ken Pennings), 12:30 pm: Lunch, 1:30 pm: Worship with Holy Communion, 2:30 pm: Closing

COST PER PERSON:

Friday and Saturday, \$20 (includes light refreshments; Saturday breakfast and lunch)
Friday only, \$5 (includes light refreshments)
Saturday only, \$15 (includes breakfast and lunch).

Please make check payable to AWAB and send with full name/contact information to Bruce Baker, PO Box 300339, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 by June 29. If you cannot commit by June 29, please send email to Bruce Baker with your intentions. Registration available at time of retreat if space allows.

AWAB Welcomes Two New Churches and One Chapter

We are thrilled to introduce to you the latest additions to AWAB's family:

Myers Park Baptist Church (ABC/USA, Alliance of Baptists, NC Council of Churches, BPFNA), PO Box 6006, Charlotte, NC 28207, 704-334-7232, fax: 704-372-5150, www.mpbconline.org, Rev. Dr. H. Stephen Shoemaker, senior minister. W&A contact person: Rev. Robin Coira, executive minister.

Woodside Church (ABC/USA, United Church of Christ), 1509 E. Court St, Flint, MI 48503, 810-767-4911, fax: 810-767-4151, www.woodsidechurch.net, Rev. Dr. Deborah Kohler, pastor, W&A contact person: Steve Blinks.

Willemette Valley AWAB Chapter, PO Box 6033, Salem, OR 97304, 503-585-1054, www.willemettevalleyawab.org, W&A contact person: Kathy Smith.

Donations in Memory of.... In Honor of....

Recently, donations have been made to AWAB...

...in honor of Rev. Dr. Craig Collemer and Gary LaParl, who were married on May 6, 2005, at First Baptist Church, Beverly, MA.

...in honor of Dr. H. Darrell Lance, from friends in Rochester, NY, who write: "What better time (to make this donation), we surmise, than now, when Darrell is leaving the post of editor of The InSpiriter, a task which he has lovingly and faithfully carried on for the

entirety of its publication. He has made us in Rochester very proud.”

...in memory of Walter B. Erickson, who died November 27, 2005 (a gift from his wife Muriel).

Will Seals Accepts Call to First Baptist Church, Greenfield, MA

AWAB member, Rev. Will Seals, has accepted a call to First Baptist Church, Greenfield, MA, and will move from Rochester, NY, to Greenfield in August or September. Congratulations Will!

AWAB Pastor Writes for Local Journal

The article below was written by Ellen Parsons Tatreau, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Albany, NY (W&A) and published in the March 2006 issue of “commUNITY”, the monthly journal of the Capital District Gay & Lesbian Community Council, Inc.

Welcoming Congregations: The Bull’s Eye

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? ...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Just when you think you can exhale a great sigh of relief for not being expected to throw your “all and all” on the altar in self-sacrifice to honor God, you find yourself impaled on the bull’s eye of life’s target board by trying to live out that “do justice” thing!

As a person with ordination standing recognized through the American Baptist Churches, USA and presently serving as pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Albany, I feel mandated to stay “somewhere” on the target board. However, I am conscious that such a mandate impacts when, how, and to whom I can minister when I allow myself to be placed on the bull’s eye. Under our denominational polity, it is through the discernment of the congregation that each church determines how it will live out its faith beliefs. And yet, we are not entirely independent as we recognize that we are part of a greater body of Christ-believers, both within and external to our particular tradition. This free and yet binding covenant challenges American Baptists to

live with a certain tension as we try to discern God’s truths offered through the quadrilateral authorities of scripture, reason, tradition and experience of the Holy Spirit. We confess that we might not all agree around specific issues, but strive to surrender final judgment to God who is, alone, the sovereign power over our lives.

I find it incredibly liberating to minister out of a congregation that invites one another out of the principle of “soul liberty”/“freedom of conscience” to struggle and make personal resolutions, without standing in judgment on any number of issues: abortion, war, capital punishment, racism, sexism and any other number of “isms”. This basic principle of American Baptist life is what enables us to welcome all who come seeking God’s presence and affirm every confessor’s place within the Body of Christ.

Our “Welcoming and Affirming” status is a blessing for which I am constantly grateful as I serve Emmanuel Baptist. However, it pains me to see how our witness also hurts us as we are challenged by our denominational sister churches who fear our commitment to inclusiveness and accuse us of not being a people honoring scripture as an authority over our ministry. It pains me to have significant numbers of the tradition that has nurtured my faith journey to call out our ministry as “Anathema”!

Yet, in the spirit of two of our great American Baptist leaders, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his recently deceased wife and leader in her own right, Coretta Scott King, who affirmed that “injustice anywhere, threatens justice everywhere”...some stands must be taken; some pains must be borne, because this is the very least of what is required of us as faithful children of God.

Glendale Baptist Youth Group (W&A) Prepares for Conference with Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Other Nobel Peace Laureates

Nashville, Tenn., June 9, 2006 — Glendale Baptist Church of Nashville, Tennessee (<http://www.glendalebaptist.org>) is sending five youth and two adults to Denver, Colorado the weekend of September 15, 2006 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of PeaceJam (<http://www.peacejam.org>) with The Dalai Lama of Tibet, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and ten other leading Nobel Peace Laureates. The PeaceJam celebration will

include about three thousand young participants from around the world who will join the Nobel Laureates in issuing a Global Call to Action.

PeaceJam is a year-long, on-going educational program built around leading Nobel Peace Laureates, who work personally with youth to pass on the spirit, skills and wisdom they embody. The goal of PeaceJam is to inspire a new generation of peacemakers who will transform their local communities, themselves and the world.

This will be Glendale Baptist's second PeaceJam trip. In February, eight Glendale youth and two adults traveled to Memphis, Tennessee for a weekend "Apprenticeship in Peacemaking" with East Timor's then-foreign minister, José Ramos-Horta. Since February, East Timor, the world's youngest independent nation, has experienced serious political unrest and Horta was sworn in as defense minister on June 3, 2006 to help end the crisis. Horta won the Nobel peace prize in 1996 for his efforts in opposing Indonesia's domination of East Timor and is scheduled to be in Denver for the anniversary.

The personal interaction that the Glendale "PeaceJammers" encountered with the man who must now save his country from sliding into a civil war has had an effect on the participants. "From the time I learned what PeaceJam was, I spent everyday looking forward to meeting a man who had single handedly changed the world. Not only would I get to meet José, but being able to listen to him speak and having the opportunity to learn from a Nobel Peace Laureate seemed unreal," said Garrett Schlosser, age 16, who recently shared his PeaceJam experience during a worship service at Glendale. "After only 5 minutes of listening to José, I quickly realized what a smart, humble, and 'peaceful' man we were listening to. His speech included a great deal about the history of the oppression of his people by Indonesia which started in 1976," he said. "Now, after hearing José so passionately talk about his efforts to bring peace to his country, it only hurts more to read about the violence and chaos now present in East Timor that José virtually gave his life to ending."

As Glendale's PeaceJam team anxiously monitors the situation with José Ramos-Horta and East Timor on a daily basis, they continue to prepare for their meeting with other Nobel Peace Laureates in September. This preparation will include the implementation of their own peace project- erecting a Peace Pole on the church grounds. A Peace Pole can be any height and can be decorated in any way but most contain the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth." The Glendale Peace Pole will contain the

message in Spanish. Depending on the number of sides that the pole has, the youth also want to include the message in Hebrew, Arabic, Korean and Georgian.

According to information posted by the youth on the church's website (<http://www.glendalebaptist.org/youth/peacepole>), "We believe that the issue that we are addressing is the lack of awareness and understanding in the world that 'peace' is an intentional, deliberate process that requires the world community to think and act as peacemakers." Youth members intend to include the entire congregation in the process of building their own church peace pole but they don't want to stop there. The next step is to invite other churches and organizations to consider building their own peace pole. This includes other youth groups from their summer camp, other Nashville churches and their partner church in Santa Clara, Cuba. The Glendale PeaceJam attendees also presented their Peace Pole project to José Ramos-Horta in Memphis (see attached photograph).

"Peace poles can be used by anyone, anywhere and can unite people heading towards the same goal," said Rachel White, 15 years old. "A peace pole can be nothing more than a cheerful reminder, or it could be a political stand. Our peace pole will be a tool to portray our dedication to, yearning, and search for peace. Peace poles give confidence and affirmation to peace-makers everywhere that peace is possible, as long as we are all in this together," she said.

Planning for the trip to Denver has also included fundraising. The PeaceJam attendees are getting a lot of help from their fellow youth members and older church members who, even though they can not go to PeaceJam, have committed to help raise the money to help pay for the trip. Glendale youth members recently presented their Peace Pole project to the Glendale congregation at a recent dinner (where tipping was highly encouraged as a way to support the PeaceJam trip) and sold miniature Peace Poles. Upcoming plans include a "parents night out" as well as a "Silent Auction and Cake Walk" on June 21 at Glendale Baptist Church.

Once in Denver, the Glendale PeaceJam team will have a busy weekend. Billed as the largest gathering of Nobel Peace Laureates ever in the United States, the anniversary celebration will include: a public event featuring all Nobel Laureates in attendance; an internationally televised conference featuring participating Nobel Laureates; a concert in honor of the Nobel Laureates and the young leaders of the PeaceJam program; a one hour television special; Master classes taught by the Nobel Peace Laureates;

and extensive coverage of all aspects of the event on C-SPAN and CNN.

Whether or not Glendale is training the next generation's Nobel Peace Prize winners is unknown but the process has certainly made the young peacemakers think. "I didn't know much about peacemaking when we started this project," said Daniel Collins, age 14. "But I've come to realize that it's just like anything else that you want to be good at. I want to be a good basketball player so I practice as much as I can. If I'm going to be a peacemaker, I have to practice peace every day. And that's what I am trying to do."

To learn more about Glendale Baptist Church or to find out how to help with the PeaceJam project, visit <http://www.glendalebaptist.org> or call Anne-Leslie Owens at 615-330-9263. To learn more about the PeaceJam Foundation or the anniversary celebration, visit <http://www.peacejam.org> or call Gary Blackwell at 303-455-2099. Glendale Baptist Church is participating in PeaceJam through BRIDGES, a Memphis, Tennessee based non-profit organization. For more information about BRIDGES, visit www.bridgesusa.org or call Rody Thompson at 901-452-5600.

Stan Haste's "State of the Alliance" Address

An Annual Report to the Alliance of Baptists, By Stan Haste, Executive Director, Birmingham, Alabama, April 22, 2006

Since we last met in Greenville a year ago, two remarkable African American leaders, both women, have departed this life for the next. Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King left their own legacies and that of the movement they represented so well. We know that most of the recorded histories of the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century feature the men who led it, as nearly all histories do. Yet we know as well that our sisters in the struggle, Rosa and Coretta, were far more than movement adornments. They were more than the women behind the men of the movement. They were leaders in their own right and our full respect is due them in equal measure to that rightfully rendered the men.

Assembled as we are in Birmingham, a city where some of the decisive events in that epic struggle took place, we pay these exemplary women the homage they are due. And it was near here, over in Montgomery, where Rosa Parks showed the young – the very young -- Martin Luther King, Jr., the stuff he

would need at the head of the civil rights column. Although she was not old at the time, she was his elder and set the example of sheer courage that would become his badge as well. Her courage came from deep within. So she could say, in recalling that day when she declined to give up her seat on the bus, simply and without pretense, "I had felt for a long time, that if I was ever told to get up so a white person could sit, that I would refuse to do so."

As for Coretta Scott King, who better to cite as the embodiment of the theme of this gathering, for it was she who said, "Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated." Yet her bedrock commitment to the principles of nonviolent change did not mean she would not push for justice for all the oppressed, as when she said later in life, "I believe all Americans who believe in freedom, tolerance and human rights have a responsibility to oppose bigotry and prejudice based on sexual orientation."

Within the Alliance of Baptists we oppose bigotry and prejudice of every kind. Yet we are acutely conscious that merely saying we oppose bigotry and injustice doesn't alone make it so. Today as we consider a new statement on racism and our need both to repent of it and renew our determination to overcome it, I want to invite you to begin thinking of our Alliance as a genuinely anti-racist organization. This statement is more than window dressing to adorn a convocation program given over to the theme of race, racism and reconciliation. If we adopt it, we will be declaring that from this day forward we intend to become an anti-racist ecclesial body. It is thus something not to be considered lightly.

We have a long way to go. In saying so, I mean more than a perpetual sense of the individual and collective guilt we rightly bear for our responsibility as individuals, churches and society for the reality of racism that continues to plague us. Not without reason, after all, has Martin Marty – one of the preeminent religious historians of our time – made the case that racism is the original sin of the American people. What did he mean?

One year ago, your Board of Directors engaged in a first exercise in anti-racism training with the help of the organization Crossroads, an interfaith ministry for racial justice. Our trainers began by helping us with a working definition of racism, one that is both disarming of unnecessary and counterproductive breast-beating but at the same time demanding in its implications. Here's what they said:

1. If we want to work on solutions to racism, we need a common definition and a common analysis of racism.

2. Racism is not the same thing as individual race prejudice and bigotry. All people are racially prejudiced (regardless of racial/ethnic identity). It is part of the air we breathe. It is socialized into every person. But this does not mean that everyone is racist.

3. Racism is more than race prejudice. It is more than individual attitudes and actions. Racism is the collective actions of a dominant racial group.

4. Power turns race prejudice into racism. Racial prejudice becomes racism when one group's racial prejudices are enforced by the systems and institutions of a society, giving power and privilege based on skin color to the group in power, and limiting the power and privilege of the racial groups that are not in power.

Thus it is racial prejudice plus the misuse of power by systems and institutions that equal racism. As applied to the Alliance, the proposed statement you will be asked to consider later this morning gets to the heart of the matter in these words: "We have come to understand that repenting of our racism is not a one-time event but a long and demanding process. As an expression of our repentance we need to engage and re-engage in the hard process, the necessary process, the life-giving process of turning away from our racism and turning toward the goal of an Alliance in which there is increasing racial and ethnic diversity, an Alliance in which there is profound respect for all persons, an Alliance in which there truly is 'no male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek.'"

We have made a beginning. Our current strategic plan, adopted two years ago, declares as its first priority direction, "The Alliance will become ever more an inclusive people." Under that priority direction, several more specific objectives are listed, the first of which reads, "The Alliance will advocate for racial reconciliation in its member congregations and communities." This 20th Annual Convocation, with its theme of racial reconciliation, is one example of our determination to live into that objective.

Perhaps you caught the wording in the strategic plan that our advocacy for racial reconciliation will be in our congregations and communities. To be sure, what we declare as a body during annual meetings matters; at least it should matter. But of far greater import is what we do locally. That is true whether of our commitment to racial reconciliation, gender

equity, or the inclusion and affirmation of those of every sexual orientation. Many of you are engaged in struggles against injustice and for inclusion in your own communities and churches. Some of you are battle-tested veterans in those struggles. Know that what you are doing is worthwhile and worthy of the gospel of the liberating Savior we serve.

As we embark upon the effort to become a self-consciously anti-racist group, we have the benefit and blessing of worthy partners who have done and still are doing the same. Our ecumenical partners, the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), are examples worthy of emulation. They will help us find our way, as will the American Baptist Churches in the USA, demographically the most diverse of all Protestant bodies in this country.

Perhaps it will surprise you to hear how American Baptist the Alliance is becoming. Of 117 congregations currently affiliated with the Alliance, 51 are ABC/USA churches as well. Most of the new churches in the Alliance over the past three or four years have ties, historic and present, to ABC/USA. Almost without exception the other newly affiliated Alliance churches are new or transformed congregations we have planted in collaboration with the United Church of Christ and, more recently, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Later this morning in the report of our Nominating Committee, you will be presented with dramatic new evidence of the increasingly vital role American Baptists are playing in the Alliance. Both Jim Hopkins of Oakland, California, and Kristy Pullen of Reston, Virginia (but until recently of Pennsylvania), have spent their entire careers in ministry in the context of American Baptist life. Their nominations as president and vice president, respectively, speak to the evolution of the Alliance from a predominantly regional movement across the Bible belt into a truly national body of Baptists. This is not meant to sound grandiose, because we all know that within the vast sea of Baptists in this country our ship is small. But it is a seaworthy vessel nonetheless, one that has navigated some tricky and even treacherous waters but is now moving out toward horizons yet unknown to us.

A decade ago, as the Alliance approached the tender age of 10, many of us didn't know if the vessel could take on much more water. But our analogy was faulty. What we failed to recognize is the truth of the aphorism that a rising tide lifts all boats, ours included. In that respect, could it be that we've taken ourselves a bit too seriously at times? Maybe we have something to gain from the perspective of the

British humorist Jerome K Jerome in his whimsical classic, *Three Men in a Boat* (1889): “Let your boat of life be light, packed with only what you need – a homely home and simple pleasures, one or two friends, worth the name, someone to love and someone to love you, a cat, a dog, and a pipe or two, enough to eat and enough to wear, and a little more than enough to drink; for thirst is a dangerous thing.”

(It was Jerome, in the same essay, who said: “I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. I love to keep it by me; the idea of getting rid of it nearly breaks my heart.”)

Yes, our vessel is small. But think of the companions God has given us as we sail. Thirty men – and merely three women – first boarded this ship called Alliance 19 years ago. But what a job those three did on the 30. Gender equity is more than an organizational objective for the Alliance of Baptists. We really mean it in our governance. Yet where gender equity most matters, in calls extended by churches to women as pastors, our boat seems to be stuck in the mud. “Where is the rising tide?” is not an unreasonable question for women to be asking, or for men who care about the advancement of women to rightful places of service in our churches. Sisters and brothers: I don’t have any easy answers. But I want you to know that the Alliance board and staff will continue to advocate in behalf of women in ministry. This is a commitment we have not forgotten and will not neglect.

On the vessel known as Alliance, we are traveling companions as well of lesbians and gays and bisexual and transgender persons. Some say of us that we doomed ourselves to perpetual smallness the day in 1995 we received and affirmed our groundbreaking statement on sexual orientation. It is true that we delimited our numerical growth by becoming a movement that welcomes and affirms those of same-sex orientation. But I sense we’ve about gotten over worrying about it. I’ll even go so far as to say that we’re beginning to ride a rising tide of acceptance of those of minority sexual orientations that some day will take us to the higher ground of genuine equality. This doesn’t mean there aren’t yet storms to weather out there, especially by those victimized for doing nothing more than reflecting openly the image of God stamped on them. To you, the Alliance says, “We are on the journey with you, all the day long and all the way through.”

Truth be told, we have many traveling companions on the journey. These include our friends of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This ecumenical partnership has been enhanced in our internal governance by the presence

of a representative of each of our partner churches on our Board of Directors – Jeanetta Cotman of Detroit, who represents the Disciples, and Mike Castle of Dayton, Ohio, the emissary of the UCC. Among the commitments we have made to one another is that of our mutual presence in annual or biennial gatherings. Both these partner bodies hold their principal gatherings every other year. Last summer we were represented at the UCC General Synod in Atlanta by Associate Director Jeanette Holt. And that synod came to a climactic conclusion with the preaching of former Alliance President Nancy Hastings Sehested.

Also last July, I was honored to represent the Alliance in Portland, Oregon, at the Disciples General Assembly. This summer, from July 27 through August 2, I’ll have the privilege of being in Dearborn, Michigan, to represent us during the Disciples National Convocation, a gathering whose general chair is Jeanetta Cotman.

With the oversight of our Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, we continue to develop our relationship with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, this nation’s principal ecumenical organization. On the NCC Governing Board we are represented by David Waugh of New York City, who has emerged as a key leader of that central panel, and by me. Sylvia Campbell of Alexandria, Virginia, represents the Alliance on the NCC Justice & Advocacy Commission. Willard Bass of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is our representative on the Interfaith Relations Commission. And Alliance communications consultant Sue Harper Poss of Greenville, South Carolina, represents us on the Communication Commission. Jeanette Holt is our representative on the board of directors of Church World Service.

Furthermore, two members of the Alliance serve as senior executive staff of the NCC. Former Alliance Vice President Shanta Premawardhana is Associate General Secretary for Interfaith Relations, and Pat Pattillo, a member of Baptist Church of the Covenant here in Birmingham, is Associate General Secretary for Communication. To say we are well represented on the staff of the National Council of Churches is an understatement.

Within the larger family of Baptists in this country we are making new efforts to nourish relationships of mutual support with the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., American Baptist Churches in the USA, and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Our longtime friend Tyrone S. Pitts, General Secretary of the PNBC, who has been with us at

convocations several times, had hoped to be with us here in Birmingham. But this morning his flight from Indianapolis, where he participated yesterday in a regional PNBC gathering, was canceled, and we miss him. About 15 years ago, when the Alliance was struggling to find our footing and some even talked of our possible demise, Tyrone Pitts offered us space in the PNBC building in Washington. That's real friendship and we're grateful. Once again this summer it will be my honor to greet the delegates and messengers of the Progressive National Baptist Convention in your behalf during this partner body's annual gathering in Cincinnati.

As for our friends of the American Baptist Churches in the USA and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, we continue to maintain open lines of communication and engage in mutually beneficial joint projects. Among these is Baptist Builders, an on-the-ground effort based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for relief to African American churches devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This effort is being co-sponsored by PNBC, ABC/USA, CBF, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, and the Alliance. All these other bodies are putting significant amounts of money into the project, yet have insisted the Alliance be included at the table. They recognize that many of our churches are affiliated with one or more of them as well and want us to be part of this specifically targeted effort to make a difference in south Louisiana.

In addition, I must mention the special affection toward the Alliance demonstrated by Roy Medley, the still-new General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches in the USA, who made a point of inviting me to his installation three years ago and repeatedly has expressed his appreciation for the Alliance. Similarly, CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal has been unfailingly courteous and encouraging of the Alliance. Most recently this has been demonstrated in his approval of a joint project with the Alliance being led by Jerry Kerns of Greenville, South Carolina, a longtime member of both bodies. Along with CBF and the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba, we are working to bring to reality Jerry's dream of a Baptist house on the campus of the Evangelical (Protestant) Seminary of Cuba in Matanzas to be named in honor of Virginia and Alan Neely.

Yes, we are immeasurably blessed with many companions on the journey, and by none more than those from other parts of the world. What can we say of the providentially serendipitous finding of one another along our common journey as God's free people? Are we not like those forlorn disciples of Jesus who unknowingly walked with the risen Savior along the road to Emmaus in the aftermath of the

good news of the resurrection they had yet fully to grasp? Similarly, we have found ourselves walking with free and faithful Baptist companions from places as varied as Canada, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, and most recently, Brazil. We have told our stories to one another – first our laments at broken relationships with mother churches, then our hopes and dreams for the building of new relationships of genuine mutuality and trust.

This year we are graced with the presence of representatives from each of these places: Andy Crowell of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship of Canada; Raimundo Barreto of the new Aliança do Batistas de Brasil; Kingsley Perera of the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya; Dennis Dhlula and John Mazvigadza of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe; and Osvaldo Pérez and Javier Pérez of the Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba. Your presence here in Birmingham, dear friends, not only brings the world to us; it means the world to us.

Every one of the countries represented by these companions of ours is dealing with serious issues. We owe them our prayers and best efforts in Washington as our nation's leaders make fateful decisions that affect the lives of people everywhere.

That brings me to the final part of my report for this year. Let me preface it by thanking you for honoring me with your trust as a representative of the Alliance in addressing issues of public policy. Long ago you empowered me to speak for the Alliance in public forums on matters of great import to the nation and the world. It is a privilege and responsibility I do not take lightly. This means in part that in speaking out on such matters I do not pretend to speak for all Baptists or even for all Alliance Baptists. Never do I claim to speak for our churches or for any other Baptist. Always I am careful to explain that Baptist polity, properly understood and exercised, requires such disclaimers. Not even for causes we consider just and necessary are we as Alliance Baptists to claim more than is our due.

Yet within those parameters, you allow me to represent the Alliance in addressing issues of war and peace, religious freedom at home and abroad, and justice for our own citizens. Many times I do so in concert with others and especially under the leadership of the National Council of Churches. Sometimes the interests of the Alliance are directly at stake, as in the current effort in collaboration with many others to reverse the limits our government has placed on national religious organizations to travel to Cuba. During our annual meeting today you will have the chance to endorse that effort.

More often it is the interests of others that are in the crucible of public debates. Let me say, if only in passing, that one of the great tragedies of recent decades has been the pursuit of narrowly focused national interests in the making of U.S. international policy. Most recently that has included the implementation of the doctrine of preemptive war in Iraq, a war that could have and should have been avoided. In the case of Iraq, the pursuit of what our government has called the national interest has had the opposite effect. Under the banner of fighting terrorism, we have managed to manufacture more terrorists and as a consequence will face a fearsome toll for years to come. The sheer cost of that war will saddle us with public debt for years to come – and that doesn't account for what might have been done with the hundreds of billions of dollars squandered in pursuing it, some small portion of which could have served the noble purposes of eradicating both hunger and HIV/AIDS from the face of the Earth. Does that sound like hyperbole? It is not, according to those who know, in that this nation alone has the resources to achieve both those objectives. And of course, we wouldn't be alone in waging those fights. Imagine the good will we would engender the world over, with current friends and foes alike, should we set our priorities toward making peace rather than war. Would that not better serve our real interests? Lord, have mercy.

Imagine what we could do with a few others of those dollars wasted in Iraq. Today is Earth Day 2006. Imagine this: We could clean the air we breathe and the water we drink and the air and water taken in by the whole of humanity should we have the national will to do so. We could render obsolete the seemingly never-ending debate over fossil fuels and where we will get them and what we will do when they are exhausted from Mother Earth. And in the process we could even humanize ourselves by being done with behemoth vehicles that somehow seem to empower some to engage in dehumanizing behavior, not to mention less than respectful gestures when some poor driver of a Prius gets in the way.

Toward the end of his life, Martin Luther King Jr. got into even more trouble that he had already by speaking out against the war in Vietnam. His outspokenness on the war not only caused the FBI and others at the highest levels of government to charge him with being a communist, it even threatened the unity of the civil rights movement itself. With the passage of time and the romanticizing of his image, we tend to forget what a polarizing figure Martin King had become by the time he was shot down. Today in concluding, I am bold enough to invoke his words.

In Oslo in 1964, in accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace, he said: "I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into a hell of thermonuclear destruction.... I refuse to accept the view that (humankind) is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality."

In his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* and published posthumously by Beacon Press in 1968, he left us this:

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The 'tide in the affairs of (humanity)' does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words, 'Too late.' There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. 'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on....' We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. This may well be (humankind's) last chance to choose between chaos and community.

For those who have ears to hear, let us hear.

G. Weldon Gaddy on "Freedom to Marry"

Freedom To Marry - June 05, 2006 - by Rev. Dr. G. Weldon Gaddy, Senior Minister of Northminster Baptist Church, Monroe, LA (Alliance of Baptists) and President of The Interfaith Alliance. Rev. Gaddy is a member of Clergy For Fairness, an organization of clergy members and religious leaders who strongly oppose any attempt to write discrimination into the United States Constitution.

The future of same-sex marriage and the voice of the conservative right will clash this week on the floor of the U.S. Senate in a game of election year politics. This week, the Federal Marriage Amendment goes to the Senate floor for debate and a vote. In response, the radical religious right deemed yesterday, June 4, Protect Marriage Sunday.

I am a huge advocate for the protection of marriage, but it appears I have a different idea than the radical religious right and some senators about what such "protection" involves. For instance, when I visited the website of the Religious Coalition for Marriage to see what their plan is to help protect marriage, all I found was information demanding that senators vote for the FMA. The amendment demands debate—raising as it does issues of civil rights, human dignity, and the relationship between houses of worship and the government in formalizing weddings. But that aside, the campaign to mobilize a political movement should not be confused with efforts to strengthen marriages, which is a worthy spiritual enterprise.

The FMA would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Therefore thousands, if not millions, of couples will be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation.

The FMA discriminates not only against people who want to be married, but also against the faith traditions that deem same-gender marriage to be consistent with their religious creed. America's rich religious diversity has resulted in a proportionally diverse approach to marriage among our various faith traditions. These faith traditions should have the freedom to consecrate marriages on whatever theological grounds they choose.

I have joined with a group of religious leaders from various faith traditions ranging from mainline Christian to Jewish and Sikh to bring this issue to the forefront. By passing the FMA, Congress is taking away our religious liberty and when one American's religious liberty is violated, all Americans' religious liberty is in jeopardy.

We cannot tolerate discrimination being written into the Constitution. So, for those people who want to protect marriage, let me offer a few suggestions: start by raising the public's consciousness of the dignity and importance of women in our still deeply patriarchal society; increase the minimum wage and offer tax breaks to the working poor so that spouses can see each other for quality lengths of time, rather than briefly passing on their way to two jobs; encourage family planning; start a plan to deal with domestic violence; and work to cover mental health care in medical insurance policies so serious emotional difficulties can be prevented from tearing marriages apart.

These are real world actions to deal with the real world problem of protecting marriage. All Americans who value the institution of marriage should unite on the above-listed goals to truly strengthen our communities and our country.

Freedom and equality are prerequisites for religious liberty to flourish in our nation. Yet, too often they are cast aside to advance one group's view of the world. The Constitution is not a party platform, but rather a liberating document that provides all Americans guaranteed rights and freedoms.

Those of us who value religious pluralism must send a unified message that freedom and equality go hand in hand with religious liberty. Congress has no business legislating one religiously-based view of marriage. In the interest of religious liberty, faith communities and houses of worship must be allowed to wrestle with the issue of marriage themselves.

Churches Seeking Pastors

Granville, OH: First Baptist Church, Granville, Ohio, a small, active Welcoming & Affirming congregation, seeks a full-time pastor steeped in social justice. We welcome applicants from any denomination who value substance over style and questions over answers. For more information, see our Website: www.firstbaptistgranville.org. Contact: Reverend Alan Newton, Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Rochester-Genesee Region, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester, NY 14620. Phone: (585)340-9520. Email: anewton@crlds.edu.

Memphis, TN: Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, Memphis, TN (ABC/Alliance of Baptists/BPFNA), is beginning its search for a senior pastor. Rev. Martha Brahm will be leaving in mid-January. Tom Walsh is a member of the search committee, and will be receiving resumes and profiles at pastorsearch@prescottchurch.org. Write to Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, 961 Getwell Rd., Memphis, TN 38111, 901-327-8479.

Ithaca, NY: First Baptist Church, Ithaca, NY, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Contact (607) 273-5800. Or write First Baptist Church / P.O. Box 254 / DeWitt Park / Ithaca, NY / 14851.

Madison, WI: First Baptist Church, Madison, WI, is seeking a Minister of Discipleship. Contact (608) 233-1880. Or write FBC, 518 N. Franklin Ave., Madison, WI 53705.

Palmer, AK: Church of the Covenant is looking for a staff person. "We're looking for a seminary graduate, who is committed to social ministries. While Church of the Covenant cannot afford a full-time pastor, our related ministries certainly can. A gay person, male

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