

Remembering the National Baptist Convention Trip to the Baptist World Alliance Conference, Durban, South Africa - July 2015

Richard and Eva Overturf
Greater Liberty Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California

Saturday, August 1, 2015



Hello, Family and Friends:

God is good and He's good all the time, amen.

Richard and I returned from South Africa Tuesday, July 28th, 2015 after having had a wonderful adventure and experience starting July 20th.

We attended this year's Baptist World Alliance Conference held in Durban, South Africa, a three-day conference – church every day, amen. This year's theme: a fitting theme as everyone from around the world attended.

We were truly amazed by all the people from all over the world knowing that while our cultures were different we were all one in the same, Believers, in the Christ, Jesus.

Our adventure began Monday, July 20th leaving Los Angeles airport via United Airlines flying into Dulles Airport, Washington, DC. We boarded South African Airlines where we left the United States flying into Qatar, an eight-hour journey, there we had an hour layover where some got off while others got on and a fresh new crew and attendants were changed.

The airplane was refreshed inside and out though those of us flying into Johannesburg (Jo burg) stayed on board. Leaving there, we flew another eight hours landing in Johannesburg. We got off that plane, transferred our luggage to board yet another plane that would fly us into Durban, our final stop. That flight was another fifty minutes to an hour flight – light flying from Los Angeles to Las Vegas.

We were met by our guides and was transported to our hotel, the Portea, a five-star hotel. It is Winter there but they were in need of rain just as we are here in California. Our guide told Richard that he brought the rain with him. We had a few days of rain but it was very pleasant and did not stop us from attending church nor from taking in some of the sights. A beautiful Country.

We were blest with an outstanding USA Host, Dr. Calvin McKinney. He made sure everything was decent and in order. All total, there were ten in our USA group –Rev. Dr. McKinney & Mrs. McKinney, Pastor Clarence Moore, Pastor John Reed, Dr. Hugh Dell Gatewood, Sis. Linda

Robinson, Dr. Stephen Thurston & Mrs. Thurston, Richard & Eva Overturf (us). We had the very best Guide, Mandell and fabulous drivers while in Durban. Saturday we traveled to Johannesburg where we met up with our guide and driver there where we visited the Downtown areas, Civic Center and landmarks. We proceeded to our hotel, the Southern Sun, another five-star hotel with beautiful surrounds and great service. The following day, Sunday, we spent the day in Soweto where we visited the museum home of then Mandela & Winnie.



This picture is of Eva in front of the Mandela Restaurant across from the Mandela then home



This is Richard coming out of their then home where they raised their family as they fought for freedom for the peoples, they were the leadership of the [African National Congress](#)



This is the church where they held apartheid strategy meetings



The monument outside of their home.



Portrait inside the home Winnie's Kitchen



Their Bedroom



O.R. Tambo





*The architect of the Cities is spectacular and is full of people statues in Johannesburg and in Durban. This statue stands in The Nelson Mandela Square shopping center where there is something for everyone. The family can go there and spend the entire day there, food, fun, shopping, and restaurants of all types, play area for the children, hotel, ice cream and bread shops...everything, even a casino.
We were blessed to be there for the opening of the statue.*

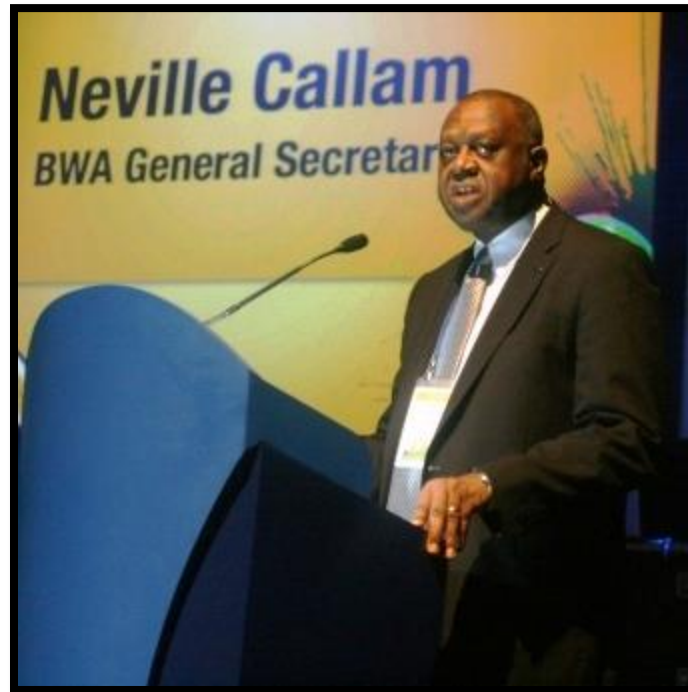
The following day, Monday, 7/27 we began our trek home to the good old United States of America, all praises to God and amen. Please read about the A.N.C. on the internet. It's fascinating.

When you can, go to South Africa. Start saving now for the next 5-year conference, The Baptist World Alliance Congress to be held in **Rio de Janeiro**. Online www.bwanet.org 2015 reviews and upcoming events.

We are grateful and thankful to God for providing this opportunity and ability to travel to the Home Land, South Africa. We were among many people from all over the world. They look like us, amen.

At this conference, our first, we were truly blest – Jesus Christ, the Door – all praises to God! A few excerpts...

The Baptist World Alliance, founded in 1905, is a fellowship of 232 conventions and unions in 121 countries and territories comprising 40 million members in 177,000 churches. Its priorities are nurturing the passion for mission and evangelism; promoting worship, fellowship and unity; responding to people in need; defending human rights and justice; and advancing relevant theological reflection. (copied from the Baptist brochure)



Callam calling on Baptists to unite at the closing session of the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa, on July 26

General Secretary Neville Callam

The BWA leader urged contemporary Baptists to affirm the importance of unity as a central focus of the BWA. "I believe that the BWA continues to have the vocation of giving expression, and bearing witness, to Baptist unity in Christ," he told the more than 2,500 participants from more than 80 countries attending the congress in Durban. "The BWA has the calling to model this unity in our life as a denominational community and to serve as a vital instrument that helps Baptists overcome fragmentation and division."

At the same time, Baptists ought to recognize that they are part of a wider global community of Christians, with Callam declaring that Baptists share with "other Christians the one body of Christ."

In a final appeal, Callam urged Baptists to commit to the core principles of the BWA, which are preaching the Good News of the kingdom, practicing responsible Christian discipleship, defending those who are persecuted and identifying with people in need not only by contributing

to their relief, but also by working to remove the systems and structures that perpetuate injustice.

Callam challenged Baptist Christians to "keep the word of God in our hearts and let us model a loving and united movement of Baptist Christians," going "forward as a people who are united in God our Savior."



Joel Gregory of the United States speaking during the last plenary session of the Baptist World Congress in South Africa on July 26

Going through the door of opportunity

Gregory delivered the keynote address at the last plenary session of the 21st Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa, on July 26, which ended on a high note of celebration.

Gregory called on the gathering of more than 2,500 Baptist Christians from more than 80 countries to make a commitment to discover the door of opportunity that God has opened for them.

He explained that there is a personal door for each individual. "Understand that each door is a personal door, a door for me," he emphasized. The prayer of the individual should be, "God show me my door. God, open my door. God, give me the will to walk through my door."

At times, Gregory explained, "God brings the door to you rather than bring you to the door." One can discern the door of opportunity by listening to the Spirit within us, knowledge and awareness of the scriptures before us and sensitivity to the circumstances around us.

But the professor of preaching, legendary for his oratory, warned the gathering that opportunity often comes with opposition. It is rare to have the first without the second. "If you are going to live and work for Jesus Christ opportunity and opposition will always go hand in hand," he said to the responsive gathering. "But this should not surprise us."



Luiz Soares Silvado of Brazil speaking during the Baptist World Congress in South Africa

Brazilian called world Baptists to discipleship

The Brazilian Baptist made a distinction between discipleship that is simply the passing on of information and discipleship that results in formation. "We must not only hear about Jesus, but be formed into/by His character," he told the roughly 2,500 Baptist Christians gathered in the coastal city.

He cautioned against "mindless Christianity," one based solely or primarily on ritual, social activism or experience.

While not discounting the importance of these, Silvado indicated that because many Christians regard religious ceremony as an end in itself, because many Christians are solely concerned about matters connected to hunger and violence, and because many ignore, disregard or even reject doctrine, "they cannot understand biblical truth and Christian thought" and thus "lack the character and mind of Christ."

Jesus, he said, both informs the mind and forms the character. But formation is paramount. "A church that invests in formation believes in a continuous discipleship. It is something that the disciple does and submits to for all his [and her] life."

This formation must pay particular attention to the preparation of young and future leaders, "because there are risks in allowing new leaders and younger generations to take strategic positions." There is the need for "continuous discipleship that enables the formation of Christian character in order to develop spiritual consciousness," he told the group of Baptists from more than 80 countries. At the same time, Baptists must trust God to "empower new generation" of leaders.



Donald Ndichafah of Cameroon speaking during the 21st Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa

Love-based Christianity

Donald Ndichafah, vice president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship and former general secretary of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, was speaking during the 21st Baptist World Congress being held in Durban, South Africa.

This love, according to Ndichafa, has several characteristics. He said this love begins with opening up oneself to and giving oneself to God. "A person must come to a point in life that he senses an emptiness that cannot be satisfied by any human agency or material thing," he told the several thousand Baptists gathered at the International Convention Center in Durban.

The opening of oneself to God comes by repentance, which is "to consciously reject our wrong ways and consciously embrace God's way as being the best." Repentance signifies that "we come to God on His terms, not ours."

Christian love is selfless and unselfish, even to the point of being sacrificial, according to the Cameroon Baptist leader. He warned that Christians should guard against focusing more on self than on ministry. "You have not known love until you begin to give, and to give sacrificially." This sacrificial love was exemplified by God who gave sacrificially through Jesus Christ, the Son.

Experiencing the love of Christ is an imperative to share that love with others. "When the love of God begins to overflow in your life, it is time to become a bridge which connects others to Jesus Christ, the Door to God's love," Ndichafa declared.



New BWA President Paul Msiza of South Africa (center) being congratulated by outgoing President John Upton (left) and General Secretary Neville Callam

African installed president of global Baptist body

Msiza succeeds John Upton of the United States, and is the first African to hold the office since William Tolbert of Liberia served as president of the BWA from 1965-1970. Tolbert was later elected president of Liberia in 1971 until he was overthrown and assassinated in a military coup in 1980.

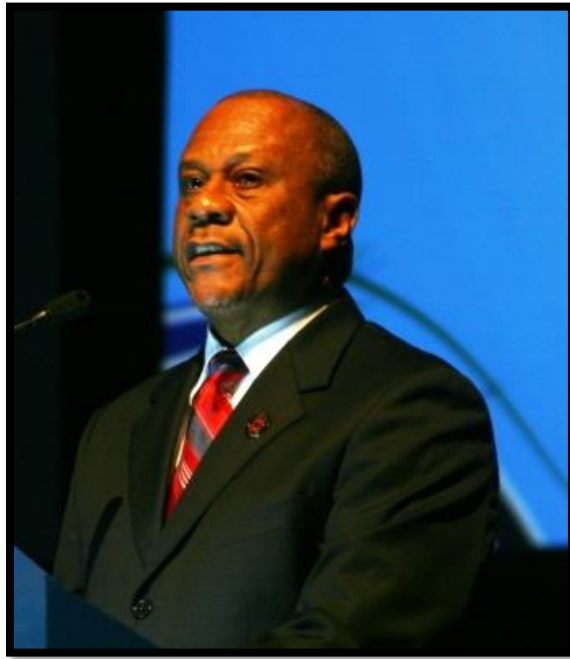
A BWA vice president from 2010-2015, Msiza has been actively involved in the BWA since 2000, serving on its governing bodies and several key committees and commissions.

Msiza was president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, from 2006-2011 and general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA) from 2001-2010.

He chaired the Local Arrangements Committee for the 2015 congress meeting in Durban.

In his response, Msiza, in alluding to the congress theme, "Jesus Christ, the Door," declared that the church ought to swing the door wide open for those who would come to Christ, rather than acting as doorkeepers, deciding who are to be admitted and who to keep out. As doorkeepers, some install locks that "only they can open." Contrary to such notions, Jesus Christ, the door, is inviting us, which affords us an ongoing opportunity for entry.

Msiza emphasized that, for the church, "the door is Christ." It is the one door, the only door, "single entry," open to "all human beings, made in the image of God," a demonstration that "We all belong together."



Anthony Carroll of the Bahamas speaking during the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa on July 24

Pastors called to faithful leadership

Speaking at the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa, on Friday, July 24, Carroll, former president of the Bahamas National Baptist Missionary and Education Convention, said that, for pastors, "matters of leadership cannot be ignored."

Heed must be paid, he declared, to the "direction of one's life" because there are voices tempting the pastor to a life of ease rather than one of service and sacrifice, beguiling the pastor to give place to fickle hype and fame.

The pastor has "responsibility for the sheep of His pasture" and is "called to tend the flock of God." There are pastors, he asserted, who lead others to question the "truthfulness, trustworthiness and transparency" of the Body of Christ. "Whether fair or foul, the ministry of the church of our Christ is under attack and those who serve as under-shepherds."

Carroll claimed that pastoral leadership is distinctive. "Leadership is sought, but pastoral leadership is having been sent. Leadership is by popular opinion, but pastoral leadership is being open and responsive to the Spirit. Leadership is delegation to the devoted, but pastoral leadership is about a divine dialog."

He said that, "within the realm of the secular, oftentimes, rather more often than not, the concentration is not the benefit of others; it's about power and the acquisition of wealth." Pastoral leadership, on the other hand, "has a depth within it that leadership elsewhere knows nothing about."

Carroll presented Jesus as the "model for leadership" for the pastor. Jesus, he said, was "Kingdom-connected and Kingdom-committed." Jesus "was resolute concerning His assignment and uncompromising about His relationship with the One who has given the assignment."

Declaring that Christ "is the epitome of leadership with integrity," he pleaded with pastors of the twenty first century not to "divorce ourselves from that which is foundational. We, who serve as leaders and those who will follow after, are but understudies, under-shepherds, if you please, of Him who is the Chief Shepherd."

It is enough, Carroll said, "for me to take the Lord at His word."



Corneille Gato Munyamasoko of Rwanda, accompanied by wife, Anne Marie, accepts the BWA Congress Human Rights Award from David Maddox, a longstanding BWA committee and commission member and supporter

Munyamasoko was recognized for his work in peace and reconciliation after the 1994 genocide in his country.

The Rwandan Genocide was a mass slaughter of Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda by members of the Hutu majority. During the approximate 100-day period from April 7 to mid-July 1994, an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed, constituting as much as 70 percent of the Tutsi and 20 percent of Rwanda's total population.

A citation read at the presentation on July 23 described Munyamasoko as a strong advocate; a prophetic witness; a champion of the vulnerable; and as a reconciler, peacemaker, pacifist and mediator.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who read the citation, declared Munyamasoko a committed Christian who has drawn "upon biblical theology, integral mission, training and community development to assist groups and persons to overcome national rivalries and ethnic differences." The Rwandan Baptist leader, who was born to exiled parents in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is "driven by the idea of the church as a home of peace."

He was instrumental in leading groups in Rwanda "to consider the painful background of Rwanda's ethnic divisions in the quest to overcome the destruction of social groups victimized by suspicion and lack of trust."

Munyamasoko led Rwandans "to understand the causes of the genocide; to seek and to extend forgiveness; and to build relationships based on the principles of justice, mercy and faith, emphasizing the need for reconciliation with God, self and others."

Initiatives led by Munyamasoko include the launching of peace and reconciliation clubs in each of the secondary schools of the AEBR, confronting suspicion and hate among teachers and students within these institutions.

He also helped found a peace camp movement, now recognized by the Rwandan government, which brings young women and men together from various provinces in Rwanda, advancing conversations between survivors of genocide and those whose parents were imprisoned for acts of genocide.

He has trained and mentored hundreds of youth and young adults to become peacemakers and reconcilers on the basis of an understanding of justice drawn from the Bible.

Munyamasoko has worked to mediate peace on both sides of the border between the DRC and Rwanda during times of tension between the two countries.

He extended his peacebuilding role to Kenya, visiting and working with Kenyan church leaders after the 2007 election violence and, in 2013, helping churches prepare to serve as agents of peace in preparation for the Kenyan national elections.

Under Munyamasoko's leadership, the AEBR participates in the fight against stigma associated with HIV and AIDS, training pastors to become role models for caregivers of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Munyamasoko paid tribute to all those who helped and worked with him, including friends, colleagues and acquaintances in the DRC and Canada, as well as to his wife, Anne Marie, "my very good friend for 22 years," and their seven children.

"This award is recognition of the resilience of all Rwandans," he said. "The award is a great encouragement to me to continue to strive for the wellbeing of my brothers and sisters. I feel reenergized in the calling to work for peace."

The Congress Human Rights Award is presented at each Baptist World Congress, normally held every five years. The first Congress Human Rights Award was made in 1995 to former President of the United States Jimmy Carter.



Dimitrina Oprenova of Bulgaria speaking during the 21st Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa

Peace and freedom in Christ

Oprenova, from Bulgaria, said Christians in her country experienced peace even during the turbulent communist era.

She told of the faith of her mentor, former Bulgarian Baptist pastor and leader, Ivan Angelov, who was sentenced to prison for eight years, "a man tortured by the communists." After one particularly terrible episode of being beaten, Angelov, broken and believing he was dying, bemoaned the state of the church and cried out to God in desperation. "God, they have destroyed me, this is the end," she recalled him saying. "God, what will happen to the church? We are all here, there is no pastor out there, what will happen to the flock?" whereupon a man

dressed in white came to him in his cell and declared, "Ivan, this is my church, I will take care of it. And I will take care of you. You don't worry about it."

That vision of Christ in his prison cell gave Ivanov strength to endure and to be an inspiration to others, including Oprenova, associate minister of the First Baptist Church in Sophia, president of the Bulgarian Baptist women's organization and a member of the board of the European Baptist Women's Union. "The powerful became weak, but this broken, weak man, in the midst of evil circumstances, received strength," she said. "He lived; he came out of prison and continued to serve God. He lived long enough to be an example for me too."

Oprenova said "sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes he lets the storm rage and calms his child." She told the gathering of Baptists from more than 80 countries that "whatever the circumstances, whatever culture we come from, wherever we are, we can be free to live without regret and fear."

If persons give place to fear, she said, this can rob them of their freedom. "Fears of the past and of the future paralyze us and rob us of the power of serving God." Oftentimes, the fear "stems from selfishness, from being overly concerned about our own self-preservation [and] self-image."

The good thing, said Oprenova, is that God is always seeking us out. God searches because God "is not indifferent to the suffering of his people." God searches "to find hearts opened for Him, who are willing to be found." Those who allow themselves to be found by this searching God receive healing and liberty. But in order for all this to happen, "we need to be found!" or rather, be willing to be found.

God, in essence, saves us "from ourselves, from our own pride and selfishness, from our wrong decisions, from our social prejudice, from our judgment of others, from our hatred and brokenness."



Peter Chin of South Korea delivering the sermon at the opening celebration of the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa

Baptists should shine their lights brightly

The roll call of the more than 80 nations encapsulated the celebratory atmosphere as more than 2,500 Baptists joined in singing songs such as "Shine, Jesus shine"; "Light of the world you stepped down into darkness"; "Lord, the Light of your Love is shining"; and "We are marching in the light of God."

Keynote speaker Peter Chin of South Korea said that because the world is filled with so much darkness, it is imperative that Baptist Christians shine the light of Christ.

Chin declared that the darkness affecting humanity is reflected in suffering, death, ignorance, discrimination and abuse.

There is also darkness, he said, in the levels of deception and political corruption and oppression that exist. Economically, darkness is demonstrated in the levels of greed, poverty and debt that are so prevalent.

But worst of all, he said, there is "spiritual darkness, a darkness where people say there is no God."

To overcome such darkness, the light that brings healing, forgiveness and life need to shine. According to Chin, such light comes only from Christ, who "holds the power to expel all darkness."

He stated that the light of Christ serves at least two functions. It eliminates darkness and it illuminates what is hidden.

Because darkness is so pervasive, Christians have a responsibility to shine the light of Christ in "our countries, our workplaces, our schools, our homes," and to ensure that it shines in "our churches."

Every Christian should "shine the brightness, the warmth, and the light of Jesus to the world he loves," Chin announced.