

The Alliance of Baptists is dedicated to the preservation of historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions, and to the expression of our ministry and mission through cooperative relationships with other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian community.

Kimball's book on religion and evil speaks well to the Alliance covenant and mission

'We live on a fragile planet'

Charles Kimball's newest book wasn't written as a resource for Alliance members or congregations, but it well could have been.

When Religion Becomes Evil, published by Harper-San Francisco and recently named one of the top 15 religious books of 2002 by Publisher's Weekly, offers an examination of the nature and signs of religious evil while outlining correctives within each of the major religious traditions.

Kimball is chair of the Department of Religion at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC; has studied world religions, especially Islam, since the mid-1970s; and is an expert in Middle Eastern politics. He is frequently interviewed by the media at all levels.

"At the heart of the argument I make in this new book is a call for individual and corporate responsibility within faith communities," Kimball said. "In churches that are seeking to live out the mandate of a ministry of reconciliation, in churches that understand they are part of a larger body of Christ, the self-critical approach I take is welcome. A lot of churches are eager to use this book as a guide to launch into deeper study of what it means to love God and others as yourself in today's world."

Though not expressly stated, Kimball said the principles of the Alliance covenant and mission statement can be found throughout his book. "In working for peace, we look for sources of conflict and injustice and political repression. You find yourself advocating for those who don't

have a voice to represent themselves. What that means, especially to congregations, is that you have to sort all of this out because you can't do everything"

Kimball wrote this book after the events of 9-11-01 but it is not about that tragedy. "While that event was horrific," he said, "it



Charles Kimball, author of **When Religion Becomes Evil**

was part of a pattern that I was able to see pretty clearly. The event was a total surprise but that it happened and the events that were behind it were not."

Hardy Clemons, retired pastor of First Baptist Church Greenville, SC, where Kimball was a member while on the faculty of Furman University, was asked by the publisher to write a statement about the book. "There are few people on this planet, in my view, as uniquely equipped to speak to our

need for understanding world religions and faith as is Kimball," Clemons said. "This book seems to me to have come to God's larger kingdom for a time such as this."

"The book illustrates the kind of creative, redemptive work Alliance Baptists do in implementing our covenant and mission statement," Clemons said. "Charles is not just an excellent scholar, he is a practicing churchman as well. He points the way to where we can choose to go in interfaith relationships and he helps us envision how to get there."

"Charles is ecumenical in the best and richest usage of that word, and he is a Baptist who believes in and lives out the Baptist identity which is so well articulated in the Alliance Covenant," Clemons said. "I hope every thinking Baptist will digest Kimball's book and I hope every church will study it as a way of navigating the scary waters through which we sail in this time of terror and self-orientation."

When Religion Becomes Evil talks about the five warning signs of corruption in religion: 1. Absolute truth claims; 2. Blind obedience; 3. Establishing the ideal time; 4. The end justifies any means; and 5. Declaring holy war.

As to why he wrote the book Kimball said: "We live on a fragile planet. We better find ways to figure out why people are doing these things. This book challenges all of us to cooperate in the Christian community and beyond. The world is a precarious place and we ought to be talking about our future together."

UCC connection: The dialogue continues

By **Ramonia L. Lee**, *Suitland, MD*
UCC Dialogue Team Member

The Alliance is ever seeking to look beyond the traditional “Baptist” confines to embrace a Christian worldview that is broad and inclusive.

One of the ways the Alliance lives into this vision is through its dialogue with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).


These talks, which began in 1997, involve representatives from each body. Over the course of the past three years we have found common ground in our desire to be open and inclusive, our call to be prophetic and visionary, our mandate to be faithful and committed to the teachings of the Christ.

The Alliance dialogue team headed by Stan Hastey, who serves as co-convenor, includes Martha Barr, Jim Hightower, Ramonia Lee, Steve Lucas, and Cathy Tamsberg. This group met for another round of talks with the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ on Oct. 30-31 in Catonsville, MD.

At the close of the meeting we found ourselves closer to formalizing a unique ecumenical relationship with two denominations that share many of the Alliance’s core values for mission and ministry.

When an agreement is finalized and ratified by each body, Alliance congregations and clergy will be able to reach across the denominational divide to share in ministry to our communities with United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ congregations. Together we will be able to celebrate our faith through worship, witness to our faith through mission, and speak for peace and justice through actions which liberate all.

The next meeting for the team is in Dayton, OH, on Jan. 15-17, 2003.

 Alliance member Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, professor of church history at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, has written a new Baptist heritage resource called **Freedom for the Journey**. The Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies is offering the study resource, which examines Baptist principles with references to early confessions of faith and to contemporary issues and thinkers. **Freedom for the Journey** may be used by individuals or for group studies. The text includes biographical sketches of key figures from Baptist history and ideas to prompt discussion. It comes with a companion CD for a PowerPoint presentation. For more information, contact the Center at (804) 289-8434 or go to www.baptistheritage.org.

Nick Foster has resigned as pastor of Alliance-affiliated University Baptist Church in Montevallo, AL, where he served for eight years. He has accepted a new position as director of a new program with Passport, Inc., funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc., and aimed at identifying and enlisting high school and college youth for vocational ministry.

Alliance represented at NCC General Assembly

Associate director Jeanette Holt and board member David Waugh of New York City represented the Alliance at the National Council of Churches’ 2002 annual General Assembly in Tampa Nov. 14-16.

The meeting included a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Alliance member Walter J. Harrelson, a retired biblical scholar, was one of the translators who shared what it has meant to him to work so closely with the Bible’s sacred texts. “Translation is a serious business,” Harrelson said. “The Bible is a reality so mysterious and powerful that it has opened the eyes of many through the centuries. It’s a text that has claimed our own lives.”

The NCC holds the copyright on the

Alliance member **Bryan Brock** has accepted a position as associate pastor at University Baptist Church in Baltimore. His previous place of ministry was in Gaithersburg, MD.

Jeanette Hastings, wife of C.B. Hastings and mother of Nancy Hastings Sehested, died in Austin, TX. A memorial service was held at Highland Park Baptist Church, Nov. 9. The family has selected two projects for memorials for Mrs. Hastings: Habitat for Humanity and the Jeanette Hastings Memorial Fund at Highland Park Baptist Church. The church’s address is 5206 Balcones Dr., Austin, TX 78731.

Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL, has recently affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists. Steve Fitzgerald is pastor.

The **Virginia** chapter of the Alliance of Baptists has met and elected Gary Tucker of Danville, VA, as its new president. Hollyn Holman, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, addressed the gathering which was held at Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, VA.

The **North Carolina** chapter of the Alliance has contributed \$1,000 to the Bridges of Hope Mission Offering.

RSV — of which the Old and New Testaments were published Sept. 30, 1952 — and its successor, the New Revised Standard Version Bible, published in 1989.

Delegates engaged in reflection together on the “Changing Landscape of the Ecumenical Movement Today” and what that means for the future of the National Council of Churches.

Among visions expressed: a re-energizing of ecumenical work for racial justice; ecumenical formation of Christian youth, especially for life in a religiously pluralistic world; an ecumenical movement concerned both with social justice and with theology and mission, and closer relationships between the NCC and local congregations.

Northminster said “Si” to partnership in Cuba

We had been to Juana’s house to worship on several occasions before. She was an elderly Baptist saint who had encouraged the use of her modest home for weekly worship services for Misión Bautista Canaán in Bolivia, an impoverished former sugar mill town in Ciego de Avila Province. The mission is one of several sponsored by our sister church in the provincial capital city, Ciego de Avila. This time was different. Juana had recently died of complications from a long battle with diabetes (hastened by a lack of medicine caused in part by the U. S. embargo) and had left her house for permanent use by the mission. On this morning we were warmly welcomed by Carmelita, the new pastor, who along with her husband and two young sons lived on one side of the house while the other side was used as the sanctuary for the mission.

Prior to the beginning of the worship service I decided to visit the restroom. There hanging to dry were two tiny threadbare towels which apparently the entire family had used as they prepared for the day. Then I walked out into the back yard where the service was to be held. It was there that I saw the hand-lettered sign hanging on the fence. In English one of Carmelita’s sons had written *Because the Lord is my Shepherd I have everything that I need.* My thoughts flew to those tiny threadbare towels, to knowing that Carmelita and her family are very poor by our standards and that they had dedicated themselves to ministry in this poor community. Then I thought of my comfortable house in Monroe with all my “stuff” that I think I must have to live a good and fulfilled life. What arrogance we North Americans (as our Cuban friends remind us they are “Americans”, too) sometimes have to think we know everything. There are many positive things about living we can learn from our Cuban sisters and brothers.

In 1994, despite our country’s long-term embargo against Cuba, Northminster Church in Monroe said “Cuba, si!” as we began our partnership with the people of Iglesia Bautista Enmanuel in Ciego de Avila. This is one of now 25 or so such partnerships between churches of the Alliance of Baptists in the United States and churches of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba. Members

and friends of Northminster have visited our sister church and her several mission congregations yearly, and we have been fortunate to have several of Enmanuel’s members to visit us in Monroe. We communicate frequently by telephone and more recently by e-mail.

As a direct beneficiary of our churches’ relationship, and having been to Cuba now on 10 separate occasions, I will always be grateful that we said “YES” to Cuba. We have made many new life-long friends. We have learned that being economically poor does not necessarily mean being spiritually poor. Our Cuban friends are some of the most spiritually vibrant people we know. (Jesus’ words in Luke “Blessed are you poor, because yours is the kingdom of God” take on new significance.) We have also learned that despite our great differences in economy, government, language and in so many other ways we are all sisters and brothers in God’s family and deserving of respect, love and care.

At the beginning of our sister church relationship in 1994 we (Enmanuel and Northminster) pledged to make the relationship mutual and non-paternalistic. Considering our differences in wealth and the natural North American tendency toward paternalism, this has proved challenging. However, in many respects our Cuban friends have given us much more than they have received from us. We may take them money, clothes and medicine, all things they need, but they give us unselfish love, daily prayer support, true hospitality and deep friendship. Truly we continue to learn from them what it really means to be followers of Christ.

We have learned another important lesson from our relationship with these friends from this tiny island nation only 90 miles from our shore. Our country’s now 40-plus-year embargo against Cuba hurts the poor, and most Cubans are poor. The embargo is immoral. As a wealthy and supposedly moral nation we should be ashamed. Please add your voice to the growing number of voices in our country demanding that we end the embargo and normalize relations with Cuba. Let us all say “CUBA, SI!”

This article appeared in the Monroe, LA, News-Star on Sunday, Oct. 27 as a part of that newspaper’s feature story about Cuba.



By Craig Henry
President

The Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba is just one of 24 organizations receiving support from the Alliance of Baptists Mission Offering this year. You can see from the figures at the right that we are significantly below our goal. We are also below our budgeted needs in receipts for the general operating budget. As the year-end approaches, please consider what you and/or your church can do to help us meet the vital needs of our missions partners as well as our own organization.

alliance **f**inances

2002 Operating Budget

Through October 31
Needs: \$243,780
Receipts: \$209,023

2002 Mission Offering:

Goal: \$95,000
Receipts: \$61,898



December 2002

Executive Director: Stan Hastey
Associate Director: Jeanette Holt
(202) 745-7609
Fax: (202) 745-0023
AllianceofBaptists@cs.com
www.AllianceofBaptists.org
Newsletter Editor:
Sue Harper Poss
P.O. Box 25461
Greenville, SC 29616
(864) 848-3346
Fax: (864) 848-5258
editor@allianceofbaptists.org

Convocation keynote speaker: **McDaniel is one of the family**

By Relma Hargus

Secretary, Alliance of Baptists, Baton Rouge, LA

Ever have a friend who is such a part of your life that you can't imagine ever not having known them? That's the way our family feels about Jay McDaniel. Except in our case we have some help with our recall. We know we didn't meet him before 1989. As memory serves us, I brought Jay back to meet the family (husband Chip, and children Jodie and Luke) from an Alliance meeting in North Carolina.

OK, make that "meet" and "brought." We actually only know McDaniel through his words and 1989 is the copyright for **Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life**, the book that introduced us to him.

But my calling him a friend is truly not so farfetched. Reading McDaniel is like sitting around the dinner table having a fascinating conversation with someone who has done a lot of thinking about a topic. (Even his footnotes fit that mold: Not dry recital of bibliographical information, but rather insights that continue the conversation.)

So, although he might not claim us, I feel quite comfortable claiming him in our name. After all, friends introduce you to other interesting people and thoughts, and you often discover you have friends in common. That's exactly what happened when we "met" Jay McDaniel. It was through reading **Of God and Pelicans** that we learned of process theology and writers such as John Cobb and Charles Hartshorne. Suddenly we had a name for where we were

spiritually and knew there were Christians on the same path. What a liberating place to be.

I had by this time embraced feminist theology, but it fit right in with process theology. So, too, did our personal experiences of the value of silence and meditation and our understanding of what science says about the cosmos. Also, friends never lecture, but only share where they are on the journey and how they got there, providing reasons for why you might want to join them. He fits that part of the definition, too.

Later, we would talk with McDaniel in **Of Roots and Wings, Earth, Sky, Gods & Mortals**, and **Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism**. Obviously we can't wait to meet him in person at the Alliance convocation in Virginia next year. Good news: He's looking forward to being with us:



Jay McDaniel

"The God who loves pelicans is a God who loves people. What inspires me is that many Baptists feel this divine love, each in their way, and feel called to love pelicans, too. This love—this respect for life and environment—is the hope of our time. It is the very heart of *caring for the earth*. I very much look forward to being at the Alliance meeting and being with fellow travelers who, like me, seek a more just and sustainable future for all."