

Connections

April 2003

Volume 6 Issue 4

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.

Another historic statement is before us

Muslim-Christian Relations

A historic document was approved by those gathered for the Alliance's Annual Meeting in Vienna, VA, in 1997. At that meeting, we unanimously approved *A Baptist Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations*. That document let our Jewish neighbors know that Alliance members take seriously our commitment to be agents of reconciliation within the faith community.

Now, as we gather again in Vienna, a similar document is before us.

Several years ago the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee decided that as the Alliance of Baptists we should prepare statements about other world religions, beginning with the Muslim faith as a joint heir of the Abrahamic tradition.

This seemed particularly appropriate in light of the ever-growing political involvement of the Christian "right" in the policies shaping the ongoing deadly conflict in Palestine/Israel. This concern was heightened by the horrendous events of 9/11 which shook our nation and resulted in a gross stereotyping of the

Muslim community.

Last April, reflecting on the desire of those gathered for the 2002 Convocation to respond publicly in some way to increasing violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to the ongoing verbal assault on the Muslim community by American political and religious

leaders, a draft of the Statement on Muslim-Christian Relations was presented for consideration.

By **J. David Waugh**
Chair, Ecumenical and
Interfaith Relations
Committee



Over the past year the committee has revised that draft in response to suggestions received from concerned members of the Alliance and from our board of directors.

This year it seems more important than ever to issue such a statement in light of the war in which we are engaged in Iraq.

At such a time as this it is vital that we confess our own sinfulness in the spread of hatred. It is time that we educated ourselves about the rich and vibrant history of the faith called Islam. It is time that we entered into

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CONVOCATION WORKSHOPS

Strategic planning team will be listening for input

As the Alliance of Baptists begins a strategic planning process, participants at the 2003 Convocation will have an opportunity for conversation with those leading the effort.

Listening for God's Leading in the Labyrinth: A Journey of Discernment for the Alliance of Baptists will be one of the workshops at the Convocation, and will be led by Daniel Pryfogle and Debra Sutton of Signal Hill, consultants to the Alliance of Baptists for strategic planning.

True to the Alliance's heritage, this is a different kind of planning process. It is a spiritual, collaborative engagement that is ultimately about discerning God's call for the organization. Through an experience of the ancient practice of the labyrinth, led by the Alliance's planning consultants, workshop participants will be invited to reflect on God's presence in the organization in the past, God's gifts for the organization in the present, and God's calling for the future.

The workshop will be held at four different times: during the
(See Workshops, page 4)

2003 Convocation • April 24-26

Vienna Baptist Church in Vienna, Virginia



Keynote Address by Jay McDaniel, professor of religion at Hendrix College, Conway, Arkansas, and author of numerous books on Christianity and ecology

Covenant Address by Elizabeth Barnes, emerita professor of theology and ethics, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond



Lynda Weaver-Williams



BTSR celebrates Founders Day

In March of 1989, the Alliance of Baptists voted to establish a new seminary in Richmond, VA. The anniversary of that founding has now become part of the tradition of that school which became Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Each year a special chapel service is held to commemorate the anniversary of that vote. BT'SR has established a Founders Day fund the interest from which is used to underwrite this special chapel service.

This year, the preacher was Lynda Weaver-Williams, a founding trustee at BT'SR. Alliance members are invited to contribute to the Founders Day fund by sending their gifts marked for that purpose to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, 3400 Brook Rd., Richmond, VA 23227.

Bill Sapp, Tom McKibbens move into new positions

Bill Sapp, former board member, has accepted the position of executive director of the Kilgore Samaritan Counseling Center in Louisville, KY. This new ministry began February 1. Sapp formerly served as the administrator of the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.

Donald Simpson has been granted Supervisory Candidate status in the Eastern Region of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. He is a chaplain at the Connecticut Mental Health Center in New Haven and a supervisor-in-training in the CPE program of Yale-New Haven Hospital.

Tom McKibbens has accepted the call of First Baptist Church, Worcester, MA, to be senior pastor. McKibbens, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Alliance, was formerly pastor of First Baptist Church, Newton Centre, MA.

Steven H. Meriwether has celebrated his 10th anniversary as senior pastor of the St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, LA.

Alliance member **Howard G. McClain** of Columbia, SC, died on February 12 after a long illness. He was 84. McClain was a well-known activist for racial and interfaith unity. His wife, Barbara, is a former member of the Alliance board of directors.

Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, is searching for a full-time minister to youth and college students. This person will coordinate, supervise, advocate for and minister to all aspects of church life that involve middle

school, high school, and college youth and their families furthering their Christian and spiritual development through educational programs, worship experiences, retreats, community outreach, social activities, pastoral care and support services.

Minimum Requirements: Bachelor's degree; three years experience working with both middle school and older youth; theological training.

Send resume to: Search Committee, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh, NC 27605. See job description, church profile and contact information at www.Pullen.org. Deadline for receipt of resumes is April 15, 2003.

happenings

alliance **f**inances

Through February 28

2003 Operating Budget

Needs: \$ 50,026
Receipts: \$ 40,827

2003 Mission Offering

Goal: \$ 111,000
Receipts: \$ 25,466

Like Those Who Dream: 2003 Gathering of Baptists and Others Interested in Spirituality

June 11-14 • Mars Hill College

Registration \$140 Due May 1 • Housing and Meals \$110 Due June 1

The Gathering begins with registration from 3-5 p.m. on June 11 and ends with lunch on June 14. For more information, contact Paula Dempsey, administrative director, at 828.206.0383 or e-mail advent@main.nc.us.

The Gathering is sponsored by the Advent Spirituality Center, dedicated to nurturing Christian spirituality in a Baptist setting drawing from many faith traditions and offering a haven to all who seek a closer life with God. The Alliance, through our Bridges of Hope Mission Offering, provides \$3,000 to the Center to provide scholarships to seminary students to attend the summer event.

Website: <http://main.nc.us/adventspiritualitycenter>

The text of the Alliance statement is printed in the insert to this newsletter and is also posted on our website, www.allianceofbaptists.org.

The Alliance-United Church of Christ-Disciples Dialogue

Shaping the future of the church

In a recent sermon, one of our pastors used the phrase “shaping the future of the Church.” He was not talking about this congregation only. Rather, he used it in the “capital C” sense, referring to the broader Church. This choice of words stimulated my thinking. Is that one of our responsibilities? Is shaping the future of *the* Church, in addition to *our* church, a task we are called to perform?

Today many churchgoers have little concern for matters beyond their local congregation. Connection between the pew and a denomination or a national body of any kind has been waning for years. In this consumer-oriented culture, what a church offers to me and/or my family here and now has become the primary concern for most worshippers. This evidence clearly reflects that many Christians have either given up on the “capital C” Church completely or simply do not see it as relevant to their lives.

As an association of Baptists grounded in an ecumenical commitment to do ministry in the world alongside all who would join us, the Alliance is challenged to go against this trend—to help shape the future of the Church.

A proposed partnership with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will provide a new opportunity to do just that. The dialogue team made up of members of the Alliance of Baptists, the UCC, and the Disciples recommends that these three bodies enter into a “*Partnership in Mission and Ministry*,” an ecumenical relationship of deepening friendship, continuing dialogue, and joint public witness.

Representatives of the Alliance and the UCC have been in conversation since 1995. More recently, the Disciples, already

partners with the UCC, have joined the dialogue. Having studied the theology and polity of the groups and seeing no obstacles to joint endeavors, our team has proposed that these three groups adopt this partnership at their respective annual meetings in 2003—the Alliance in April, the UCC in July and Disciples in October. If that occurs, our joint venture would include exploration of ways to do joint mission and ministry at both local and national levels. We hope this will involve cooperative ventures in

curriculum development and missions at the national and international levels as well as combined ministry and mission among local Alliance, UCC, and Disciples congregations. An important aspect of the partnership would bring our voices together to address critical issues of justice in our day. A Partnership Council composed of members of each body would provide ongoing support for these activities.

As a member of the dialogue team for the last four years, I have been continuously inspired by the deep desire of the UCC and Disciples representatives

to link their ministry to the work of our tiny association of progressive churches known as the Alliance of Baptists. They see hope and vision in what our churches and our people are doing just as we are encouraged by their ministries both locally and around the world. Uniting our witness with that of the UCC and the Disciples is a way to *shape the future of the Church* so that God’s desire for shalom for all people can become a reality. I hope you will share my excitement about this opportunity as we consider it at our convocation later this month.

Cathy Tamsberg is minister of outreach and adult education at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC. She is also a member of the Alliance’s board of directors.

perspectives



By Cathy Tamsberg
UCC Dialogue Team

REGISTRATION FOR 17TH ANNUAL CONVOCATION

Name _____

Address _____

Daytime phone _____

Child-care needs (ages/times): _____

\$65 – Individual • \$35 – Student • Youth Convocation — \$40 Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Mail Registration to: Alliance of Baptists, 1328 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036

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Muslim-Christian statement (continued from page 1)

dialogue with one another about our common concerns, fears, and loves so that together we might build a better tomorrow working side by side rather than as foes to be overcome.

The proposed statement expresses our common guilt, seeks forgiveness, pledges future cooperation and affirms several ways that we can alter the patterns of our relationships to build dialogue. It, along with a revision of the prior Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations, will be presented for adoption as 'Institutional Understandings' so that they will become institutional guidelines directing our common witness in interfaith relations.

The entire text of the statement is printed on the insert to this newsletter and is also available at www.allianceofbaptists.org.

Convocation workshops (continued from page 1)

regularly scheduled workshop times on Friday and Saturday, as well as Friday evening after the worship service and Saturday morning before morning prayers. Each of the four segments is limited to 15 participants.

Other workshops that will be held at the convocation include:

Rainbows, Butterflies and God's Good Earth: Helping Children to Care for the Earth. Anne Charles-Craft and Diana Veazey

Conversations with Jay McDaniel Awakening to the Universe. Julie and Ted Purcell

Listening for the Spirit: A Nature-Walk Meditation Joy M. Salyers

Recovering the Sabbath Principle. Jim Strickland, Mahan Siler and Diana Veazey

Bringing Ecological Awareness into Worship. Herman Greene and Margie Latham

Mother Earth's Spiritual Connection: The Apache Spiritual Way of Life and Religion. Wendsler Nosie and Stephen Boyd

Exploring New Paradigms for Ministry: Partnership, a Transformative Vision for Pastoral Leadership. Marcia Bailey and Marcus Pomeroy.

Helping Patients and Families with End-of-Life Decisions. Hank Dunn

Toward a New Ecumenical Partnership: The Alliance of Baptists, United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Stan Haste, Lydia Veliko and Thomas McCracken

Connecting Sunday to Monday: Christian Discipleship and the Environment. Bill Sykes

Biblical and Theological Bases for a Christian Ecology. Elizabeth Barnes

Earthcare Ministry in the Local Church. Panel of representatives from Alliance churches

How Then Should We Live? An Ecology of Hope in an Environment of Despair. Ken Sehested

Fostering the Creation-Faith Connection: Practical Ideas for Church Leaders. Kyle Childress and Cathy Tamsberg

Conclusion of the **Proposed Ecumenical Agreement** between the **Alliance of Baptists, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

Whereas ecumenical relationships are realized in the commitments that friends and partners make to each other for support, assistance, and mutual counsel; and

Whereas we look forward to expanding and strengthening an evolving ecumenical relationship of deepening friendship, continuing dialogue, and joint public witness with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and

Whereas the Alliance of Baptists cherishes ecumenical relationships and seeks to enter into partnerships in as many settings of the life of the church as possible;

Be it therefore resolved that the Alliance of Baptists shall:

- 1) Commit itself to an ecumenical relationship of deepening friendship, continuing dialogue, and joint public witness by establishing a Partnership in Mission and Ministry with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);
- 2) Facilitate participation by congregations, clergy, and church staff of the Alliance with the United Church of Christ Covenanted Ministries, Associated, and Affiliated Ministries, and its associations/conferences and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Ministries and Regions;
- 3) Encourage congregations, clergy, and church staff of the Alliance to develop and deepen this ecumenical friendship by pursuing opportunities for worship, fellowship, collaboration, sharing of resources, and mutual support with neighbors in the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);
- 4) Encourage substantive conversation among the Alliance Board of Directors and staff and the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its staff to discern where the ministry of all might be enhanced by cooperation and collaboration;
- 5) Encourage progressive Baptist seminaries and theological schools to offer courses on the history and polity of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and to include in Baptist history and polity courses information regarding this ecumenical relationship in order to deepen understanding of the faithful witness and ministry of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as new ecumenical partners;
- 6) Encourage, in partnership with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the continuation of theological conversation on matters of ministry, ordinances/sacraments, theology, and polity throughout the life of the Church;
- 7) Encourage all settings of the Alliance of Baptists to invite participation by the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in all Alliance events;
- 8) Call upon leaders in the Alliance of Baptists to seek to make common public witness with leaders of the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and other ecumenical colleagues on issues of national and international concern and collaborate wherever possible on works of public witness and justice-making;
- 9) Collaborate with the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) where possible in the development of educational resources for children and youth, and share opportunities for mission, outdoor camp experiences, education and fellowship events with children and youth of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in recognition of a deeply shared commitment to children and to the growth of our churches;
- 10) Direct the Board of Directors upon the recommendation of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to name Alliance of Baptists representatives to an ongoing Partnership Council to facilitate and encourage the growth of this Partnership in Mission and Ministry among the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Alliance of Baptists;
- 11) Extend a seat (voice without vote) on the Board of Directors of the Alliance of Baptists to a representative of the United Church of Christ and a representative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as an expression of Christian hospitality and ecumenical partnership.

A Statement on Muslim-Christian Relations from the Alliance of Baptists

Presented by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the Alliance of Baptists

As Christians in the Baptist tradition, we are the inheritors and the transmitters of a theology which ignores fifteen centuries of Muslim development by viewing contemporary Muslims from a monolithic perspective. This perspective belies the vibrant diversity found within the larger umbrella of the Islamic family. We have held to a theology which has valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and prejudice over knowledge—a theology which does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and efficacy of the Muslim faith.

The madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes which led to the Crusades during the Middle Ages, and to the colonial domination for Western gain during the more recent history of the Middle East, have left the Christian community with a sad legacy ranging from anger and distrust to outright hostility toward our Muslim neighbors. Globally, our worlds, which have more often than not been separate, are becoming more intertwined politically, culturally, and economically. Yet we have done little or nothing to correct the theology which nurtures an attitude of cultural supremacy among Western Christians over the adherents to Islam. Either we have fostered rather than defused such hatred, or have failed to expend the energy needed to develop bridges of understanding between Christians and Muslims which counter the centuries of prejudice.

In recognition that Baptists, both past and present, have joined their voices with those of other Christians in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths concerning Muslims, we, the Alliance of Baptists, in Annual Meeting on April 25, 2003, at Vienna, VA, adopt as an **Institutional Understanding for Muslim-Christian Relations** the following:

As individual members and as churches of the Alliance of Baptists, we:

Confess our sin of complicity and silence by not defusing hatred and failing to expend the energy to develop bridges of understanding between Christians and Muslims;

Confess our sin of interpreting our sacred writings in such a way that we have created enemies of those people who follow the Muslim faith;

Confess our sins of indifference and inaction to the horrors which have been perpetuated against Muslims by non-Muslims since the time of the Crusades;

Confess our sin of perpetuating prejudices of stereotypes against Islamic peoples; and

Offer this confession with humility and with hope for reconciliation between Christians and Muslims toward which end we will work.

Islam has always presented a theological challenge to Christians. We have historical ties as monotheistic faiths which affirm the covenant of God with Abraham and we both affirm the teachings of Jesus. This challenge prompts us, as it does our Muslim neighbors, to turn with a fresh vigor to an understanding of our scriptures, traditions, and legal systems which give shape to our communal life.

Recognizing that important contributions can be achieved as Christians and Muslims work together in areas of common concern such as racial and social justice for the oppressed, the provision for and defense of human rights, the safeguarding of religious freedom, the resolution of national and international conflict, and the care of the homeless, we, as fellowshipping members of the Alliance of Baptists:

1. Affirm the teaching of the Christian scriptures that God has not rejected the descendants of Abraham and thus recognize our common historical roots with Muslims, along with the Jews, in the faith of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar.

2. Renounce interpretations of Scripture which foster religious stereotyping and prejudice against the Muslim people and their faith;

3. Seek genuine dialogue with the broader Islamic community, a dialogue built on mutual respect and the integrity of each other's faith;

4. Lift our voices quickly and boldly against all expressions of racism, bigotry, and religious bias which target followers of Islam;

5. Educate ourselves and others on the often peaceful and at times tumultuous history of Muslim-Christian relations from the seventh century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past;

6. Affirm the continuation of the long Baptist history of witness in word and deed among Muslims while giving rigorous consideration to appropriate forms of Christian witness for our time; and

7. Commit ourselves to work for full religious freedom, including the right to practice the faith of one's choice, and for equality of citizenship for all persons in all societies, whether Muslims or Christians or others, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere.