

connections

December 1999

Volume 2 Issue 12

Our Mission is to make the worship of God primary in all our gatherings, foster relationships within and outside the Alliance, create places of refuge and renewal for those wounded or ignored by the church, side with the poor, pursue justice with and for the oppressed, care for the earth, work for peace, honor wisdom and lifelong learning, and hold ourselves accountable for equity, collegiality and diversity.

The Alliance of Baptists moved a giant step closer to membership in the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA Nov.10, when the ecumenical body's General Assembly voted without objection to certify the 12-year-old Washington, DC-based Baptist body. The action was taken in Cleveland during the NCCC's 50th Anniversary Celebration.

Certification means that next year the NCCC General Assembly will decide whether the Alliance will become the 36th member communion of the nation's flagship ecumenical organization. During that assembly, in Washington, DC, each of the current 35 member bodies will cast a single vote for or against the Alliance's membership application.

ALLIANCE CERTIFIED FOR NCCC MEMBERSHIP

Should the vote be favorable, the Alliance will join several other Baptist bodies in the NCCC, including American Baptist Churches in the USA; National Baptist Convention of America; National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.; National Missionary Baptist Convention of America; and Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

Speaking in support of the Alliance's application at Cleveland was Tyrone S. Pitts Jr., general secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, who noted an ongoing commitment between the two Baptist units to discuss issues of race and racism and a mutual commitment to mission projects in Cuba.

Responding to the favorable action, Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey thanked the assembly, saying its vote was "an act of true grace." He noted the Alliance's commitment from its beginnings in 1987 to finding its place in the larger church.

"Though we are only 12 years old, we have envisioned the action you have taken today since our beginning. We Baptists in the South have isolated ourselves from the rest of the church for far too long. Today marks a milepost of significance for us that I can scarcely exaggerate. With great thanksgiving, we offer ourselves to you."

He noted that fully one-quarter of the congregations affiliated with the Alliance also belong to American Baptist Churches in the

USA and called attention to a new dialogue between the Alliance and the United Church of Christ.

Founded 50 years ago as the Federal Council of Churches by the nation's principal Protestant bodies, the NCCC has grown to include several Orthodox churches as well, and is now reaching out to Roman Catholics and evangelicals.

One of the gala gathering's highlights was a valedictory address from outgoing NCCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell, whose eight-year term of service is to end Dec. 31, and who has been a strong advocate for Alliance membership in the Council. Bob Edgar, a United Methodist and former member of Congress, was elected to succeed Campbell.

(concluded on page 3)

P U E R T O R I C O F R I E N D S H I P T O U R



Seven members of the Alliance and Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America visited Puerto Rico in late October on a friendship tour designed in part to demonstrate solidarity with the Puerto Rican people in their continuing struggle against U.S. colonialism on the Caribbean island. During the six-day visit, the delegation — headed by BPFNA Associate Executive Director LeDayne McLeese Polaski, former Alliance President Ann Quattlebaum and Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey — the group met with two recently released Puerto Rican political prisoners. One of the two, Luis Rosa, received the delegation at the home of a United Methodist minister in San Juan where Rosa is temporarily housed. Rosa spent 19 years in several U.S. prisons after being convicted of "seditious conspiracy."

happenings

For the first time since the Board of Directors voted earlier this year to offer the Alliance as a participating body in the ordination of professional clergy, one of the Alliance's earliest congregational affiliates, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, asked for such participation in the ordination council

of **Stephanie Ford**. Representing the Alliance was Associate Director Jeanette Holt.

Alliance-affiliated **Knollwood Baptist Church**, Winston-Salem, NC, voted overwhelmingly Nov. 14 to sever ties with the Southern Baptist Convention. Chris Chapman is Knollwood's pastor.

Alliance member **Melissa Rogers** has been named general counsel of the Baptist Joint

Committee on Public Affairs. Previously associate general counsel, she succeeds Brent Walker, recently elected the Washington-based agency's new executive director. A graduate of Baylor University and the University of Pennsylvania School of Law, Rogers is a member of the Maryland, District of Columbia and U.S. Supreme Court bars.

Alliance member **Hugh Tobias** has been called as pastor of the Alliance-affiliated Riverside Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL. He moves to the Florida post from the pastorate of Trinity Baptist Church, Madison, AL.



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COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Alliance President C. Welton Gaddy has appointed and the Board of Directors has approved three committees. Of 14 people approached for the three tasks, all 14 accepted.

Nominating Committee: Genie Dyer, Waco TX (Chairperson); Walt Skinner, Newnan, GA; Paul Richardson, Birmingham, AL; Lynda Weaver-Williams, Richmond, VA; Henry Crouch, Asheville, NC.

Committee on Ordination: Nancy Hastings Sehested, Clyde, NC (Chairperson); Raye Nell Dyer, Nashville, TN; Richard Groves, Winston-Salem, NC; Paul Hanneman, Charlotte, NC.

Special Committee on the Involvement of Young People in Future Convocations: Sterling Severns, Washington, DC (Chairperson); Eileen Campbell-Reid, Cartersville, GA; Todd Daniel, Hagerstown, MD; Bonnie Dixon, Raleigh, NC; Rachael Tanner, Lynchburg, VA.



VIRGINIA ALLIANCE

Outgoing Virginia Alliance President Donna Hopkins Britt welcomed her successor, Wayne Blythe, during the affiliate's annual meeting, held Nov. 8 in Richmond. Britt currently serves as interim pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, Roanoke. Blythe retired earlier this year as associate pastor at Freemason Street Baptist Church, Norfolk.

Two Alliance congregations, Oakhurst Baptist Church and Virginia-Highland Baptist Church, both of Atlanta, were expelled Nov. 16 from the Georgia Baptist Convention for violating that body's one-year-old policy of excluding congregations that "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

In a letter to the two churches sent 10 days before the anticipated action, Alliance Executive Director Stan Haste wrote: "Your sisters and brothers in the Alliance know that the entire process ... has been painful and that you grieve the loss of such a significant association with other churches. Yet you have the satisfaction of having engaged the process with conviction and integrity. You have spoken an important word of truth and have done so in love. For this you are to commended rather than condemned."

A beast like Floyd:

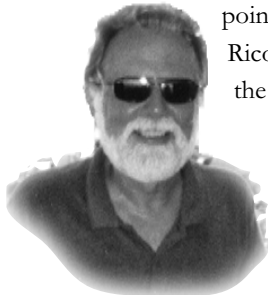
Alliance
churches
offer
more than
clothes

Alliance member Richard Peerey, pastor of Beaver Dam Baptist Church near Franklin, VA, has been on a number of trips to Cuba and often seen the poor conditions under which some people live. Earlier this fall, he saw some of those bad conditions right in his own neighborhood, courtesy of Hurricane Floyd.

"Floyd nearly destroyed the entire business district of Franklin, 83 businesses and 200 homes lost," he said. "The clean-up will take several more months for many, while some will never be able to open up, or live where they did. Condemnations and bulldozers have already seen to that."

Richard and members of his congregation quickly went to work to help. Church members distributed necessities, helped relocate residents short-term, cooked meals for volunteers, fed senior adults who had no electricity, had prescriptions filled for those whose drug store was washed away, and even cashed checks for some whose banks had not yet

An incongruous relic of this nation's policy of overseas colonialism is festering in an unlikely place named Vieques, the tiny island east of Puerto Rico where the U.S. Navy insists it has a right to continue concentrated bombing exercises. Those exercises of late have provoked a rallying cry that has united Puerto Ricans in all three major political parties to the point that 95 percent of the people of Puerto Rico now demand the immediate withdrawal of the U.S. military presence.



Rubén Berríos

For nearly six decades, “Puerto Rican residents have been threatened by the Navy’s bombardment and squeezed into a narrow strip of land,” the president of Puerto Rico’s Independence Party, Rubén Berríos, wrote in a Nov. 1 opinion piece in *The Washington Post*. In late April of this year, something went terribly wrong during one day’s bombing exercises when a stray bomb killed one Navy civilian employee and injured four others. The accident galvanized public opinion almost instantly.

For his part, Berríos took the incident to heart by setting up a small tent May 8 on a beach directly below the Navy’s principal observation tower on Vieques. “I have pledged to continue until the Navy decides to stop the bombing and declares its intention to leave or until I am arrested,” he wrote in the *Post*. His presence, along with that of others who have set up small tent cities along the firing range, has become a powerful symbol of the determination of Puerto Ricans across political ideological lines to draw the line against continued U.S. military presence.

The Navy, which prior to this year conducted bombing exercises about 200 days annually, has not strafed the island since the April incident and Berríos’ arrival. Thus far Berríos, who is his

party’s only member of Puerto Rico’s Senate, has received visits from the archbishop of San Juan and Jesse Jackson, among many others.

Among his most recent visitors was a delegation of seven representatives of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and the Alliance of Baptists. Our team leader, BPFNA Associate Executive Director LeDayne McLeese Polaski, organized the “friendship tour” to Puerto Rico, along with Alliance board member José Oliveras Ocasio. With former Alliance President Ann Quattlebaum of South Carolina, I was honored to represent us on the trip.

During our brief visit to Vieques, we met with Senator Berríos, who told us his own value system was shaped largely by a Baptist grandmother who taught him the Bible. An indefatigable crusader for Puerto Rico’s independence, he said that despite Navy arguments for military preparedness, the real issue is one of simple morality — of doing the right thing. He told us about the stress and strain on the 6,000 residents of Vieques, who have lived for

two generations with bombs exploding near their homes. He lamented what he calls “a lunar wasteland of unexploded ordnance and depleted uranium-tipped radioactive shells littered about in dead wetlands and lagoons.”

Beyond these matters, Berríos contends, “stands Puerto Rico’s inalienable right to self-determination and independence.” Recalling 101 years of U.S. rule since the invasion of 1898, he concludes that Puerto Ricans’ “quest for self-respect and human dignity in Vieques is the metaphor for and the prelude to our freedom.”

Whatever the political future of Puerto Rico, this much is clear. Once more our claims of self-interest have infringed on the interests of others. Once again we have demonstrated our penchant for ugly Americanism. It’s time the Navy got out.

perspectives



By Stan Hastey
Executive Director

NCCC (continued from page 1)

Installed as the new NCCC president was Ambassador Andrew Young, also a former member of Congress and mayor of Atlanta. His service of worship and installation was celebrated in the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in downtown Cleveland, making it the first NCCC event to be held in a Catholic church.

Principal speakers included Otis Moss Jr., a fellow veteran of Young’s in the civil rights movement and pastor of Cleveland’s Olivet Institutional Baptist Church; Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children’s Defense Fund; and Jesse Jackson, one of Young’s closest allies and friends.

set up temporary offices.

“Also, we made a significant contribution to the purchase of a trailer for a family of six who lost everything they owned,” he said. “And we received sizable gifts from churches outside our area which we distributed.”

“In addition to the physical needs,” Richard said, “we are attempting to offer emotional and spiritual help to those whose marriages and family structures are being tested to the limit. No one who’s lost the routine of their lives is immune to the long-term negative effects of the stress which accompanies a beast like Floyd.”

In eastern North Carolina, where flooding also wrecked houses and lives, Millbrook Baptist Church in Raleigh is just one Alliance congregation that has tried to help. “Our hope is to set up a rotation of churches that can work on weekends to help with the ongoing clean-up and rebuilding,” said Bonnie Dixon, a staff member at Millbrook. “The bottom line is that this area will probably be 18-24 months recovering, at least in terms of rebuilding. It will be a project for the long haul.”

alliance finances

Operating Budget YTD:

Needs: \$215,994

Receipts: \$213,373

Mission Offering YTD:

Goal: \$80,000

Receipts: \$53,850

If you would like to make a year-end contribution to the operating budget or Mission Offering, we invite you to use the enclosed envelope.

connections

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Stacey Simpson, the president of the Georgia chapter of the Alliance of Baptists, is not sweating quite so much this year, thanks to the Alliance Mission Offering. Stacey is pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Edison, GA, which in 1999 received its first funding of \$3,000 from the Alliance offering.

The Alliance grant is helping to pay for a heating and air conditioning unit that volunteers from First Baptist Church in Columbus, GA, installed last spring. "The sanctuary we used to meet in had no air conditioning," Stacey said. "July and August used to be particularly difficult months in the south Georgia heat."

Fellowship Church moved into new quarters in May to better fulfill what the congregation perceived as its mission. "For the first four years of our existence as a church, we had been meeting for worship, education, and fellowship in an old Presbyterian church building about four miles outside of town," Stacey said. "During a period of intense discernment, we discovered that mission and outreach were the weakest areas of our life together and we began to reach out to the community. Eventually, we realized the need to move into town in order to have any impact and presence at all."

Last year, the church bought an old hardware store in the center of town. With the help of FBC in Columbus and Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, GA, volunteers began renovating the building. "The move has made a tremendous difference in our ministry and in our morale," Stacey said. "We have our own space where anyone is allowed to come. I work in a church office right downtown, rather than hidden away in my home. The community

sees us as a church that is interested and involved in what goes on in town, rather than just a group of folks who meet with each other for worship and sanctuary."

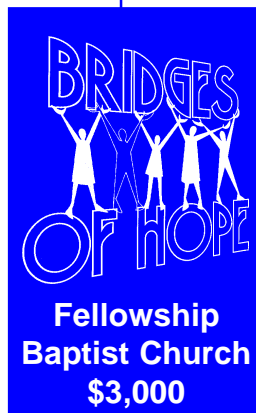
The church's primary ministry to the community is a Kids' Club held at the local trailer park, where all the children are African-American, living in single parent homes, living on welfare. "There are virtually no resources in our community for dealing with the needs of these children after school, and no other church has

taken an interest in them," Stacey said. "Once a week we go out to the trailer park and have Kids' Club, with Bible study, games, crafts and songs. During the summer months, we also hold a cookout once a month for the children and their families. And at Easter and Christmas, we hold parties for these children and the children in the housing projects."

"But we were never able to invite them into our space because we didn't have a place of our own in an accessible location," she said. "For the first time ever, this summer we were able to hold a three-day Kidfest, our version of Vacation Bible School, in our own

building, and with air-conditioning." More than 30 children participated in a simulation of the Exodus story.

"The help we have gotten from the Alliance in providing for this building has been indispensable," Stacey said. "We are spending ourselves on people who can't help us pay the bills — in particular on children and on families living in poverty — and the Alliance is helping us do that. It has been a blessing and an encouragement to have the Alliance partner with us to do ministry in a sometimes dispiriting situation."



MISSION OFFERING

As you can see at the top of this page, our 1999 Mission Offering goal is \$80,000 and through mid-November gifts totaled \$53,850. Twenty churches and organizations are counting on the Alliance offering to fund their programs of work this year. If you would like more information about the offering, please contact the Alliance office. If you would like to make a year-end contribution to the Mission Offering, an envelope is enclosed in this issue of *connections* for your convenience.