

connections

April 2000

Volume 3 Issue 4

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.



Fernando Vázquez Castro, center, the director of International Relations of the Ministry of Higher Education in Cuba, met with Furman University representatives during February. Pictured left to right, are Fraternity Executive Secretary Adalberto Cuéllar, Ministry Protocol Officer Rafael A. Mendoza, Furman Chaplain Jim Pitts, Ministry Consultant Silvia Hernández Vargas, Vázquez, Furman's Director of International Education Bill Lavery, Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey and former Fraternity President Manuel Delgado.

**A
NEW
CONNECTION**
ALLIANCE HELPS
FURMAN UNIVERSITY
ARRANGE STUDY
TOURS IN CUBA

Almost since the Alliance's inception, its primary role has been as matchmaker — matching groups and individuals with willing partners. And when it comes to making these connections in Cuba, the Alliance has become a master.

Most recently, the Alliance role moved beyond the church-to-church links that have been so successful into the educational realm to help Furman University in Greenville, SC, open talks for faculty and student development studies in Cuba next year.

Jim Pitts, Furman's chaplain, was the driving force behind a February exploratory trip to Havana led by Alliance director Stan Hastey and that included several Furman representatives. Pitts' interest in Cuba had been sparked by hearing about the Alliance partnership with the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba from members of his church, First Baptist in Greenville, and from attending Alliance convocations.

(continued on the back page)

Karen Thomas Smith is a former board member of the Alliance of Baptists who now is a real ambassador for Christ. Her ministry in Morocco is receiving support from the Alliance Mission Offering this year for the first time. Pages 4-5.

LIVING
ON THE
BOUNDARY

Convocation 2000

University Baptist
Church

Austin, Texas

April 27-29

beginning with a
reception at 6 p.m.
on Thursday
and worship at 7:15

CONVOCATION SCHEDULE

Thursday night:

President's Address by C.
Welton Gaddy

Friday morning:

Workshops
Covenant Address by James
McClendon

Friday Afternoon:

State of the Alliance
Address by Stan Hastey
Annual Meeting

Friday night:

Hymn Sing led by Max Lyall

Saturday Morning:

Church-State Panel Discus-
sion
Worship and Communion
led by Julie Pennington-
Russell

Bridges of
HOPE

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”
(Second Amendment to the Constitution)

Let's parse this sentence from the Constitution. Let's do so to see if the National Rifle Association's claim that it guarantees a virtually absolute right for the people of this country to pack heat is a valid one — be the armament in question a handgun, a rifle, or an Uzi.

There's no doubt in my mind how Arnold Taylor, my ninth-grade British grammar teacher, would have analyzed it. The enumerated right, he would have said, is qualified by the conditional clauses preceding it.

So how is it that some who call themselves strict constructionists as to constitutional interpretation so easily ignore the clear intent of the nation's founders in framing the Second Amendment? And how is it that the NRA bases its entire argument against virtually any kind of gun control on such a contorted construction of constitutional doctrine?

In my 15 years as a reporter covering the U.S. Supreme Court, concentrating on the religion clauses of the First Amendment, I learned how carefully — how meticulously, really — constitutional experts decode its wording. There's a whole body of case law to prove it.

But the jurisprudence on the Second Amendment is paltry. Truth is, its practical interpretation as granting an almost absolute right to anyone other than criminals to manufacture, sell, and buy just about any firearm imaginable seldom has been challenged.

That's too bad. Perhaps little Kayla Rolland, the 6-year-old Michigan girl shot to death by a first-grade classmate, would like to

testify. Maybe her parents will want to say a word to the nation about the “right” the crack cocaine addict whose loaded pistol Kayla's killer used had to purchase a weapon unimpeded by legal restrictions.

Or maybe, just maybe, we citizens of this unspeakably violent land will at last take note of the fact that in much of the rest of the world such incidents occur rarely. And that, when they do, say in a

Scottish village, the English Parliament responds immediately with tough new laws. Or are we so enamored of our wild and woolly, shoot-'em-up, mythical past as to keep on ignoring the gory horror we've created?

Let's make no mistake about one fact. We're all responsible, all of us. Not just Charlton Heston and the NRA, as shameless as they are in their foul attacks on anyone who dares disagree with their plainly mistaken interpretation of a constitutional right. We're all responsible in that we have let our lawmakers be cowed into submission without fear

of voter reprisal.

We don't have to keep on letting them get away with pathetic excuses any longer. So here's another question: How about sending a message, loud and clear, that meaningful curbs on the making, sale, and possession of firearms will be a major issue this election year? Why not? If not now, when? If not you and I, who?

For my part, I'm doing something for a change. So it's only right that you should know I've recently signed on to the Interfaith Call to End Gun Violence. Not for you, of course, but I would like to have the privilege of telling you more about it should you want to join me. It's long past time to call the National Rifle Association to account for its tragically flawed reading of the Second Amendment.

perspectives



By Stan Hasteley
Executive Director

Miscellaneous Information for the 2000 Convocation

Housing: Four Points Hotel/Sheraton: (512) 836-8520. Free housing available for students. Call Richard Moore, (512) 328-2044, ext. 12.

Site: University Baptist Church: (512) 478-8559

Discount Airfares: Carlson Wagonlit Travel, ask for Ann Yates, (919) 469-5071 or (800) 521-8529

2000 Alliance Convocation Registration Form

Name(s): _____
 Address: _____
 Daytime Phone: _____
 Childcare needs (ages/times) _____
 Registration fee: \$60 per person \$30 students: Amount enclosed: \$ _____
 Mail to: The Alliance of Baptists, 1328 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036



Individuals are invited to become members of the Alliance at any time. Annual membership dues are \$40, individuals; \$60, families; \$125, sustaining; and \$20, students/low income.

KAREN THOMAS SMITH: CONNECTING IN MOROCCO

She runs a multi-dimensional Christian ministry in the heart of a Muslim country. She leads weekly Bible studies and frequent conferences in both English and French. She travels for hours at her own expense to speak for 20 minutes. She gets no salary.

She is former Alliance board member Karen Thomas Smith who since 1996 has been the campus pastor of Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, where her husband Kevin is a professor of computer science.

Karen's ministry is for the first time this year a recipient of Alliance Mission Offering funds. We are the only organization from which she gets financial support.

Her ministry is wide and varied — in small villages or big cities she works to build relationships among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.

“Our first priority upon arriving was to establish the Christian community on campus as an active and visible worshipping and ministering body, a viable and contributing group within the larger campus community,” she said. “This has indeed happened. We have regular weekly worship, and we make sure that the great liturgical events of the Christian year are celebrated and celebrated well.”

In this international setting, Karen finds that her community changes rather drastically each semester, as it has a significant regular turnover in foreign faculty and exchange students. “Depending on the makeup of the group at a given semester, we organize special groups for prayer, Bible/book study, or children’s ministries,” she said.

Her efforts serve an important role in ecumenical ministries. “Our community is itself ecumenical with Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox this past year,” she said. “In addition, we have cultivated strong ties with other Protestant and Catholic congregations throughout the country.”

She is often asked to preach in both Catholic and Protestant churches. Recently she preached at Notre Dame des Oliviers Catholic Church in Meknes for

the week of Christian unity. “Our biggest event of the year is a regional Lessons and Carols service which we organize drawing on choirs and musicians from churches in the surrounding area,” she said. “This is the one event of the year open to anyone who wishes to attend. We rejoice that because of events like these, we have helped bring Protestants and Catholics together who have worked here for many years but were not familiar with the others and their work.”

A large part of her work is in interfaith relations. “We are quite literally ambassadors for Christ in this place, and we are continually learning what that means,” she said. “I am involved in discussions about launching an interfaith theological conference

here, building on the International Conference on Tolerance which was held at our university last fall. But our most significant interfaith relationships are those we engage in everyday.

Most of the university

students here have never known Christians and are unfamiliar with Christianity. It is not only a great joy, but also a great responsibility to represent Christ in this place.”

Karen particularly enjoys serving on the executive council of the Al Akhawayn University Hand-in-Hand Association for charity. “Working as a Christian alongside Muslims toward goals our faiths hold in common,” she said, “I find myself continually telling stories from the gospels to my colleagues in the association as we encounter situations that mirror the scriptures — an old man brought to receive help by friends who care about him, miraculous multiplication of resources that we didn’t expect, children offering to share what little they have with others.”

Also, in her role as campus pastor, she is involved in the life of the university in a myriad of ways. “I serve as a minister to exchange students, who make up a significant portion of our congregation now,” she said. “I get called in to mediate conflicts among foreign faculty and to represent the Christian community at numerous university functions.”




Karen's connections include:

- Extensive program of services, studies, and activities during Advent.
- Intense program of worship and reflection during Lent, which corresponds to the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
- Various activities held with the Catholic diocese of Meknes.
- Joint work with the Franciscan sisters of Tattiouine.
- A strong relationship with Protestant churches throughout Morocco.
- Working with Muslim students, faculty, and staff to raise money for charity.

Al Akhawayn is a Moroccan University that operates on the North American system of education. It opened in 1995 and now has approximately 850 students. In his official statements upon founding the university, King Hassan II declared that one of the purposes of Al Akhawayn would be to promote dialogue and interaction between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. King Hassan II’s desire was that there be a Christian Church and a Jewish Synagogue on campus as well as a mosque.

Karen's past...



Karen is the daughter of a Baptist minister. Her family's roots are in Mississippi, but she grew up in Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1987, she married Kevin, the son of Southern Baptist missionaries to Indonesia for 21 years and the Philippines for nine years. Kentucky is home now for both Karen's and Kevin's families, and until they left for Morocco, the couple had spent all of their married life in Decatur, GA, where they still own a house. They consider Oakhurst Baptist Church in Atlanta home, although they also feel like honorary members of Jeff Street Baptist in Louisville.

Karen went to Georgetown College in Georgetown, KY, where she majored in philosophy, French and BSU. She was a summer missionary for three years, twice in Kentucky and once in Montreal. She studied abroad — in Caen, France — during her junior year. Graduating in 1986 as valedictorian, she went directly to serve as a Journeyman in Burkina Faso, West Africa, acting as interim director of the Baptist Student Center there.

She returned to the states in 1987, married Kevin, and went to live in Georgia, working in refugee resettlement ministries through World Relief Refugee Resettlement, where she worked until they left for Morocco in 1996.

In 1988, she entered the Master of Divinity program at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and became co-founder and coordinator of the Candler Baptist Community.

the Smiths today



In November of 1998, the Smiths moved off-campus into a villa in town. From January on, they offered their home as a place of retreat to those who needed a place to rest and pray. "We had nearly 100 people use our home during the past year for that purpose," Karen said. "Also, I have been called on to lead retreats in other places; in November I led the worship portion of an all-Morocco Christian women's retreat in Casablanca."

The retreat ministry has been put on hold for a while, as Kevin and Karen have a new baby. "We have made the decision to discontinue our retreat ministry until after we establish a liveable routine," she said. "Making space for the baby will drastically cut down on our sleeping capacity. Previously we had beds for 13, but because of the layout of the house, this will become limited to 4-6 guest spaces."

The Smiths live on Kevin's salary. They did receive about \$1000 in private donations to buy beds and desks to begin the retreat ministry last year. Contributions from church members vary with

It was as a Candler student that she first joined the Alliance of Baptists. She graduated from Candler first in her class in 1991, and went immediately into the Ph.D. program in theology there. She arranged to spend her first year of coursework studying at St. John's University, a Benedictine school linked to an active Benedictine monastic community in Collegeville, Minnesota. "There my life was transformed through participation in the monastic life of prayer," she said. "I returned to Emory, but never felt satisfied with my course of study from that point on. In 1995, I left the Ph.D. program at Emory and completed instead a Master of Arts in Theology with emphasis in spirituality from St. John's." She was ordained to Christian ministry by Oakhurst Baptist Church in 1996.

It was during her Ph.D. program years that she served on the board for the Alliance, 1992-1994, on the convocation committee and on the missions committee. "It was in conversations with Alan Neely and other Alliance folks that Kevin and I struggled to define our sense of vocation to cross-cultural and interfaith ministry," she said. "With encouragement from Stan and Jeanette and others, we pursued overseas ministry possibilities through CBF and ABC. We had offers from both bodies, but never felt completely comfortable with the options open to us." About that time, the Smiths discovered Al Akhawayn University through friends living in Morocco.

the makeup of the congregation. "Because I do not draw any salary, and the church apartment is provided for us by the university, we have limited expenses. But we do have expenses that, up to this point, Kevin and I have assumed when the intake is inadequate," she said.

"Oakhurst has bought us some books and supplies, and that has been helpful. But there are no funds available for phone service (every minute of every local call costs in Morocco), transportation (gas is close to \$4 a gallon), or other expenses. The congregations nationwide have so little money that there is not an honorarium given for preaching; I preached in Marrakesh 6 hours away once a quarter last year and had to pay my own expenses for each trip."

This is where the Alliance funding will play a major role this year in picking up some of these expenses. "The money you give us will make a big difference in our ability to keep leading in ecumenical worship events and retreats and organizing interfaith activities," Karen said.

2000 Operating Budget:	
Needs:	\$61,233
Receipts:	\$67,694
2000 Mission Offering	
Goal:	\$85,250
Receipts	\$13,265

April 2000

The Alliance of Baptists
 1328 16th Street NW
 Washington, DC 20036

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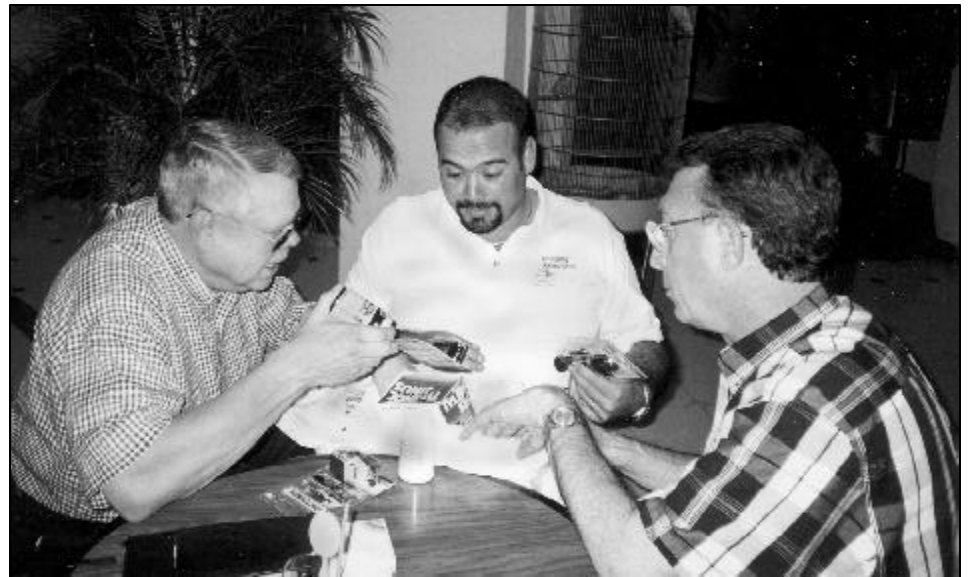
Furman-Cuba connection

(continued from page 1)

The purpose was three-fold: to determine the feasibility of sending a group of Furman students and faculty to Cuba in February 2001 as a service project sponsored by the chaplain's office; to set up a faculty seminar in the summer of 2001; and to investigate possible continuing travel study options.

Among the Furman contingent with Pitts was Bill Lavery, a history professor and director of Furman's International Studies department. Lavery, who has set up more than a dozen such travel studies for Furman, said he was amazed and pleased with the results, and credits the success to Hastey and the Alliance's connections that were already in place. "I think the Alliance relationship has a significance beyond its size," he said. "Everywhere I went I saw respect for and knowledge about the Alliance. We didn't have to explain who we were or what we were doing."

Lavery was particularly impressed by a meeting the Fraternity leadership was able to arrange with Fernando Vázquez Castro, the minister of higher education in Cuba, and others in that department. While details still need to be arranged, the basis of the summer faculty exchange to occur in late July 2001 were decided on the spot. The generalities of the Feb. 24-March 4, 2001, student-faculty trip, which Pitts will lead, were also agreed upon.



Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey, right, and Curtis Sexton, a Furman alumnus living in Lake City, TN, are shown with Plácido Alonso Gómez, a physician who is a member of El Jordán Baptist Church in Havana. The Furman group brought in a substantial amount of medicines donated by CrossLink International of Falls Church, VA, for the Fraternity to distribute.

Lavery's portion of the Furman-Cuba connection involves implementing a grant the school received last year for faculty studies of societies in transition. In the summer of 1999, the study was in Quebec. This summer it will be in Prague, where the traveling party will stay at the International Theological Seminary.

The 2001 study will be titled "Contemporary Caribbean Realities" and will include study in Jamaica prior to entering Cuba. "When you go to Cuba from the U. S., you see a country in economic distress," Lavery said. "But when you go from Jamaica you have a different perspective. Jamaica has some problems that Cuba has worked on such as education, medical care, and crime. When you go to Cuba from Jamaica, you see a country that does not have enormous disparities in wealth. You see a country where it is safe to travel about."

Lavery has intended for quite some time to have a faculty study trip to Cuba: it was just a matter of how to do it. "Then serendipitously, here is Stan. We could not have asked for a more thorough introduction to Cuba," he said.

The faculty trip will include study in Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Trinidad, and Havana. The studies will be led by Cuban university personnel and other experts from a variety of fields, including women's organizations, performing arts, and sports.