

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.



## Hinson in Cuba

Invited by Fraternity of Baptist Churches President Francisco (Paco) Rodés, renowned historian E. Glenn Hinson presented lectures in mid-March at the Evangelical (Protestant) Theological Seminary in Matanzas on Thomas Merton and spirituality. The lectures are to be published later this year in that school's theological journal. Rodés, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Matanzas, now teaches church history and directs the program of Baptist studies at the ecumenical seminary.

# At risk from violence

## Alliance partner in Bethlehem offers holistic approach to ministry

By Sue H. Poss

It's a life we know nothing about. Shelling down the street. F-16s flying low over our houses. Bombings in our neighborhoods. Frequent shooting from far and near.

Yet, this is what hundreds of Palestinian Christians, including children, must deal with everyday. "All of this violence puts our children at risk," said Mitri Raheb, the director of the International Center of Bethlehem, a recipient of Alliance mission offering funds. "What we are trying to do at our center is offer an innovative and holistic program that will help meet the needs of the rapidly growing numbers of children in our society who are not getting the kind of education they need."

The Alliance funding of \$5,000 is being used specifically in the center's six-week summer program that targets children and young people ages 6-15.

"We believe that God is calling us to a whole

ministry where we can address not only the spiritual well-being of these children but also the social and physical needs," Mitri said. "So our programs are designed to bring healing and wellness to the body, the mind, the soul and the spirit."

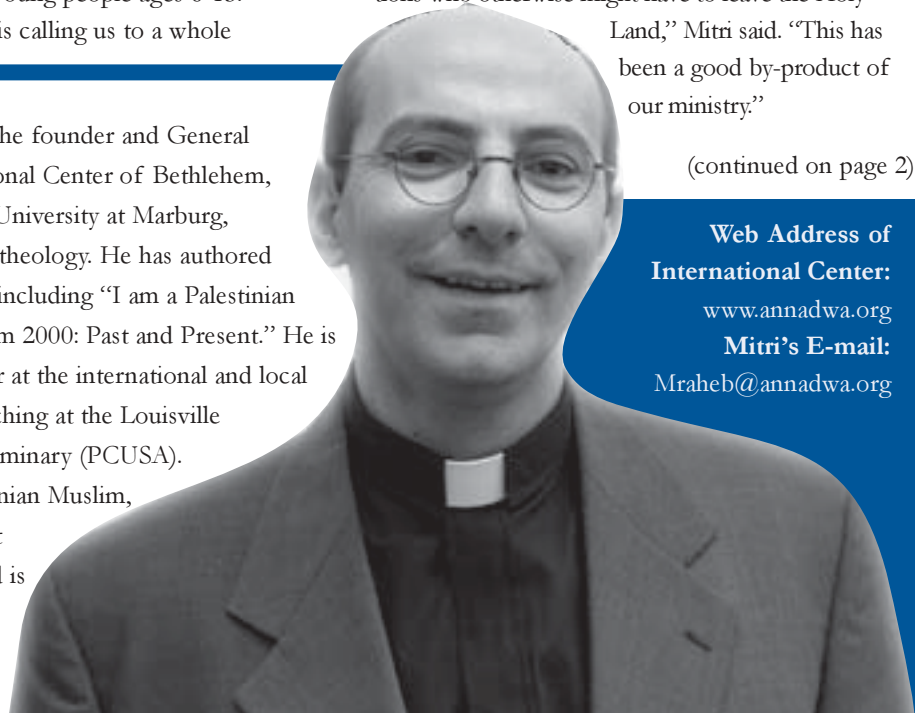
About 300 children, Muslim and Christian (there are no Jews living in Bethlehem), participate in the summer program that is offered for about five hours a day, five days a week. The center, used as a private school during the school year, is part of the Lutheran Church compound.

Students are recruited from ads placed in the local media. Regular public and private school teachers and others with special abilities such as musicians and artists are recruited to teach in the summer program. "Between the school and our center, we employ about 80 well-educated Palestinian Christians from many denominations who otherwise might have to leave the Holy Land," Mitri said. "This has been a good by-product of our ministry."

(continued on page 2)

**Mitri Raheb**, the founder and General Director of the International Center of Bethlehem, graduated from Philipps University at Marburg, Germany, with a PhD. in theology. He has authored many books and articles, including "I am a Palestinian Christian" and "Bethlehem 2000: Past and Present." He is also a well-known speaker at the international and local level, and is currently teaching at the Louisville Presbyterian Theology Seminary (PCUSA).

His wife, Najwa, a Palestinian Muslim, has been an accountant at Bethlehem University and is a skilled pianist. They are parents of two daughters, Dana, 12 and Tala, 8.



**Web Address of International Center:**  
[www.annadwa.org](http://www.annadwa.org)  
**Mitri's E-mail:**  
[Mraheb@annadwa.org](mailto:Mraheb@annadwa.org)

Through March 31

**2003 Operating Budget**

Needs: \$ 75,039

Receipts: \$ 52,125

**2003 Mission Offering**

Goal: \$ 111,000

Receipts: \$ 29,555

**Hinson lectures in Cuba**

E. Glenn Hinson, professor emeritus of church history and spirituality at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, delivered a lecture March 14 at the Lay Theological Institute in Havana. Shown here with Institute Dean Adolfo Ham and Associate Dean Midiam Lobaina, Hinson spoke on the subject, "Life in the Spirit in Today's World." Ham, who also teaches at the Evangelical (Protestant) Theological Seminary in Matanzas, is a Presbyterian, while Lobaina is a key lay leader in the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba and a member of William Carey Baptist Church in Havana.



**“In the next years when our political situation improves, I hope that groups from the Alliance will visit the Holy Land. I would like to tell them that now you have an address, a partner, a place where you can feel at home and welcome, and where you are no strangers, but are part and parcel of this community and this family.” —Mitri Raheb**

**Alliance connection with Bethlehem—**

(continued from page 1)

Each day of the summer program begins with all participants gathered for Christian study, then they break into smaller groups for study and recreation throughout the day before coming back together again before leaving. The students participate in art and music classes, learn skills like web design and radio production, and go swimming several times, a real treat for them among the violence.

Last year, 24-hour curfews seriously impaired the summer program, but Mitri is expecting the summer of 2003 to be better. He expects children to come not only from the city of Bethlehem but also from refugee camps and remote villages.

He looks forward to the day that Alliance members and volunteers can come to work in the program, or at least come to see first-hand how their funds are being used. "I want our partnership not to be one just of financial gifts but to also include hands-on involvement," he said. "Unfortunately our situation is not one where that is possible right now but I hope that in a year or two some of you can come and teach in our school."

The Alliance connection with the center in Bethlehem began when former president John Roberts led an Alliance group to Israel in June 2000. "They happened to come to our center and I gave a lecture," Mitri said. "When I told them about the ministry we have and the needs, some of them immediately asked, 'How can we help?' Out of this one meeting, a very warm and deep relationship began to grow. Now we feel that this summer school program is a project jointly owned by our International Center of Bethlehem and the Alliance of Baptists."

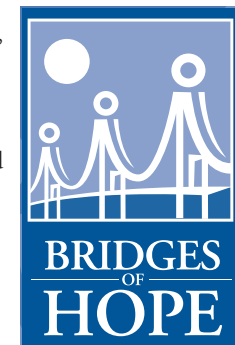
The facilities of the International Center are still being improved, Mitri said. "We have a nice facility that includes classroom, playgrounds, and an open air stage. We are currently doing some gardening, planting trees and shrubs to create a lovely environment. In the whole of Bethlehem there is not a single park and we hope this will become a place of wellness not only for

children in summer but in the evenings when whole families can come. Out of that we see new ministries growing."

Born in Bethlehem to a family that has lived there for centuries, Mitri was pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in 1995 when he started the center as a hobby. "As a church we cannot just keep within our own like-church world," Mitri said. "As the church of Christ we have to reach out to the whole community."

"God was calling us to a challenging but promising and unique ministry in a difficult context," he said. "When God puts us in front of challenges, though, he sends us also friends and partners to help us meet the challenges and achieve the goals and that is what happened with the Alliance."

"What really I like about our connection with you is that during the difficult weeks and months in Bethlehem in the past two and a half years, Alliance people were sending us e-mails saying, 'We pray for you and keep you constantly in our prayers. We have not forgotten you.' This meant to us so very much because in that context of fear and destruction, these prayers and friends were sustaining us. I look forward to days when together we can celebrate the joy of the kingdom of God."



# Relations with Cuba becoming more abysmal

Relations between Cuba and the United States are becoming more abysmal by the day.

Most recently we have heard and read of a roundup of some 75 Cuban dissidents who were subjected to sham trials and given inhumanely long sentences, all for doing nothing more than exercising the fundamental human right of complaining to their government, a right we as U.S. citizens presumably can take for granted. In the words of this nation's founders, contained in the First Amendment of the Constitution, we have the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

(Our current government would do well, by the way, to remember this last phrase of the First Amendment — certainly the least known of our basic rights — when it comes to enforcing the unhappily named Patriot Act.)

What our media have not reported adequately is the background to Fidel Castro's most recent outrages. While traveling in Cuba in late February and early March, I learned that James Cason, new chief of the U.S. Interests Section (what passes for an embassy in a country with which we have no diplomatic relations), has been stirring up trouble by meeting with dissidents, having them in the chancery for receptions, and speaking publicly in their behalf. When asked about his impolitic and undiplomatic behavior, his response has been that he is merely stating U.S. policy.

For his part, Fidel Castro seems incapable of overcoming his conditioned response of overreaction. To be sure, the treatment of these dissidents is not to be taken lightly. Not only should the United States object, but of far greater importance, Cuba's allies as well. And they will, as they have been doing more and more in recent years. This will not free the prisoners, of course, but such protests will shine the bright light of world attention on an unjustifiable situation.

From the perspective of this U.S. citizen, however, my grievance

is to be redressed to my own government, not to Cuba. What I object to is that we have posted a loose cannon like James Cason in Havana. What I protest is the presence in the Department of State of an undersecretary for Latin America, Cuban-American Otto Reich, who received a recess appointment from President Bush when it became evident his nomination was in serious trouble in the Senate and who throughout his career has been notorious in the whole of Latin America. And I object to a Cuba section in the State Department dominated by hard-line anti-Fidelistas who will not give the time of day to those of us who oppose U.S. policy toward our Caribbean neighbor.

Beyond that, I direct my grievance to the Departments of State, Justice and Homeland Security for the shabby treatment of Cuban citizens invited to travel in this country. Even as I write out these thoughts, we await final word on whether five invited guests from the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba will be granted travel visas so they can participate in our annual convocation. Both the invitation and the applications were filed in a timely manner. All five should have been given swift approval.

The reason they have not is that our government lists Cuba as a "terrorist state" whose citizens must be subjected to detailed security checks before being allowed to set foot on our shores. Why? Because as citizens of a nation on that dreaded list they are assumed to be security risks. And when, we might ask, did Cuba gain its new status? When did Christian friends like Paco Rodés, Manuel Delgado, Ofelia Ortega and Raúl Suárez come to be presumed threats to our nation's security?

The answers to those questions, like the irrational answers to so many other questions these days, is that September 11, 2001, makes all this nonsense necessary. The implementation of the Patriot Act requires it.

I object ... I protest ... I am a dissident...

perspectives



By Stan Hastey  
Executive Director

## Furman students explore Cuba

Former Alliance President Ann Quattlebaum, director of the Center for Theological Exploration of Vocation at Furman University, took a group of eight Furman sophomores to Cuba in late February for a 10-day introduction to the history, culture and religion of the Caribbean island. Along with Quattlebaum and fellow faculty members Linda Bartlett and Vic Greene, the students visited numerous sites, including a Jewish temple and community center in downtown Havana. They were accompanied by Fraternity of Baptist Churches Executive Secretary Manuel Delgado and Alliance of Baptists Executive Director Stan Hastey.



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## Woodbrook calls Ballenger; Heifner joins Passport

Alliance-affiliated **Woodbrook Baptist Church** in Baltimore has called **John Stewart Ballenger** as its new pastor, effective May 15. He goes to Woodbrook from the pastorate of Candler Park Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Alliance member **Todd Heifner** of Birmingham, AL, has been named the first director of development of **Passport, Inc.** He will work with individual donors, churches, foundations and denominational groups to develop a permanent funding base. For the past two and one-half years, he has been director of development for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Alliance board member **Cherie Smith** has been named director of pastoral care services at Franklin Square Hospital in Baltimore. She formerly was an associate pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis. Currently a member of the Alliance's

Strategic Planning Work Group and chairperson of the Women in the Church Committee, she also provided key leadership as chair of the 2001 Convocation Task Group.

**happenings**

Former Alliance board member **Flynn Harrell** of Columbia, SC, has been elected to the Board of Trustees of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. He is a long-time supporter of religious liberty.

Alliance member **Brian Graves** has been called as pastor of Alliance-affiliated **Dolores Street Baptist Church** in San Francisco, effective July 1. Most recently he has been on staff at Druid Hills United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

Alliance member **Dennis Atwood** is the new pastor of First Baptist Church, Mount Olive, NC. A graduate of Mississippi

College, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary, he was most recently pastor of Webster Groves Baptist Church in St. Louis.

**First Baptist Church** of Worcester, MA, an American Baptist Church, is seeking a Minister of Education who can also help with pastoral visitation and provide worship leadership. Working with senior pastor Thomas R. McKibbens, the associate will be a creative leader in developing extensive children and youth programming. Inquiries and resumes should be sent to First Baptist Church, 111 Park Ave., Worcester, MA 01609, or emailed to [tomm@fbc-worc.org](mailto:tomm@fbc-worc.org).

**Watts Street Baptist Church** in Durham, NC, is seeking an associate minister with children, youth and their families. For job description and additional information see: [www.wattsstreet.org](http://www.wattsstreet.org)

## 2003 Convocation and Annual Meeting

This issue of *connections* was completed before the April 24-26 Convocation and Annual Meeting held in Vienna, VA. A full report of those events will be in the June issue, and will also be posted on the website, [www.allianceofbaptists.org](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org).