

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.



### Possible Partnership

## Sri Lankan Baptists

by **Shanta Premawardhana**  
 Vice President, Alliance of Baptists  
 Senior Pastor, Ellis Avenue Church  
 Chicago, IL  
 773.268.4910 • [www.ellisavenuechurch.org](http://www.ellisavenuechurch.org)

**S**ri Lankan Baptists are in the midst of a full-blown revival. It is happening, however, in the unlikelyst of places – the communities of Tamil people of Indian origin, who for generations have worked in tea and rubber plantations.

Estate Tamils, as the communities of the plantations are commonly known, are ethnically different from the dominant minority of Sri Lankan Tamils from the north and east of the country. Brought over from India by the British about four generations ago, they are paid meager wages, given inadequate housing and are required to work at the whim of their plantation bosses. Until recently disenfranchised from citizenship and the electoral process both in India and Sri Lanka, Estate Tamils are among the most marginalized people in Sri Lanka.

British Baptist missionaries arrived in Sri Lanka in 1812. Like other missionary activities of the colonial era, their attempts, seen as bringing a foreign gospel associated with the imperialistic west,

barely took hold in Sri Lankan soil. Today, after 54 years of independence from Britain, Sri Lankan Baptists, still beholden to old paradigms, number about 3000 in 23 churches.

Thankfully, this is changing. I was invited by the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya (Convention), this August, to conduct a three-week “Mission” on the theme “The Church in the Power of the Spirit.” Since 1999, I’ve gone there every year, and seen the seeds of revival beginning to sprout. Now the revival is here and my time there was about the most exciting I have spent there in years.

One of the churches struggling to cope with revival is Agalawatta Baptist Church. They pack over 200 people in a half walled shed-like structure for energetic worship every Sunday. On a Friday evening from 5:00 – 11:30 and the following Saturday from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Nimal Costa and I visited 16 cell groups out of the 21 which meet in the homes of estate workers. Each group

One of the churches struggling to cope with revival is Agalawatta Baptist Church. They pack over 200 people in a half walled shed-like structure for energetic worship every Sunday.

had at least 10 –12 people and in some as many as 25 crowded into tiny living rooms where we sat on the floor for praise, testimony and prayer.

Distance makes it very difficult for many people from these cell groups to attend church on Sundays. Some spend over two hours to get to church, walking long

distances and riding in the buses. For many taking the family to church is prohibitively expensive. In recognition of these challenges the Alliance Mission Offering raised \$4000 to buy land and build a church building in a strategic location where many people would find it possible to attend Sunday worship.

(continued on page 2)

## To meet needs of Sri Lankans — and others — Alliance needs to find more funding

Alliance Executive Director Stan Hasteley thinks there’s “real wisdom” in Sri Lankan Baptists taking a year to study a possible partnership with the Alliance.

“Anytime a convention of Baptists overseas explores a partnership with a group of churches in this country it deserves special processing,” Hasteley said. “At the end of the year, I hope the Sri Lanka Baptist Convention in fact invites us

into a partnership.”

Hasteley expects the partnership to take the form of a covenant of prayer and spiritual support and “presumably financial support from us to them.”

“The process is good for us as well because it will enable our missions committee to give deliberate attention to the prospect of providing funding to this group,” Hasteley said. “To do that, we need

to find additional support for our mission offering in Alliance churches. Our missions committee — as it does year by year — will be challenged to make discriminating decisions about which of our grantees continue to receive funds from the Alliance mission offering. They may have to free up some money to take care of new projects.

We have \$150,000 in requests for the 2003

(continued on page 2)

The Alliance's immediate past president, Paula Clayton Dempsey, campus minister at Mars Hill College, was fired Sept. 4 in what school officials described as a budget-cutting move. She was one of five to be laid off, including the assistant campus minister who was subsequently reinstated. Interim President Dan Lunsford said an anonymous gift made the reinstatement of the assistant possible.

Dempsey has been a frequent target of criticism from some who regard her views as too liberal for a Baptist college. She has been an active member of the Alliance since its beginning and served as president for two years, 2000-2002.

Mars Hill officials said that her firing resulted from budget considerations only. "Rev. Dempsey is a very caring individual who has worked hard to help young people establish a vision of mission and outreach on a local and global basis," Lunsford said. "She has made a real contribution and has shown that giving Christian spirit."

## Some lessons learned along the journey

*By Paula Clayton Dempsey*

When a reporter from our college newspaper asked me to summarize my accomplishments as campus minister at Mars Hill, I was speechless. How could I reduce 11 years of ministry into a couple of sentences? In a college setting the most appropriate question for me to address is: "What have I learned?"

I came to campus ministry after spending 10 years as a pastor. The first thing I learned when comparing my "congregations" was that very few people participate in local church in order to learn and grow. What has made the college setting such a vibrant setting for ministry is that everyone is learning and growing.

Perhaps the most shocking lesson to learn in campus ministry has been the amount of pain and suffering young people are enduring in our world today. My short clinical pastoral education unit did not adequately prepare me for the students I encountered battling depression, diagnosed with dissociative disorder or as bipolar, or whose life in the college residence halls was safer than the homes where they were incested as children.

Our students represent the full spectrum of Baptist life – from churches located on university campuses to the tiniest church in a hollow of the mountains. I constantly challenged my students to draw the circle wider and to define more inclusively the family of God. Students continually drew the circle more narrowly, restricting God's grace and love only for people who saw the world and faith as they did. Their drawing of the circle often left each other out.

I had been at the college only a few years when our Christian students were faced with responding to a homosexual in the leadership circle. The most prophetic words concerning the



church's response to homosexual persons in her midst came from a college student: "I love you; please don't make me vote on this." This plea from one student to another was a cry of love and pain, a battle of heart and head.

As much as that student struggled with heart and head, others declined to engage in the discovery of truth. The repertory theater on our campus produced a play titled "Frankie" in which this truth was stated: "Our people would rather repeat an easy lie than to try to understand a difficult truth. I tell you, this whole scene brings shame to our society." The college community has had shame brought to it by the easy lies repeated and the pitifully few who take the time to discover the truth.

I have learned that Baptists are culturally bound to the south – and a south of the mid-twentieth century. Fundamentalists pose a threat to freedom and critical thinking, and liberal or progressive Baptists are diseased by elitism. A true Baptist allows room for all expressions in the larger Baptist family.

I have learned that women are often women's worst enemy. A true feminist is concerned not only about justice and welfare for herself, but justice and welfare for all women and for all of the created order.

I have learned more about what it means to be Christian and Baptist from a tiny church in Cuba than from any lesson studied in church or classroom. For example, I have learned that prayer is so much more than a list. Above all, I have learned to hope – not in any Baptist entity or institution, but in the power of love – God's love. God's love as experienced in relationship one with another is the most powerful force on earth.

## 2003 MISSION OFFERING

The Missions Committee, chaired by Bonnie Dixon, second from left, of Cary, NC, reviewed applications for 2003 Mission Offering funding totaling \$170,000. The committee recommended, and the board approved, a 2003 goal of \$111,000. Of that, \$104,000 has been allocated to 28 causes with the rest held in reserve to fund additional projects as needed. Other members of the Missions Committee include Louise Stanford of Greenville, SC, Tim Dean of Charlotte, Chris Copeland of Atlanta and Bettie Hodges of Savannah, GA.



## Alliance board approves 2003 budget, 2004 Convocation site

The Board of Directors of the Alliance of Baptists has approved a budget of \$300,156 for 2003, an increase of \$7,625 over the current year budget of \$292,531.

The budget includes a new line item of \$7,500 to pay for the services of an outside bookkeeper. It also includes salary increases of three percent for Executive Director Stan Hasty and Associate Director Jeanette Holt.

In order to meet the proposed budget for next year, as well as the 2002 budget, the board approved an interim financial development plan that includes recruiting new individual members and new affiliate churches as well as soliciting increased support from current members and affiliated churches. The board will also explore the possibility of obtaining grants from foundations.

Board members themselves pledged to bring in five new individual members each,

to reconsider their own financial commitment to the Alliance, and to ask their churches to increase their giving.

The board's action came during its fall meeting, Sept. 19-21, at First Baptist Church in Washington.

Also at the meeting, the board accepted the recommendation of its Executive Committee that Cross Creek Community Church in Dayton, OH, be the host congregation for the April 16-18, 2004 Convocation. Cross Creek is affiliated with both the Alliance of Baptists and the United Church of Christ. The theme of that convocation will focus on ecumenical and interfaith relations.

In other business:

- The 2003 Convocation will be held April 24-26 at Vienna Baptist Church in northern Virginia. Mahan Siler of North Carolina, chair of the Convocation Task Group, announced that the theme of the

meeting will be *Health in God's Garden, Hope in God's Children*, and will focus on the environment.

- Upon the recommendation of its Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, the board approved a statement on Muslim-Christian relations which will be presented for action to the Annual Meeting on April 25, 2003. The text of that statement can be read on the Alliance website, [www.allianceofbaptists.org](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org).

- Paula Clayton Dempsey of North Carolina, immediate past president of the Alliance, was named to head a Nominating Committee that will bring recommendations to fill board and officer positions to the Annual Meeting. Other committee members will be named later.

The board asked the committee to consider nominating more lay people, as currently only nine of 32 board members are non-clergy.



### REVISIONING PROCESS IS CRITICAL TO ALLIANCE FUTURE

Recognizing that the Alliance is at a critical point in its history, the Board of Directors is moving forward with a revisioning plan to help it chart the organization's future course. "We've done well with the challenges behind us," said past Alliance president C. Welton Gaddy, who is chairing the revisioning process. "But that won't take us into the future and the new challenges that we face." The Alliance is applying for a grant from the Louisville Institute to fund the services of an outside strategic planner who can help bring focus to Alliance goals and challenges over the course of the next five years. Just one of the challenges the Alliance faces is overseas Baptist groups — in places such as Sri Lanka, the Republic of Georgia, and Zimbabwe — cut off from other Baptist funding and relationships seeking to partner with the Alliance. Many of these groups need funding, initially at least, to help them as they reorganize their work. Alliance president W. Craig Henry said the brief time the Board spent on revisioning at its most recent meeting was among the most important items it undertook.

C. Welton Gaddy

# Ugly Americans Abroad: Zimbabwe

Written by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick and first published in 1958, *The Ugly American* exposed American arrogance, incompetence and corruption in Southeast Asia at a time when the United States was well on its way to a tragic war in that part of the world, a war that came to dominate a generation of politics in this country. Although semi-fictional, the work was deadly serious in its urgent call to action and caught the attention of official Washington. It is in fact credited with prompting President Eisenhower to initiate a study of our military aid program that led the way to needed reforms.

In addition, Lederer's and Burdick's book coined a phrase for U.S. blunders abroad that has stuck. Today that phrase aptly describes many of our embassies around the world in the shabby treatment of applicants for visas to travel to the United States. During a recent trip to Zimbabwe, I was made painfully aware of just how ugly our official behavior abroad can be.

Twice during a five-day stay in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, I was denied appointments with embassy personnel to discuss the case of David Mukandatsama, a young pastor who has been denied a visa to enter the U.S. for the purpose of pursuing the Master of Divinity degree at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Following months of meticulous preparation for his interview, including the securing of letters of endorsement from the leaders of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and BTSR President Thomas Graves, Mukandatsama's interview had hardly begun when embassy officer William P. Linder brusquely informed him his application was denied.

Without a trace of bitterness, Mukandatsama told me that Linder refused to review any of the paperwork he had put together so assiduously, telling him only that he was considered a high risk to stay in the U.S. In the second of my calls asking for an appointment to discuss the case, another embassy representative informed

me curtly, "Every alien is assumed to be an immigrant." The only intervention I could make, I was told, was to send the embassy an e-mail message supporting Mukandatsama's presumed application for a rehearing.

David Mukandatsama has no intention of coming to the U.S. in order to stay. For starters, he would come alone, leaving behind a wife and young children. He has been selected by Baptist leaders in Zimbabwe, including Baptist Theological Seminary Principal Henry Mugabe (no relation to Zimbabwe's dictator Robert

Mugabe) as a potential member of that school's faculty, which is being built from the ground up. Whether as a teacher or a pastor, Mukandatsama already has demonstrated extraordinary gifts of intelligence and leadership. He wants nothing more than to prepare himself more fully to serve God and the people of Zimbabwe.

If I were a young embassy officer like William Linder and a fellow American came along to vouch for a visa applicant, I think I'd want to hear him out. After all, Mr. Linder had never met Rev.

Mukandatsama before the so-called "interview." One would think Linder might even appreciate hearing the perspective of one who knows the applicant and the reasons for his application. To do so, one reasons, might help him make a more informed decision. Apparently not, however, given the working assumption that, "Every alien is assumed to be an immigrant."

My traveling companion in Zimbabwe, Alliance Vice President Shanta Premawardhana, is a native Sri Lankan and a naturalized U.S. citizen. When I told him about the case of David Mukandatsama, his response was immediate and passionate: "My interview with a U.S. embassy officer was the most terrifying experience of my life," he said.

If that is not the embodiment of the ugly American abroad, what is? Shame on us.

perspectives



By Stan Hasteley  
Executive Director

## Resources available from the Alliance of Baptists

Indicate number of copies desired and return form to Alliance of Baptists, 1328 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW Washington, D. C 20036. Shipping and handling are extra. Invoice will be included with the shipment.

_____	Being the Church: Exploring Multiculturalism I Congregations, Cathy Tamsberg	\$ 12.50
_____	Care for the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action	No charge
_____	Grace for the Journey: Interpreting Baptist Ordinances in the 21st Century, Cathy Tamsberg	\$ 5.00
_____	A New Call to Mission: Help for Perplexed Churches, Alan Neely	\$ 5.00
_____	Pursuing Justice: A Social Justice Curriculum for Churches, Cathy Tamsberg	\$ 15.00
_____	Report of the Task Force on Human Sexuality: A Document for Dialogue and Study	No charge
_____	Rightly Dividing the World of Truth: A resource for congregations in dialogue on sexual orientation, eds., LeDayne McLeese Polaski and Millard Eiland	\$ 25.00

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**2002 Operating Budget**

Through August 31

Needs: \$195,021  
Receipts: \$172,601

**2002 Mission Offering:**

Goal: \$95,000  
Receipts: \$51,054

October 2002

**A**lliance member **Susan Burgess Parrish** was ordained to the gospel ministry Sept. 29 by First Baptist Church, Oak Ridge TN. Currently executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Anderson County (TN), Parrish credits FBC Oak Ridge Pastors Larry and Carolyn Dipboye for having “called out from me talents and gifts that were given me to share.” In an open letter to friends and family announcing her impending ordination, she wrote that her concept of calling has been broadened “by serving with the disenfranchised and downtrodden of our country.”

happenings

One of the Alliance’s principal organizational partners, the **Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America**, has announced the resignations of **Ken Sehested** as executive director and **LeDayne Polaski** as managing director. Both resignations are effective Jan 1, 2003, and come “as a result of a variety of factors, most notably Ken’s and LeDayne’s own vocational leanings, and the current stage of development of the BPFNA as an organization and movement,” according to President Lindsay Penn-Matheson and Vice President Paul C. Hayes in an open letter to “BPFNA friends.” The organization’s top two elected officers also wrote that an interim executive director will be employed during a transitional period. Polaski, citing a desire to spend more time with her infant daughter

**SEMINARY STUDENTS  
SPONSORED  
BY THE ALLIANCE  
GLENN  
HINSON  
INSTITUTE  
SCHOLARS**



Pictured here with Glenn Hinson are the seminary students who received the Alliance of Baptists scholarships to attend the E. Glenn Hinson Spiritual Formation Institute this past summer. On the front row: Carl Gregg, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University; Mike Sciretti, George W. Truett Theological Seminary; Glenn Hinson. Second Row: Janet Webb, M Christopher White School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb University; Maggie Hurst, Wake Forest University Divinity School; Eydie Pittman, Princeton Theological Seminary. Back Row: Kari Maschhoff, Brite Divinity School, TCU; Joane Afshar, Earlham School of Religion; Becky Brannon, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University; Sue Lewis, M Christopher White School of Divinity, G-W University

Kate, has told friends she will stay on with BPFNA as coordinator of the group’s annual summer “peace camp.” Sehested has said he hopes to complete the manuscript for a new book while he seeks other employment opportunities.

The Academy of Parish Clergy selected its top 10 books for parish ministry published in 2001, and Alliance member **Mary Hammond** is the author of one of them: “The Church and the Dechurched: Mending a Damaged Faith” (Chalice Press, 2001). Mary is co-pastor of Peace Commu-

nity Church in Oberlin, OH, an Alliance-affiliated congregation.

**Northminster Baptist Church** in Jackson, MS, seeks a full time Associate Pastor for Students and Community Ministries. This person will be responsible for youth-related activities and programs, will serve as primary ministerial liaison with Northminster’s community missions activities, and will regularly participate in worship leadership. Send resumes to Anne Guidry, 3955 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, MS 39211; or fax to 601/982-4705.

# Sri Lanka Baptists

(continued from page 1)

Galawatta is not alone in this revival. On the day I preached at Eheliyagoda Baptist Church, they baptized 12 new believers, most of them from the plantations. Together with these two, other churches in the Kelani Valley Association are also experiencing revival. Kingsley Perera who led that Association to seek new paradigms for incarnating the gospel in their particular context is one of the architects of this revival. This August, he was appointed the General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya (Convention).

Revivals pose serious challenges to church structures. Here are the top three challenges that Sri Lankan Baptists are facing. First, Sri Lankan Baptists throughout their history have been a Sinhala (majority language) speaking people. Kelani Valley churches now routinely conduct their services and meetings in both Sinhala and Tamil with simultaneous translation.

In a country that has experienced a protracted civil war based on this ethnic/linguistic division, this in itself is a powerful testimony. Now that these churches are sending high numbers of people to the activities of the Sangamaya, the latter is forced to become bilingual as well. Second, Kelani Valley churches are producing leaders. Some are in seminary and others are taking leadership in various auxiliaries of the Sangamaya.

Giving Baptist leaders who are Estate Tamils places of leadership in the Sangamaya is going to be a serious challenge in a few years. Third, Baptist leaders, since they never had the opportunity to relate with them, know very little about the needs of Estate Tamils. Now their plight, which has significant political ramifications, is a front and center issue for Sri Lankan Baptists.

My “mission” (their word to describe what I did there) included conducting several leadership training seminars, visiting new church plant sites in different parts of the country and preaching



Newly elected and reelected officers and executive committee members of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe were solemnly installed in their new positions during the final session of the 39th Annual Congress, held Aug. 30-Sept. 1 at the Baptist Conference Centre near Gweru, Zimbabwe. Alliance Vice President Shanta Premawardhana was invited to give the charge to the new leaders and offer a dedicatory prayer.

both in churches and the annual sermon at the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya meetings. There, I conveyed greetings from the Alliance of Baptists and presented them the Mission Offering check. I also expressed our desire to establish a partnership with them similar to the partnerships we have with Baptists of Cuba and Zimbabwe. Partnerships are between colleagues who want to learn from each other, I said, and between sisters and brothers who want to share their lives with each other.

A resolution to “explore a partnership with the Alliance of Baptists” was referred to the Working Committee of the Sangamaya. I am reasonably confident of its passage.



## The Alliance of Baptists

1328 16th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Executive Director: Stan Haste  
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

## New groupings of Baptists emerging —

mission offering. Clearly we have some hard decisions to make.”

“While Sri Lankan Baptists are processing this internally, we are going to be examining ourselves and hope to have some good suggestions about what we can do to find new support for the Alliance and deepen the support we have now,” Haste said.

“My hope over time is that we can be much more intentional about finding new overseas partners. I don’t have

any doubt at all that if we had resources, we could find willing partners on every continent that share Alliance principles and values. And I hope the day comes sooner rather than later when we do have partners on every continent.

“The simple fact of the matter is that all around the world there is tension in Baptist life over issues of freedom. Emerging from that ferment are new groupings of Baptists, more progressive

(continued from page 1)

Baptists, who are interested in Alliance values or the values we hold in common. I hope we can be there for more and more of those people. Clearly at our current stage of development, we have very limited resources.

“This means we have a responsibility to weigh carefully such invitations to partnership so as to do well by them. The Sri Lankans will need discernment and so will we as we consider the possible new partnership,” Haste said.