

connections

December 1998

... a movement of progressive congregations and individuals committed to historic Baptist freedoms, the larger church of Jesus Christ, authentic discipleship, biblical authority and open inquiry, and the proclamation of God's good news to persons and society.

AND JESUS
TAUGHT
THEM
TO
STAY

The Convocation weekend will focus on The Alliance's commitment to theological education in congregations, colleges and seminaries characterized by reverence for biblical authority and respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship.

In addition, the Alliance will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its decision to establish the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

1999 Convocation

March 12-14 in Richmond, Virginia

Northminster Baptist Church & Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
with concurrent Youth Convocation

Friday, March 12, Northminster Baptist Church

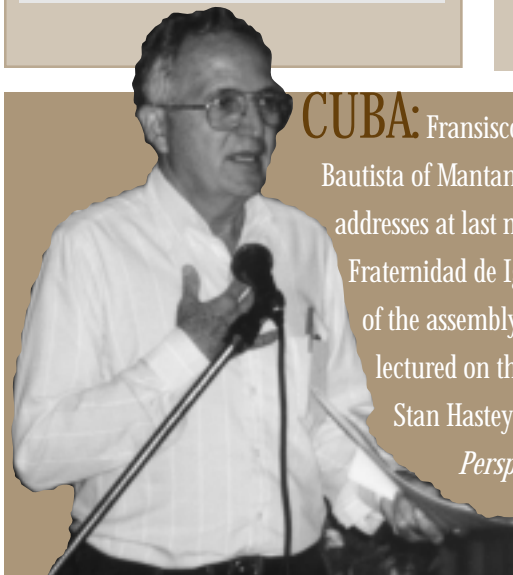
7 p.m. Theme Interpretation: Ken Meyers, Minister of Christian Education,
Hendricks Ave. Baptist Church, Jacksonville FL
Covenant Address: Nancy Ammerman, Hartford Seminary, Hartford CT

Saturday, March 13, Northminster Baptist Church

8:30 a.m. Morning Prayers, based on the Book of Common Prayers
9:00 a.m. President's Address: C. Welton Gaddy, Executive Director,
The Interfaith Alliance
10:30 a.m. Workshops
1:30 p.m. State-of-the-Alliance Address: Stan Hastey, Executive Director,
The Alliance of Baptists
2:00 p.m. Annual Meeting
7:00 p.m. Reception and Open House at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
8:30 p.m. Evening Prayers, based on Taize Tradition

Sunday, March 14

9:00 a.m. Workshops at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
11:00 a.m. Closing worship at Northminster Baptist Church



CUBA: Francisco Rodés, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista of Mantanzas, Cuba, delivered one of the principal addresses at last month's annual meeting of the Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas, held in Havana. As part of the assembly's focus on Baptist distinctives, Rodés lectured on the history of Baptist confessions of faith. Stan Hastey writes about the recent trip to Cuba in *Perspectives* on page 3. The Fraternity is also the featured mission offering recipient this month, on page 4.

Glory
to God in
the
highest
heaven,
and on
earth
peace,
goodwill
among
people.



Paula Clayton Dempsey was presented with the Anne Thomas Neil Award by North Carolina Women in Ministry at their annual meeting Nov. 9 at Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem. The award is named for the former president of the Alliance. Dempsey, who has served as pastor of churches in North Carolina and Virginia, is the chaplain at Mars Hill College.

happenings

Noted church historian and Alliance member *Norman H. Maring* died last month in Rock Hill, SC, where he lived in retirement with spouse Sarah. He was 83. For more than 35 years, Maring taught at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also served during the mid-1970s as academic dean. He also taught at Hardin-Simmons University, Temple University, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Donna Hopkins Britt is the new president of the Virginia Alliance. A graduate of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, she currently serves as associate pastor in Roanoke.



The Alliance of Baptists now has a brokerage account into which you may transfer gifts of stocks directly. Please contact the office for information.



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Alliance member *Free Williams* of Richmond, VA, will spend three months in Cuba beginning in January 1999. He will be based at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Havana, where he will be under the tutelage of Raúl Suárez, Center director and pastor of the adjacent Iglesia Bautista Ebenezer. Suárez, a key leader in the *Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba*, is one of two members of the clergy who serve in Cuba's National Assembly.

Lowell H. Fewster, executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, reports that body's Board of Managers voted in November to "continue dialogue with the Alliance of Baptists and explore the possibility of a formal connection..." The action follows a visit by Fewster and Connecticut pastor Brian Ladr to the Fall meeting of the Alliance Board of Directors.

The Alliance chapter at *BTSR* led chapel services Nov. 19. At the conclusion of the worship and communion service — which included students, administrators and faculty as worship leaders — an offering was taken to aid in humanitarian relief in Central America.



Alliance board member *Kathy Berry* presented *Jeffrey Sims*, a student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, with an Alliance check for \$500 to help him attend a special program for seminarians at the World Council of Churches Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. The board approved the help for Sims at its September meeting.

A partnership missions trip to Zimbabwe is planned July 15-Aug. 3, 1999. Volunteers are needed for preaching and renovation projects. Contact *Bonnie Dixon*, 919/851-6577, or bjadixon@aol.com.

Two Alliance congregations, *Oakhurst Baptist* of Atlanta and *Wake Forest Baptist* of Winston-Salem, NC, took actions last month relating to homosexuality and the church. Anticipating the Georgia Baptist Convention's adoption of a constitutional amendment which would exclude churches that "endorse" homosexuality, *Oakhurst Baptist* unanimously declared its commitment "to an inclusive gospel for all people." Another Alliance-affiliated congregation in Atlanta, *Virginia-Highland Baptist*, reportedly has been targeted for exclusion by the Georgia convention.

For its part, *Wake Forest Baptist* has adopted the following motion after a lengthy process of study and reflection: "Believing, as we do as Baptists, in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer and in the competency of every believer to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and faithfully, we acknowledge that only God can bestow spiritual blessings. Therefore, though we cannot, as a church, bless any relationship, we do with joy petition God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that he bless, insofar as it conforms to his will, any and all loving, committed, and exclusive relationships between two people."

Having just returned from my ninth trip to Cuba over the past five years, here are some fresh impressions of life on that island nation — so near to our own shores yet so far away.

(1) Food is more plentiful than when I first visited Cuba. My first two visits, in September 1993 and June 1994, coincided with the worst of economic times there, brought on by the demise of the Soviet Union and Cuba's consequent loss of its principal trading partners. Fruits and vegetables, in particular, seem more readily available.

(2) Medicines and medical supplies of all kinds remain critically scarce. Everywhere on the island I've traveled, physicians, nurses and others are of the unanimous opinion that the shortage of medicines is Cuba's largest single problem. It is here that the cumulative effect of nearly four decades of the U.S. economic embargo is felt most severely. And it is here that we as U.S. citizens can make a difference by urging our senators and representatives to pass legislation early in the next Congress to lift the embargo on food and medicine.

(3) Cuba's internal economic fault line increasingly is found between those who have access to U.S. dollars and those who don't. Five years ago, in perhaps the most poignant signal of Cuba's economic woes, Fidel Castro legalized the U.S. dollar. (U.S. visitors don't even exchange our dollars for Cuban pesos.) While the official exchange rate is still one-for-one, Cubans and visitors alike know better, the current street value of \$1 USD being about \$21 Cuban pesos. Earlier this year, the Clinton administration legalized the sending of up to \$1200 annually by Cuban Americans who still have family members on the island. Inside Cuba, what this means is that those families and individuals receiving dollars from U.S. relatives are fabulously wealthy by

perspectives



*By Stan Haste
Executive Director*



During last month's annual meeting of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches, the National Symphonic Band of Cuba presented an open-air concert. Shown at right is Fraternity president Manuel Delgado during one of the assembly sessions.



Cuban standards, while others remain desperately poor.

(4) In spite of economic hard times, Cubans generally and Cuban Christians in particular remain hopeful. Although uncertain about the political future of their nation, they aspire to the preservation of the best achievements of the Cuban socialist revolution — particularly in the fields of education and medicine — as well as to necessary changes. Along with all Cubans, at least from my perspective, we should pray and strive together toward those ends.

Housing Information
for 1999 Convocation
in Richmond
Holiday Inn Central
804/359-9441
\$59 per night S/D/T/Q
Ask for the Alliance of
Baptists rate.

Registration Form: 1999 Convocation March 12-14

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Amount enclosed: \$60 Individual \$100 Couple \$30 Student

Child care needs (List ages/times) _____

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

Operating Income
YTD: **\$205,193**
Budget Needs YTD:
\$212,322



Frontiers of Hope
Mission Offering
Goal: \$75,000
Receipts: \$52,726

As it approaches its 10th anniversary next year, the *Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba* (Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba) has much to celebrate.

- From humble beginnings in 1989, when the *Fraternidad* began with four congregations, it has grown to include 23 constituted churches and more than 50 churches-in-formation. Nearly all these represent new church starts. And they surely represent the lively presence of God's Spirit within the life of the Alliance's first overseas partner.

- The *Fraternidad* can celebrate the historic breaking down of the gender barrier in Christian ministry, one of the fault lines that resulted in its creation a decade ago. Then, the divisive issue within the Southern Baptist-related *Convención Bautista Occidental* was the ordination of women as deacons. Today in *Fraternidad* churches, women serve not only as deacons but as pastors. Already six women have been ordained to the gospel ministry, with numerous others working toward theological degrees in

Alliance dollars at work: Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba

anticipation of ordination. And earlier this year, thanks to the *Fraternidad's* example, the American Baptist-related *Convención Bautista Oriental* ordained its first woman pastor.

- After just 10 years of existence, the *Fraternidad* can celebrate expanding relationships with overseas partners beyond its eight-year-old relationship with the Alliance of Baptists. Today it counts as its other U.S. partners the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches. In addition, the *Fraternidad* has been granted membership in the Latin American Baptist Union and has applications pending with the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance.

From our side of the geo-political divide that separates our nations and peoples, we in the Alliance celebrate our partnership with the *Fraternidad* as well. While our Cuban partner assures us of the importance of our modest Mission Offering gifts, used primarily to help start new churches, what we receive in return has no price. Perhaps the most priceless gift we have received is that of

learning how to suffer hopefully and joyfully for the sake of the gospel.

For 22 of our churches, giving and receiving God's good gifts has taken on dramatic new meaning. These are the U.S. congregations, most of them affiliated with the Alliance, that have entered into sister-church relationships with *Fraternidad* congregations. In many of these, the church's larger mission has come alive as never before. The truth is that these churches have had their sense of mission revolutionized.

For all these gifts, especially in this season of giving and receiving, within the *Fraternidad* and the Alliance, we can exclaim together, "Gracias a Dios," "Thanks be to God!"

Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba	
\$13,000	



Noel Fernández Collot, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel in Ciego de Avila, Cuba, addresses the newly constituted Iglesia Bautista Getsemani. The latter became the 23rd church in the *Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba* last month. Located in the town of Colorado, Getsemani has been one of several mission churches sponsored by Emmanuel.

Please note that your gift to the 1998 Alliance Mission Offering will make it possible that the *Fraternidad* and 17 other recipients receive the full amounts we have set in our \$75,000 goal. If necessary, the Alliance office will keep open its accounting of Offering receipts through January 1999. Should receipts exceed the goal, they will be applied to the 1999 goal of \$80,000.