

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.



TAMSBERG IS CO-MODERATOR

During the organizational meeting Feb. 16-17, the council named as co-moderators for 2004-2005 Thomas McCracken of Murfreesboro, TN (Disciples); Annie Wynn Neal of Nashville, TN (UCC); and Cathy Tamsberg of Raleigh, NC (Alliance). McCracken is pastor of Central Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, in Murfreesboro. Neal, a noted educator, is a member of Howard Congregational United Church of Christ, Nashville, and Assistant Moderator for General Synod XXV of the UCC. Tamsberg is Minister of Outreach and Adult Education at Pullen Memorial Church in Raleigh and is a former board member of the Alliance of Baptists.

During the first meeting of the Partnership Council, one of the important tasks identified for the coming months is to find out where Alliance people are already in relationships with United Church of Christ and/or Disciples of Christ pastors, laypersons, or congregations. If you or members of your church staff or congregation are connected with UCC or Disciples people or congregations through collegial relationships, shared worship, joint mission, community coalitions, or other avenues of shared ministry, we would like to know about it.

Priorities set for Alliance, Disciples, UCC partnership

Global ministries, inclusiveness, youth and children's education, and local engagement and conversation are among the initial priorities set by a partnership council charged with oversight of a new ecumenical arrangement among the Alliance of Baptists, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

Ten of 12 representatives of the three church bodies attended a mid-February meeting and accepted assignments to shape initiatives in the four major areas. These will form much of the agenda of the next council meeting, scheduled for Sept. 8-10 in either Indianapolis or Cleveland. Participants in the Washington gathering agreed to rotate meetings in the cities that are home to the three church bodies.

In addition, the group selected theological and biblical reflection, ordained ministry, theological education, and the sharing of resources and methodology as other major initiatives to be taken up over the next two years.

Formally called a "Partnership in Mission and Ministry," the new ecumenical arrangement follows nearly six years of preparatory work by the three bodies, all of whom share a common ecclesiology of congregational polity. Contacts among members of all three have multiplied in recent years, in part as a result of chaotic conditions in Baptist life.

Share your story

Contact Cathy Tamsberg, Alliance representative to the Partnership Council, at ctamsberg@pullen.org or 919/828-0897, x-214 to share your story.

Neil is BTSR's Founders Day speaker

Anne Thomas Neil, former president of the Alliance of Baptists and a staunch advocate for women in ministry, was the speaker at the Founders Day Chapel service at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond on March 4. Also at that time, Seminary President Tom Graves acknowledged Neil's important role in the early days of BTSR. Through an anonymous gift, the Seminary has named a faculty office in her honor. That office is assigned to Alliance member Sandra Hack Polaski, Assistant Professor of New Testament at BTSR.

NEIL



POLASKI



Newest congregation:

First Baptist Church of Granville, OH. This historic church is also a part of the Rochester-Genesee Region of American Baptist Churches and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. First Baptist's long-time pastor, George Williamson, recently retired and the congregation has called Rick Mixon of Oakland, CA, as interim pastor.

Locals volunteer to lead various tours

Three tour options will be available on Friday, April 16, for those attending the Convocation in Dayton, OH.

Aviation heritage

Dan Carl, a member of Cross Creek Community Church, has offered to lead a tour to the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, which celebrates the lives and legacy of three exceptional Daytonians: Wilbur Wright, Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar. The tour will consist of the Wright Cycle Company Building and related museums. This site is free. For those interested, the tour will continue to the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial. Cost is \$5. The tour will leave the Doubletree Hotel at 1:45 p.m. and return at 5:00 p.m. To sign-up or for more information call Mike Castle at 937.434.4580.

Art institute

Mike Castle, pastor of Cross Creek Community Church, has offered to lead a

tour to the Dayton Art Institute. General admission is free. For those interested, the tour will leave the Doubletree Hotel at 2:00 and return by 5:00 p.m. To sign-up or for more information call Mike Castle at 937.434.4580.

'Holy ground' in Cincinnati

Joe Henry, a chaplain from Ohio, has offered to lead a tour of Cincinnati-area historical and religious sites. This tour to Baptist "holy ground" in Cincinnati will include regional historical information and an inspirational guided spiritual experience at Columbia Baptist Church's historic pioneer cemetery. This church was the first of any denomination and the first Baptist congregation in Ohio and the Northwest Territory. The tour will take approximately 3 hours, leaving the Doubletree Hotel at 2 p.m. and returning one hour before the gathering reception. For additional information, contact Joe Henry at 513.745.9845.

Additional Convocation workshops:

These workshops have been added to the convocation agenda since the March issue of *connections* was published.

Formation or Frustration: Shaping Faith with Children and Youth in Progressive Baptist Churches, led by Brian Ammons of Raleigh, NC, Chris Copeland of Decatur, Ga., Tim Dean of Charlotte, NC, and Libby Stephens of Raleigh, NC.

Working with Others to Defend Religious Freedoms, led by J. Brent Walker, executive director, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, DC.

Lifting Our Cup Together: Baptist Ordinances in the 21st Century, led by Cathy Tamsberg, minister of outreach and adult education, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC.

Position openings:

Vienna Baptist Church, a culturally diverse American Baptist congregation, affiliated with Virginia Baptists, Alliance of Baptists and the Baptist World Alliance, and located in suburban Northern Virginia, seeks a full-time Associate Pastor beginning summer 2004. For more information, go to www.vbc-va.org or www.allianceofbaptists.org.

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America is now accepting applications for the position of Coordinating Director. More information is at www.bpfna.org.

Lockwood begins work with disaster services

Susan Lockwood has resigned as pastor of Noank Baptist Church in Connecticut to accept a position as Director of Disaster Planning and Training for the New York Disaster Interfaith Services.

happenings

Sterling Severns has been called as pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Richmond, VA, effective April 19. He was formerly Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults at First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, DC.

Alliance members **Jann Aldredge-Clanton** and **Larry Schultz** of Raleigh, NC, have written a children's musical exploring and expressing images of God. It is titled, "Imagine God!" and has been published by Choristers Guild. Jann is a chaplain in Dallas, TX. Larry is Minister of Music at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh.

University Baptist Church, Montevallo, AL, has called **Robin Norsworthy** as pastor. Robin began her ministry at University in November 2003. She is a graduate of McAfee School of Theology and came to University from Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, MO., where she served as Associate Minister for Children's Ministries.

alliance **f**inances

Through Feb. 29

2004 Operating Budget	
Needs:	\$57,720
Receipts:	\$34,775
2004 Mission Offering	
Goal:	\$113,000
Receipts:	\$32,894

Interfaith Relations: A Theological Necessity

The United States is now the most religiously diverse country in the world, claims professor Diana Eck of Harvard University's Pluralism Project in her recent book *A New Religious America*. Even a casual observer in any city and most towns in the United States can notice that the religious profile of our nation, which for most of the 20th century was a configuration of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, has changed significantly. Much of this growth results from an influx of immigrants, particularly from Asia, in consequence of the Liberalization of Immigration Bill of 1965.

The beginning of the 21st century brought with it such unprecedented changes, among them an increase in religiously motivated violence around the world, but more particularly and conspicuously the attacks of 9/11, that the need to understand religious people and their motivations has never been more urgent. Some say if ever there was a time for Christians to engage in interfaith relations, this is it.

Early in the 20th century, at a time when the colonial missionary movement was intent on aggressively evangelizing indigenous people without full consideration of their religious and cultural heritage and sensitivities, some Christians became aware of an unexpected reality. In the words of F. W. Steintal, a missionary to India, it was the realization that there is "among Hindus and Brahmans as deep, genuine and spiritual religious life as is found among most Christians." From the International Missionary Conference that met in Edinburgh in 1910 to consider the implications of this reality, to date, almost a century later, the ecumenical movement has committed significant resources in search of a theologically proper method of engaging with those of other religious traditions. Some say if there was ever a time for Christians to commit greater resources to that on-going process of discovery, this is it.

Such concerns prompted the University of Chicago theologian David Tracy to remark: "Interfaith dialogue is no longer a luxury but a theological necessity." This statement is laudable because it indicates a well-known theologian's commitment to interfaith relations. However, he misses the mark when he adds the phrase "no longer a luxury." Dialogue was never a luxury; it was always a theological necessity.

We must be clear that we engage in interfaith dialogue not because of the exigencies of the present political and demographic realities.

Hinson Institute is June 6-11

The E. Glenn Hinson Institute for Spiritual Formation will be held June 6-11 at Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC. It is a program of the Advent Spirituality Center in Mars Hill. Faculty for the 2004 Institute includes E. Glenn Hinson, retired Professor of Spirituality, Worship, and Church History at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Stephanie Ford, professor at Earlham School of Religion, will join Hinson on the faculty. Ford was a student assistant of Hinson's and teaches Christian Spirituality. The theme for this year's Institute is *A Spiritual Heritage*. For more information, e-mail advent@main.nc.us or call 828-206-0383.

Dialogue has always been a theological necessity because diversity is a hallmark of God's creation, and holding the diverse components of creation in dynamic relationship, seems to be the intent of the Creator. Human communities too are created with incredible diversity including religious diversity. Does it not follow, then, that in order to experience God's revelation more fully, we need to

perspectives



By Shanta Premawardhana
Alliance Vice President

understand how people of other faiths understand God's revelation?

If I were to say that God's revelation is not present in the Qur'an, that is not so much a statement about the Qur'an as it is a statement about my God. I have limited God's capacity for revelation. If, on the other hand, I affirm that God is all pervasive and that all creation is under God's providence, and I refuse to look in the Qur'an, the wisdom of the Buddha or the teaching of the Hindu sages for divine revelation, am I not missing something of the divine grandeur? Let me hasten to add that such an inquiry does not need

to take anything away from my commitment to, experience of, and exploration into God's special and particular revelation in Jesus Christ.

Trends in biblical interpretation over the years have been so dominated by exclusivistic theologies that Christians who take the Bible seriously tend to stay clear of this exciting adventure of interfaith relations. For the same reason, those who want to explore God's revelation in other religions tend to stay clear of the Bible. I contend, however, that our faithfulness to the Bible requires us to relate to people of other religious traditions. This the Alliance of Baptists demonstrated in our statements on Jewish-Christian Relations of 1995 and Muslim-Christian Relations of 2003.

The Interfaith Relations office at the National Council of Churches, seeking to assist churches to engage in interfaith relations, has information on relationships with other religious communities both at the national and local levels and educational resources for use in Sunday Schools and study groups. I am very aware of the amount of experience and wisdom that is available in the Alliance networks. I welcome your participation in the work of interfaith relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA.

Shanta Premawardhana is Associate General Secretary for Interfaith Relations for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. He may be e-mailed at shanta@nccusa.org.

April 2004

Executive Director: Stan Hasteley
Associate Director: Jeanette Holt
(202) 745-7609
Toll-free: (866) 745-7609
Fax: (202) 745-0023
info@allianceofbaptists.org
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

2004 Convocation: Summing it up in a soundbite

Recently, Huston Smith came to speak at the church I serve as pastor, Highland Park Baptist Church in Austin, TX.

Huston Smith is, of course, one of the foremost scholars in the field of world religions in this country, and one who has, as a Christian, found a way to weave many of the teachings of the different faith traditions into his own spiritual practices and disciplines. The occasion for his being at Highland Park was the Annual Meeting of the Austin Area Inter-Religious Ministries.

Huston Smith was our featured speaker. He spoke powerfully and authentically, and then he had to leave early to catch his plane.

As he was waiting, a reporter from a local news channel asked to interview him.

He obliged the young man. After a few preliminaries, the young reporter asked his question. He said, "Dr. Smith, can you sum up for our viewers what you have learned from your study of the world's different religions over the last 50 years?"

Huston Smith looked at the young man incredulously, and then asked him, "You want me to sum up the content of my life's work in a sound bite?" And the reporter said, "Uh, well, yes."

And Huston Smith said, "OK, here goes..."

"My parents were Christian missionaries, who spent their entire lives teaching people about the love of God. Everything that I have been about in my study of the religions of the world is not a negation of what I learned growing up, but an amplification of it — because when you get right down to it, the Christian faith is not about moralism, nor is it about dogmatism, it is about this one thing...bear ye one another's burdens."

I believe that Huston Smith is right, and I also believe that his sentiments echo the core commitments of the members, and member churches of the Alliance of Baptists. Our annual convocation, "Lifting Our Lights Together," to be held this year in Dayton, Ohio, is our

opportunity to come together and reaffirm our commitment to the ongoing work of reconciliation and peacemaking between denominations and the other faith traditions of the world, as we seek to learn more and more what it means to "bear one another's burdens." And as always, it is a time to reconnect with old friends and make new ones.

I look forward to seeing you there!



By Steve Lucas
Pastor, Highland Park
Baptist Church in
Austin, TX
Chair of the Convocation
Task Force



2004 CONVOCATION APRIL 16-18 • DAYTON, OHIO

featuring Charles *Kimball*, Karen Thomas *Smith*,
Jeremiah *Wright*, Stephanie *Ford*, James *Fowler*

with a special performance by nationally-known singer *Kate Campbell*

WWW.ALLIANCEOFBAPTISTS.ORG FOR REGISTRATION INFORMATION