

# **Baptist World Alliance General Council looks to the future\_80904**

August 6, 2004

Posted: 8/06/04

## **Baptist World Alliance General Council looks to the future**

**By Trennis Henderson**

*Kentucky Western Recorder*

SEOUL, South Korea (ABP)—Pledging to focus on the future, leaders of the Baptist World Alliance convened their first global meeting since the Southern Baptist Convention voted in June to withdraw from the international Baptist body.

The BWA General Council meeting attracted about 300 participants from more than 30 nations, including such diverse settings as Australia, Croatia, Ghana and India as well as the United States. The council is a representative body that conducts the business of BWA, which holds a worldwide congress once every five years.

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz, speaking during the General Council's opening session, noted that BWA “has gone through a tremendous year of encouragement and support from Baptists all over the world.”

---

Musicians in traditional Korean attire perform during the opening banquet of the Baptist World Alliance General Council meeting in Seoul, South Korea. It was the international body's first meeting since the Southern Baptist Convention voted to withdraw membership and funding from the Baptist World Alliance. (Trennis Henderson Photo)

While not specifically referencing the SBC departure, which cost BWA its largest member and donor, Lotz told participants, "It would be wrong to say we did not have a break in our fellowship." Noting that BWA has gone "through some deep waters," he said the division has caused "great distress ... particularly to our minority conventions all over the world."

"But we are not here to look at the past," he declared. "We're here to look at the future."

Emphasizing that "unity is a central doctrine of all Christian faith," Lotz said, "We believe Jesus' prayer in John 17 for unity is part of the authority of Scripture for all Baptists and all Christians.

"When we do not work for unity, then we are part of the movement of disunity," he warned. "One of the greatest hindrances to evangelism in the world is the lack of unity in the church. ... If we cannot mirror that unity, we are not being faithful to that Scripture we believe."

While several Southern Baptist individuals attended the weeklong meeting in Seoul, only one of the SBC's 17 General Council members participated—Wanda Lee, executive director of national Woman's Missionary Union.

Though the SBC's withdrawal from the BWA doesn't officially take effect until Oct. 1, Southern Baptist leaders such as BWA Vice President Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee; BWA executive committee member Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources; and BWA study and research committee Chairman Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, declined to attend their final meeting as BWA representatives.

Citing WMU's commitment to continue working in cooperation with the BWA women's department, Wanda Lee said, "The women's department is an auxiliary to BWA, just as WMU is an auxiliary to the SBC." Noting that

WMU helped establish the BWA Women's Department in 1911, she added, "For us to not participate in prayer with all the women of the world is unthinkable.

"When you look at the world climate in which we live, Baptists need to speak with one voice in regard to religious freedom, separation of church and state, and on behalf of those who have no voice and are persecuted," Lee said. "We continue to pray for reconciliation in the Baptist family."

In his written report to council members, Lotz refuted charges leveled by the SBC committee that recommended withdrawal from BWA.

"The BWA is not a liberal organization," he wrote. "It strongly affirms the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith as proclaimed in holy Scripture, which we accept as the authoritative word of God.

"The BWA does not promote women as pastors of churches nor does it argue against the practice," he added. "Since we affirm the autonomy of Baptist bodies, it is the prerogative of local churches and their member bodies to make decisions on ordination."

Lotz also countered the SBC's charge of anti-Americanism. "The BWA is not anti-American," he wrote. "We are citizens of the kingdom of God and loyal citizens of our own nations."

He also addressed a charge concerning a pair of gay-friendly American Baptist churches, which was raised by former SBC President Paige Patterson during debate about the SBC leaving the BWA.

"The BWA does not support homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, believing it to be incompatible with the teachings of Scripture," Lotz wrote.

Emphasizing that BWA "affirms without reservation that marriage is a holy state and only between a man and a woman forever," he added, "There is

not one BWA member body that affirms, promotes or approves of gay marriage.”

Despite the SBC's decision to withdraw from BWA, Lotz said BWA still “hopes for and will work for reconciliation with our Southern Baptist brothers and sisters and prays for their return to the historic and international Baptist world family.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.