

'We belong to each other because we belong to Christ'

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By Marv Knox

Editor

BIRMINGHAM, England—Margun Waren of Norway grew up in a country with a strong, state-sponsored Lutheran church. “As Baptists, we are a minority,” she said, reporting that only about 5,000 Baptists live in Norway. “It was very great for me when I first found out as a teenager that the Baptists were so many more than the small area where I grew up.”

And worshiping with about 13,000 Baptists from many countries at the Baptist World Centenary Con-gress in Birmingham, England, strengthened her sense of Baptist unity, Waren added. “How rich it is for me to meet with Baptists from wherever in the world. You feel united. Deep in my heart, I am always a Baptist.”

Mirian
Martins
(left) and
Raquel
Medrado,
both from
Brazil,
greet
each
other at
the
Baptist
World
Centenary
Congress.
(Photo by
Ferrell
Foster)

Richard Otim, pastor of Rockview Baptist Church in Soroti, Uganda, marveled at the inspiration he received from Baptist sisters and brothers around the world.

“I am challenged to go back to my country and share the gospel and bring more to Christ,” he said. “I have enjoyed seeing the different ways of worshipping and giving praise to the Lord God.”

Otim acknowledged he learned from his experiences at the Baptist World Alliance meeting.

“In Uganda, I thought all Indians believed in Hindu. But the congress here exposed me to so much—including Indian Baptists,” he explained. “I also have been surprised at the way the church is growing. Sometimes, in my

own country, I think the church is very small. ... But so many people (around the world) are coming to the Lord.”

Samson Mamidi, pastor of The Living God's Church in Suryapet, India, smiled and then started laughing as he talked about “bringing here all the nations” to worship together as Baptists.

“It has given me an opportunity to see around the world,” he said. “In 1993, God told me, 'I will bring your name around the world.' Now he is fulfilling his promise. I have met people from around the world, and now they all know my name.”

The greatest lesson he learned in Birmingham was how “this people loves one another,” he added, noting he felt that love specifically after his luggage got lost between India and England. “A United Kingdom pastor gave me this coat,” he said, pointing to a blue double-breasted blazer. “He expressed his love to me.”

Ruth and Pete Taylor of Brackley, England, not far from Birmingham, expressed their love to delegates who visited their homeland. Brackley Baptist Church, where he is pastor, housed four delegates from Gambia and one from Germany during the five-day meeting.

“I've really enjoyed meeting people from all around the world,” Ruth Taylor said, adding she feels blessed to “fellowship with a wide variety of cultures,” as well as to see their friends from the International Baptist Convention and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Her church is aligned with both unions.

Ben Chen, a native of Hong Kong who now is area director for East Asia and India with the American Baptist Churches-USA, affirmed the notion of fellowship.

“And this is a platform to express common concerns and issues—the political

and ethical issues facing the world,” he added. “As a Baptist family, this is a good forum to hear different voices.

“I also was impressed with the way the Baptist World Alliance brings nations of the world together, to listen to each other. We may not always understand how people arrive at their positions, but we can share with each other and gain an understanding of what God has for us as a family.”

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz said he would remember the 2005 congress for “unity, unity, unity.”

“We belong to each other because we belong to Christ,” he added, reporting he heard and sensed that same idea as he worshipped and talked to delegates throughout the week.

And the Birmingham congress illustrated how Baptists can embrace passion for both evangelism and social justice, Lotz insisted. Baptists said they are united in evangelism and will continue to promote the BWA's “Living Water” evangelism conferences. But they also said they are united in compassion for the people Jesus called “the least of these,” he added.

“We did that in this conference,” he said. “We had the whole spectrum of Baptist life. We need to be that inclusive ... and not be isolated from each other.”

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