

Nilson Fanini, former BWA president, dies at 77

September 21, 2009

BEDFORD, Texas — Nilson Fanini, Brazilian pastor and evangelist who served as president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1995 to 2000, died Sept. 19. He was 77.

During his term as BWA president, Fanini viewed the BWA's primary role as defending human rights, attacking social injustice, promoting peace, and helping those who were hungry and those with desperate needs. In addition, he placed evangelism at the heart of the fellowship of more than 200 Baptist conventions and unions. He also met with world leaders ranging from Pope John Paul II to Cuban President Fidel Castro.



Nilson Fanini

"Fanini had an incredible preaching ability and he had an earnest desire to see the BWA lift higher the banner of global evangelism," said John Upton, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Upton will

be nominated as BWA president this July.

“He will always be remembered for his concern for the lost of the world. His preaching was electric with powerful images and a direct challenge to let the love of Christ take hold of you,” said Upton. “He will be greatly missed as a Baptist world leader.”

“He was a godly man and the most genteel human being I ever met,” reported retired Baptist missionary Perry Ellis, who worked with Fanini on many evangelism projects in Brazil.

Before graduating from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, in the late 1950s, Fanini had earned a law degree in his native Brazil.

Fanini founded the 7,000-member First Baptist Church of Niteroi, Brazil, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro, and had preached in 109 countries, baptizing more than 11,000 converts. A seminary he founded trained more than 600 young ministers as pastors and ministers of education.

By radio and a television ministry he began, reportedly with assistance from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, he preached for 34 years to tens of millions in South America. A network of 13 social ministries emerged from his TV presence including medical clinics, food and clothing distribution sites, and a vocational training center.

Four years ago, Fanini left First Baptist to form a new church, Memorial Baptist Church in Niteroi, which he served until his death.

Fanini was visiting his family to celebrate a new granddaughter when he became ill and was admitted to a Bedford, Texas, hospital with pneumonia on Sept. 13. While being treated, he suffered a stroke from which he did not recover.

Funeral services will be held Sept. 26 at Fort Worth's Iglesia Bautista Getsemani. Other memorial services will be held in Brazil.

Survivors include his wife, Helga; a daughter, Margaret Aviles of Bedford; sons, Otto Fanini of Houston and Roberto Fanini of McKinney, Texas; and four grandchildren.

-Jim White is editor of the Religious Herald.