

Top stories of 2014 from Baptist News Global

January 2, 2015

Baptist reaction to the advance of gay marriage, racial justice, Obamacare and Ebola were among issues covered frequently in 2014 by Baptist News Global.

Following is a summary of some of the year's major headlines.

Baptists and race. Will Baptists remember 2014 as a sea change in race relations? Fifty years after the civil rights movement and nearly 20 years after the Southern Baptist Convention apologized to African-Americans for the denomination's racist past, grand jury acquittals of white police officers in the deaths of black men in Ferguson, Mo., and Staten Island, N.Y., exploded the myth of a post-racial America.

Southern Baptists planned a major conference next year in response to racial tension, while moderate Baptists pointed to work done in recent years in the New Baptist Covenant as a sign of hope.

Marriage. Since the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Windsor* struck down a federal law interpreting the terms "marriage" and "spouse" as applying only to heterosexual marriage, 35 states have legalized same-sex marriage, the majority by court decision.

Progressive congregations such as Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., made headlines for changing policies to allow gays to wed, while conservatives debated whether Christian photographers or bakers ought to have the right to refuse service to same-sex couples.

Healthcare vs. religious liberty. Long known for running their

business on Christian principles like closing stores on Sundays, the Southern Baptist owners of Hobby Lobby sparked controversy when they refused on moral grounds to obey a requirement in the Affordable Care Act to include contraceptive coverage in employee health insurance plans. The Green family won their case before the Supreme Court by a 5-4 ruling. Two weeks earlier, they were honored at the SBC annual meeting in Baltimore with a major religious-liberty award.

Southern Baptists traditionally aren't opposed to artificial birth control, but the Greens contended that certain contraceptives like IUDs or the morning-after pill end a pregnancy, making them not birth control but an abortifacient.

Sex and the Southern Baptists. In his first major conference as head  of Southern Baptists' moral concerns agency, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission President Russell Moore told reporters reparative therapy, a treatment long supported by conservative evangelicals that attempts to change a person's sexual orientation has been "severely counterproductive" and reflects an "inadequate view" of same-sex attraction. Many viewed the conference, "The Gospel, Homosexuality and the Future of Marriage," as a major change Southern Baptists' intolerance toward homosexuality.

But probably not members of New Heart Community Church in La Mirada, Calif. In September, the SBC Executive Committee disaffiliated the congregation for adopting a "third way," neither affirming homosexuality nor judging those who do. The Kentucky Baptist Convention followed suit, booting Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville after the congregation posted on its website it would treat homosexual members the same as everyone else.

Ebola. The outbreak of a rare and deadly disease in West Africa hit  home for moderate Baptists in the United States. On loan from the

Mercer University faculty, Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary President Richard Wilson had to leave the country when President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf closed the school in a state of emergency. Back home, Wilson turned to a fund raiser, launching a Care for One Hundred project to provide basic care for about 100 people left without a paycheck living on the seminary campus.

Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, meanwhile, looked no further than its own congregation to find lives changed by Ebola. Thomas Eric Duncan, who died from the disease Oct. 8 at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas, was engaged to be married to Louise Troh, a Liberian-American who joined Wilshire by baptism in August.