

# Baptist World Congress slated as virtual event in 2021

November 23, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the [Baptist World Congress](#)—originally scheduled for July 2020 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil—will instead become an online event July 7-10, 2021.

In March, the COVID-19 crisis prompted the [Baptist World Alliance](#) to postpone the Baptist World Congress, typically held every five years, and reschedule it for summer 2021. In light of continued health concerns and travel restrictions, the BWA Executive Committee voted last month to transition to a virtual event next year rather than an in-person gathering.



Elijah Brown

“We wanted to have a Baptist World Congress that is as globally inclusive as possible,” BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown explained.

At Pentecost, BWA held an online prayer meeting that drew thousands of participants around the world, demonstrating the openness of Baptists globally to a virtual gathering, Brown noted.

So, just as the pandemic inspired churches around the world to use available technology to connect members in Bible study and worship experiences, BWA pivoted to a completely virtual format for the Baptist

World Congress.



“This virtual opportunity to gather will allow us to seek the wisdom and strength of the Lord during such a special time in the world,” said BWA President Tomás Mackey. “Together we will share the experiences that

have enriched us in so many different communities, and thereby strengthen our hope. We will be sensitive to the pains of peoples and individuals, interceding for one another, and plan for ministry that will help in these circumstances.”

The 2021 Baptist World Congress holds the potential to be the largest event uniting Baptists in their 400-year history, as well as the most diverse and accessible event since the Baptist World Congress launched in 1905, organizers asserted.

“After this unprecedented season of physical isolation, we need the encouragement of our Baptist sisters and brothers more than ever,” said Carolina Mangieri, BWA director of global events and fellowship. “I am prayerful that this transition will enable more people than ever before to experience the beautiful unity amidst diversity of our global Baptist family.”

## **Accessible regardless of time zone**

The 22nd Baptist World Congress will include a combination of livestream events—which will be recorded and made available on demand later—and prerecorded sessions accessible at any time, to accommodate all time zones.

In addition to Paul Msiza, past president of BWA, speakers include Elie Haddad, president of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut,

Lebanon; Karen Kirlew, president of the Jamaica Baptist Union; John Kok, senior pastor of Kuala Lumpur Baptist Church in Malaysia; Fanyana Peter Mhlophe, past president of the Baptist Convention of South Africa; Gabriel Stephen, originally from Nigeria and now a doctoral student and youth pastor in Norway; and Robert Smith Jr., preaching professor at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala.

The congress will feature more than 30 breakout sessions on a variety of ministry topics, along with virtual roundtable discussions about worship, missions, aid to people in need, religious freedom and transformational leadership.

Three related events are scheduled prior to the opening session of the Baptist World Congress—the “Life” Global Conference of Baptist Women, the Youth Leadership Conference and the “Together with the Persecuted” Religious Freedom Summit.

To register or find more information about the 2021 Baptist World Congress, click [here](#).

## **BWA responds to COVID-19 crisis**

The transition to a virtual Baptist World Congress represents one in a series of actions BWA has taken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, Brown noted.

In March, the global fellowship launched its Standing Together Response Plan, receiving and praying for thousands of requests from around the globe and making available 132 emergency aid grants that benefited more than 130,000 people in 82 countries, he said.

In addition, through the BWA Forum for Aid and Development, more than 30 Baptist aid agencies worked collaboratively to respond to refugee

challenges, meet the needs of vulnerable populations, help women recover from human trafficking and work on economic development projects to generate jobs in the midst of a global pandemic.

At the same time, BWA has closely monitored human rights abuses and religious persecution, and its racial justice task force worked on issues that particularly came to the forefront in 2020.

“BWA has made every effort to respond holistically,” Brown said.