

BWA leader joins ecumenical prayer vigil in Rome

October 2, 2023

Prior to the beginning of the Vatican Synod on Synodality, Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown offered a prayer for peace at an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil in Rome, a historic event that included participants from Orthodox, Anglican and various Protestant traditions.

The Sept. 30 [prayer service](#)—which drew an estimated crowd of 18,000 participants to St. Peter’s Square around the theme “Together”—marked the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church’s XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

The [Synod on Synodality](#) is a summit of 464 Catholic bishops, priest and laity—including women—to discuss a range of issues, based on two years of conversations in Catholic parishes around the world.



Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown offered a prayer for peace at an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil in Rome. (Screen Grab Image)

At the prayer service, Brown followed Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch,

patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, who prayed in Arabic: “Christ Jesus, look down upon your family. We entrust all your disciples to you, that they may continually grow as peacemakers.”

Brown prayed: “For all who suffer from violence and war in Ukraine, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Haiti, Nicaragua, Congo, Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia and in many other places around the world, for those who persevere, wherever they live, in the service of justice and reconciliation, we pray to you.”

Other participants included Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury; Bartholomew I, ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople; Jong Chun Park, president of the World Methodist Council; Anne Burghardt, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation; Thomas Schirrmacher, secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance; William Wilson, president of the Pentecostal World Fellowship; and Kuzipa Nalwamba, representative from the World Council of Churches.

The ecumenical Taizé community organized the two-hour prayer service, which included eight minutes of silence for personal prayer.

In his remarks to the ecumenical gathering, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of silence as “essential in the life of the believer,” noting it “enables true discernment.”

‘A spirit of Jesus-centered worship’

“While we maintain our differences, I was grateful to participate on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance in this historic gathering as church leaders from Catholic, Orthodox, Mainline and Evangelical churches came together for the very first time to pray,” Brown said.

“There was a spirit of Jesus-centered worship when the many thousands

who were present spontaneously joined with a children's choir from Ukraine to sing 'Alleluia.' I was encouraged that the prayer service began and concluded with each of the church leaders standing and prayerfully reflecting before the cross.

"With so many around the world bearing the cruelties and injustice of war and persecution, it was humbling to pray again for peace and to ask if each one of us would follow Jesus with courage and conviction into the sufferings of violence in the path of peacemaking."

In a brief encounter with Pope Francis, Brown said he told him, "The Baptist World Alliance prays for peace and for renewed Pentecost witness."

"The Pope responded, 'Pray for me, as well,'" Brown said.

Taizé hosted a youth gathering prior to the prayer service. Brown met with 125 young people from Egypt, Sri Lanka, Spain, Germany, Sweden and other nations to talk about what it means to follow God's call and live on mission.

He also preached at La Chiesa di Trastevere, the largest Baptist church in Rome.