

# **BWA leader recalls the past, challenges for the future**

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ZURICH, Switzerland—Elijah Brown stressed the power of Scripture to transform lives and the importance of building bridges as he welcomed the global Baptist community to the historic city of Zurich in his opening remarks to the Baptist World Alliance General Council.



Elijah Brown

“As we gather here in this city, of all cities, we are reminded of the transformative power of God’s Holy Word,” said Brown, general secretary of BWA, the largest international Baptist fellowship.

The Christian Reformation began in Germany and Switzerland 500 years ago, with Zurich being the key site in the Swiss Reformation. Zurich also is the city where early Reformation leaders persecuted and killed other, more radical, Reformers like the Anabaptists.

The global body was co-hosted by the Swiss Baptist Union and Evangelical Reformed Church of Zurich. Brown thanked them for their “gracious hospitality and for all you have done to help bring us together for this important milestone.

“Here in the city where Huldrych Zwingli preached, where Scriptures were translated anew, the Reformation was shaped, and at times the Anabaptists hid, we are gathered to join in the ongoing celebration of 500 years of Protestant Reformation,” said Brown, a native Texan.

## **‘God’s word is not chained’**

Brown spoke from 2 Timothy 2:8-9, which ends with the phrase, “God’s word is not chained.”

God’s messengers can be put in chains, practices can become outdated, and cultures can turn, but “the word of God cannot be chained. God’s holy, perfect, inspired word cannot be chained,” Brown said.

He listed the five key principles of the Reformation—sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), sola fide (faith alone), sola gratia (grace alone), solus Christus (Christ alone) and soli Deo gloria (to the glory of God alone).

“This is who we are,” Brown said. “And this is who we at the BWA strive to be. Would you sit in this room for just a moment? Would you feel hundreds of years coursing through this city, echoing through our foremothers and forefathers, and calling us ever more. ...

“As we gather, would you join me in praying that God’s word would be powerful and alive in our lives this week? For one of the themes woven throughout this week is the transformative power of the Scriptures. It is what we will be celebrating tonight in the Grossmünster Church,” the

church where Zwingli was pastor.

## **Reality of persecution**

In the midst of this celebration of God's transformative work through the centuries, the BWA leader said many people around the world, including Baptists, are suffering persecution. Many are "even now feeling the weight of God's word and those who would seek to chain it down. As we begin we also remember them. They may not be able to join us, but we will join them."

Brown recently returned from a trip to South Korea, and he asked Baptists to be "especially mindful of our brothers and sisters in North Korea." After sharing details of his trip to Korea, Brown asked participants to gather in small groups of prayer for North Korea and its people.

"I pray that throughout this annual gathering we will be a community who builds bridges," Brown said. "We are recalling our bridges to our past. ... We will be building bridges to one another in Jesus Christ. ... We will be building bridges to our shared future in ministry. ... For we still believe in the transformative power of God's word."