

Voices: Baptist World Alliance fills me with hope

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The bad news

Occasionally, I listen to reports about things happening in Baptist life across our state and nation, and my emotions are stirred in a cauldron of frustration, sadness and confusion. I wonder, “God, why am I still a Baptist?”

Young adults in my church read reports about how Southern Baptists have treated women, and as they read about recent lawsuits, they ask me what it means for our church to be affiliated with the SBC.

It was obvious these young adults—Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z—were not enthusiastic about being Baptist, and no teaching on our marvelous mission work or biblical doctrinal distinctives was going to sway them easily to wave the Baptist flag.

These younger generations seem to be increasingly unimpressed. I’ve offered to pay their way to our Texas Baptists annual meetings. One person responded that he couldn’t imagine a greater waste of his time.

A number of years ago, I remember having to respond to questions from people visiting my church asking if we were a part of the infamous Westboro Baptist Church who picketed the funerals of U.S. soldiers, declaring they were in hell for fighting for our country.

The good news

I absolutely love my Texas Baptist family and will never give it up, but I admit I sometimes need to hear great stories of what God is doing among my beloved Baptists.

During the Baptist World Alliance annual gathering in Birmingham, Ala., this past July, the heavens opened with torrential downpours of story after inspiring story of how the Holy Spirit is working among Baptists all over our world.

Baptists from Poland shared how they were the first people to set up shelters for Ukrainian refugees. Baptists are trying to broker peace deals between warring peoples in Ethiopia.

Baptists are fighting for religious freedom in Sudan, and because of their efforts, a woman finally was released from prison where she had a baby while her feet were shackled to the wall just for being a Christian. Baptists in Brazil were laboring to relocate Christians being persecuted in Afghanistan.

Three times, I listened to the vice president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, a gentleman named Igor, who came off the frontlines in eastern Ukraine to talk to us about how Baptist churches were worshiping and preaching there.

I listened to Igor tell BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown, as bombs dropped around one Baptist church in eastern Ukraine on a Sunday morning, the people continued to sing. Elijah asked him what they were singing. He said: "We were singing 'Count Your Many Blessings.'"

I thanked God I have been so incredibly blessed to be a part of this family of faith called Baptists.

The power of together

There was a spirit at the BWA gathering of laboring for what is right in light of the kingdom of God in this poor and broken world.

I worshiped at the famous 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, where four little girls were killed in a bombing in 1963. A beautiful memorial to them stands across the street from the church. As we sang together, I lifted my voice with the members of this Black Baptist church, which truly is everybody's church.

Annual gathering attendees traveled to Montgomery, Ala., to visit the Legacy Museum, which traces the experience of Africans from enslavement to today. Afterward, a small group of Texas Baptists drove to Selma, Ala., and walked across the Edmund Pettus bridge, the site of [Bloody Sunday](#) on March 7, 1965.

It occurred to me as it never had, a courageous and wise Baptist pastor led that difficult march from Selma to Montgomery. I felt the Spirit of God inspiring my heart to desire to be the kind of Baptist pastor he was. Again, I thanked God I have been so incredibly blessed to be a part of this family of faith called Baptists.

After the Legacy Museum, we had an experience I will never forget. Bryan Stevenson, a follower of Jesus and attorney, addressed us. As Baptists from all over the world stood and cheered for our Lord's liberating hand of justice and mercy that flow from his powerful gospel, an indigenous couple from New Zealand called out to him, saying they had something to offer him. When he accepted, they spontaneously and tearfully performed [a traditional haka dance of respect](#).

This Baptist pastor and his wife communicated something powerful to us from their heritage. Baptists from Nigeria were weeping, Baptists from

India were amazed, Baptists from Honduras never had seen anything like it, and we Baptists from Texas were inspired. We were not the same, and yet we had so much in common in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet again, I couldn't help but thank God I have been so incredibly blessed to be a part of this family of faith called Baptists.

Being Baptist together

Texas Baptists, as we nobly struggle to clarify ourselves doctrinally to this post-Christian world, as we elect new leaders, attend to social issues with love and truth, create innovative ways to carry the gospel forward and seek to unite, we are not alone.

There is a Baptist in New Zealand whose eyes grow wide with passion, strikes his arms and yells out he is with us. There are Baptists in Ukraine who sing with bombs falling around them, and there are Black Baptists who continue to show the world the power and heart of God amidst ugly oppression.

My best friends in the world are here in this Baptist family of faith. We are not the only Christians in the world, but I can declare with all my heart: God is still with us and moving us forward. It's a good day to be a Baptist.

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