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Clinton outlines 'family values' agenda at joint Baptist meeting

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- A scripture-spouting President Bill Clinton called Americans to embrace the "family values" of hard work and commitment to others at a Baptist meeting Aug. 9.

Clinton addressed a historic joint session of the predominantly African American Progressive National Baptist Convention and the mostly white Alliance of Baptists in Charlotte, N.C.

The president called on Americans to repudiate the politics of polarization. He called the joint meeting of black and white Baptists "a good example" for the nation.

"I believe as strongly as I can say we have to find common ground instead of trying to tear each other apart," Clinton said.

"Whether we like it or not, we are all in this together," Clinton said. "Whether we like it or not we are an American family and we behave like a good family or a bad family or a little bit of both, but we are a family. We have got to get together."

The president decried partisan rhetoric that criticizes policies from the sidelines but does not solve social problems.

"We can stand some good preaching, but we've got to be Good Samaritans too," Clinton said, referring to the gospel story in Luke. "It also means that when we look at our neighbor and see that sty in his or her eye, we've got to make sure the beam's out of ours," he added, alluding to Jesus' saying from the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew.

"There's been a lot of talk for 15 or 20 years about family values," Clinton said. That discussion is often limited to concerns like violence and sex in the media, while ignoring other social and economic issues that are also important to building strong families, he observed.

"Isn't raising a family fundamentally about the obligations we owe to other people in the family?" Clinton said. "Isn't it fundamentally about the responsibility we have to fulfill those obligations and then to behave in such a way that we can make the most of our lives?"

"If we're going to talk about the family values of America, shouldn't we talk about it like that?"

Clinton said it is wrong to expect the government to solve America's problems but it is just as wrong to destroy programs that help people in the name of personal responsibility.

"The point I am trying to make is all these problems we face as an American family or in our individual families, they have a moral aspect which needs some preaching and behaving, and they have a communal aspect which may need a little help from Samaritans."

Clinton pointed to the problem of teen pregnancy. "People obviously have to make a decision not to do that," he said. "That's a matter of personal ethics and discipline and values. And we're just kidding ourselves if we just pretend that there's some picture-pretty social program that will solve this."

"On the other hand, when people do want to behave, they're entitled to a little help from their friends. If a young girl has a child and wants to get off welfare and wants to go to school or go to work, then there has to be some child care.

"If you want to fight the crime problem, you've got to punish those who do wrong, but you also have to take these kids who are ... at great risk of doing wrong and give them something to say yes to, something to be hopeful about."

The president outlined his list of "family values" that he said government can help promote.

"Number one, if you were running a family right, you wouldn't saddle your kids with unnecessary debt," Clinton said. But the young and the aged should not be forced to bear the brunt of reducing the nation's debt, he added.

"If you're running a family right you'd first and foremost try to take care of your children," Clinton said. "We don't have to cut Head Start or college loans and make it more expensive to educate the children to balance the budget. We can do them both."

"The third thing that you want your family to do is to take care of your parents," he said. "We don't have to balance the budget by exploding the cost of Medicare to ordinary people."

Fourth on the list is to help working families, Clinton said. "If people leave welfare and they show up for work every day and they've got kids in the house, what kind of message does it send to them if they're in poverty? It's not the right message."

He cited the Family and Medical Leave Law and a working-family tax credit he initiated in 1993. "We don't believe people who work 40 hours a week and have kids should be in poverty. We should increase that program. The last thing we should do is do what some people want to do and cut back on that program. We should reward people who are doing their best at working and parenting."

He also listed reforming health care and raising the minimum wage, which he said is at a 40-year low in spending power.

"My idea of the 21st century is not a hard-work, low-wage, dead-end society. Let's raise the minimum wage. We can go forward together. That's what family members do. That's our obligation to people who are out there doing that kind of work the rest of us don't want to do. That's part of our family obligations."

He advocated programs that benefit people educating children or themselves. "We ought to say we know some people are going to lose their jobs in all this downsizing ... but when people lose their jobs, if they're working people, the least we can do is guarantee them a right to immediately -- not to wait until their unemployment runs out -- immediately, immediately get more education."

He said he has proposed a G.I. Bill for America's workers that would provide a voucher up to \$2,500 a year to any unemployed person to be used for up to two years for education and training at a community college. "That's a family value," Clinton said.

He included protecting the environment on his family values list. "I don't understand this new obsession in Washington with ripping out all the protections for the environment and for the public health and safety, for clean food, clean water, clean air. I don't understand that. I don't understand that."

Clinton also cited four imminent threats to children in society: violence, teen pregnancy, smoking and drugs.

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,' " Clinton said.

"When they come, what do you do? Luke 11: 'If a child asks for bread would you give him a stone? If he asks for a fish would you give him a serpent? If he asks for an egg would you give him a scorpion?' That's what the kids of this country are being given, a whole lot of them."

He called on churches to intervene in a gang culture which overwhelmingly believes it is proper to shoot someone for showing disrespect. "Whatever happened to 'sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me?' Whatever happened to people being told to define themselves from the inside out, not from the outside in? Whatever happened to that?"

"Somebody has got to say, 'I don't care what they call you, it is better to live to be 70 years old and have children and grandchildren and have a useful full life. What difference does it make what they call you?' Somebody has to be there to do that, and we've all got to do that together."

He urged changing laws to encourage unwed teenage mothers to remain at home rather than drop out of school and go on welfare and holding fathers more accountable for children born out of wedlock.

He also called for continuing and strengthening drug-prevention programs in schools.

"Now the last thing I want to talk about is smoking," Clinton said. "Tobacco is very important to the economy of this fine state. ... There are a lot of wonderful people in this country who make a living as tobacco farmers ... That's important to understand."

"But we cannot pretend we are ignoring the evidence," he said. "If you wanted to do something to reduce the cost of health care, help over the long run to balance the budget and increase the health care of America, having no teenagers smoke would be the cheapest, easiest, quickest thing you could ever do to change the whole dynamic of health care in America."

Clinton closed with thanks to the two organizations that extended the joint invitation to him. "You've got this alliance of these two groups meeting here today," he said. "We need this kind of alliance on these problems."

"The kind of problems that our children are facing at the grass-root level, they know no racial barrier. They know no income barrier, even. They certainly know no regional barrier. We have got to get over this using family values to drive a stake between us as American people and let it lift us up."

"I ask you to leave here determined to do what you can do to be good preachers and Good Samaritans and good examples -- to make the family of America a place where family values lifts us up, pulls us together and takes us into the future," Clinton said.

"We can walk and not faint. We can run and not grow weary. And if we do not lose heart, we shall reap," he said, a quotation from Isaiah 40:31 and Galatians 6:9.

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Clinton receives warm welcome at joint meeting of Baptists

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist who has at times received scorn from his own Baptist family, got a hero's welcome at a gathering of other Baptists -- both black and white -- Aug. 9.

Clinton addressed a historic joint session of the predominantly African American Progressive National Baptist Convention and the mostly white Alliance of Baptists in Charlotte, N.C.

In his first address to the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Clinton received a strong endorsement from platform speakers and a capacity crowd at the Charlotte Convention Center because of his support for the poor and minorities.

Renowned African American preacher Gardner Taylor introduced Clinton to the crowd. Taylor cast doubt

on the legitimacy of right-wing groups which claim to represent a "Christian" position in political discourse but do not reflect scriptural ethics.

"We are Christian people and we know Christians, no matter what label they might bear," Taylor said. "And we know imposters when they bear the name of Christian and bring disgrace on the name of Christ by their lack of compassion and concern for people in this land."

"We are thankful we have a president who is a committed Christian," Taylor said.

"We know his compassion and we are committed to his purpose," Taylor said. "Liberty and freedom and democracy can no longer claim primary position in two branches of our government. We have only the executive branch where compassion for people ... and religious liberty still exist and we must keep it so."

Clinton's warm reception contrasted with that in his own denomination, the conservative and predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention, which has never invited him to speak.

In 1994, a Florida pastor tried unsuccessfully to remove Clinton's home church, Immanuel Baptist Church of Little Rock, Ark., from membership in the SBC because of the president's pro-choice position on abortion and his "don't ask, don't tell" policy toward gays in the military.

More recently, the SBC spoke out to oppose Clinton's nominee for surgeon general because the nominee, Henry Foster, had performed abortions. Foster, who was scheduled to speak Friday at the Progressive National Baptist Convention, did not receive Senate confirmation for the position, largely due to opposition by the Religious Right.

Clinton commended the convention for inviting Foster to speak. "I thank you for standing behind Henry Foster. He is a good man," Clinton said in an aside to this lengthy address.

The Washington-based PNBC, founded in 1961 by leaders of the civil-rights movement, is considered the most liberal of the African American Baptist groups in America. The Alliance of Baptists, founded in 1986 and also based in Washington, is considered the more-liberal of two moderate splinter groups from the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention.

Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., told a humorous story about a rabbit who outran a hound and was asked later how he managed to do it despite the dog's superior ability. "I was running for my life," the rabbit responded.

"We are now in this country running for the life of liberty and conscience and freedom, and by God's grace we shall overcome," Taylor proclaimed to resounding applause.

North Carolina governor Jim Hunt endorsed the joint meeting of black and white Baptists. "I am proud to be a part of this expression of racial unity today," he said.

He commended the Progressive Baptists' president Bennett Smith for including the Alliance in the joint service. "Dr. Smith, the eyes of America and the eyes of the world are on you in this convention today," he said.

At Clinton's request, a joint choir of black and white Baptists, led by soloist Tramaine Hawkins, sang the spiritual "O Happy Day" after his speech.

Smith, introducing Clinton, quipped, "It will be a 'happy day' when we see him in our convention in 1997, 1998 and 1999 when he comes to visit after his re-election."

Clinton joined in the jovial spirit in his introductory remarks, observing that the inter-racial gathering "will have a lot of subsidiary benefits."

"For example," he said, "it's doing the white folks up there a world of good to sing in a choir like that."

Turning sheepish, Clinton added with a laugh: "That may have been a racially insensitive, politically incorrect remark, but having spent countless hours of my life in Baptist church choirs, I do know what I'm talking about."

Pausing momentarily, the president mused, "I can't believe I said that." He laughed again and said, "A happy heart doeth good like medicine," quoting Proverbs 17:22.

Alliance of Baptists president John Roberts, pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore, Md., brought greetings to the convention. He invited delegates to a meeting in Providence, R.I., this fall sponsored by the Alliance to commemorate the last national meeting of Baptists in the United States before the Southern Baptist Convention

split from the old Triennial Convention over slavery in 1845.

At that meeting, speakers appealed passionately to not let the abolition issue divide Baptists of the north and south. Shortly thereafter, Southern Baptists met in Augusta, Ga., to form a separate convention that would not penalize slaveholders.

"Some have celebrated the division of the Baptist family," Roberts said, alluding to the SBC's recent sesquicentennial celebration in Atlanta. "But we are going to celebrate the efforts of good people to keep Baptists together. They failed, but God bless them."

After his speech, Clinton lingered several minutes to shake hands with delegates and visitors before leaving for another meeting.

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Alliance of Baptists directors state support for Peace Fellowship

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- Directors of the Alliance of Baptists voted Aug. 8 to state their support for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, a Memphis, Tenn.-based organization defunded recently by two Baptist groups for its controversial stance on homosexuality.

The Alliance directors, meeting Aug. 7-9 in Charlotte, N.C., voted unanimously to endorse a statement affirming "continuing support" for the Baptist Peace Fellowship. The endorsement followed recent actions repudiating the peace group by leaders of both the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"We join you as disciples of Jesus Christ in encouraging dialogue within communities of faith on issues of discipleship, justice and peace, including human sexuality," the Alliance statement said.

In February, the Baptist Peace Fellowship's board of directors adopted a resolution declaring the organization a "welcoming place" for gays and lesbians.

The Baptist Peace Fellowship statement originally pledged to oppose resolutions critical of homosexuals in other Baptist groups, leading the American Baptist Churches' national ministry arm to defund the peace group. The Peace Fellowship has since reworded the statement to remove the language about seeking to influence denominational policies, and leaders say American Baptist funding is likely to be restored.

In July, meanwhile, the Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship voted to delete a line item for the Baptist Peace Fellowship under its ethics and public policy budget. Fellowship leaders charged the statement on homosexuality moved the peace group beyond a normal peace-and-justice emphasis and into an area with which most Fellowship members would not agree.

The Fellowship is a moderate missions-and-ministry organization formed in 1990 to protest a conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Alliance, which formed four years earlier over similar concerns, is generally perceived to be more liberal on social issues than the centrist and much-larger Fellowship.

Proposed and drafted by Alliance board member Kyle Childress, the statement also congratulates Baptist Peace Fellowship Executive Director Ken Sehested on receiving the 1995 Edwin T. Dahlberg Award for peacemaking from the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Childress, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacodoches, Texas, also serves on the Baptist Peace Fellowship's board.

"In a world divided by fear and violence, Ken (Sehested) and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America give witness to the peace and wholeness made possible through the cross of Christ," the statement concludes.

The Alliance voted at a convocation in March to receive its own statement on human sexuality, a study

document developed earlier by a task force, giving special attention to persons with same-sex attractions.

The Alliance statement acknowledges that well-informed Baptists can disagree on what the Bible and science say about the morality and causes of homosexuality. It does not endorse or condemn homosexual behavior, but encourages churches to "welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation or marital status in the life" of Baptist churches.

The statement also advocates "covenant relationships between monogamous adults" as the "most responsible" model for sexual relationships for either heterosexual or same-sex partners.

Alliance leaders were prepared for a huge fallout for speaking out on the divisive topic but lost only one member church as a direct result of the statement on sexuality, Stan Hasteley, Alliance executive director, reported to the board.

"That was a pleasant surprise to many of us, because we assumed the action establishing the task force ... [and] receiving and endorsing that report might very well have the kind of negative impact on us to change what we are about," Hasteley said. "Some of us talked about 'what if we lost half of our churches?'"

To the contrary, for a handful of congregations that are in the midst of their own struggles about how to minister to homosexuals, Hasteley said, "It seems we are being given a second look and in some places a first look" because of the statement. "This statement has become a calling card for the Alliance" for people impressed by "our openness to gay people," he said.

The Alliance has added two new churches each of the last two months, Hasteley said, bringing to 116 the total number of congregations formally affiliated with the group. The high-water mark for congregational membership was 139, established four years ago, he said.

While church membership has experienced a recent boost, another membership category -- people who join the Alliance as individuals -- continues to decline, Hasteley said.

In 1989, individual membership reached about 2,900. "We are today less than half of that level," Hasteley said.

While no formal study has been done, Hasteley attributed much of the decline in individual membership to growing influence of the Fellowship among those disaffected by changes in the SBC. "I have an idea that some of those people we have lost come from congregations that did not feel comfortable affiliated with the Alliance, but have found a better comfort level with the CBF," Hasteley speculated.

"More and more we are, in terms of our financial support, becoming an association of churches," Hasteley said. "That is why we have been able to maintain ourselves in spite of these seismic changes."

Hasteley challenged board members to aggressively seek new members. Studies indicate that groups like the Alliance typically lose a third of their membership each year, he said. "Obviously if a group is going to keep at a current level, we have got to gain new membership. We have not been doing that," he said.

Overall, including both church and individual members, the Alliance represents about 60,000 Baptists, Hasteley reported.

One board member, Mark Caldwell, pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., urged the group to boost its appeal by promoting itself more deliberately as a revolutionary voice on social issues.

The Alliance's founding covenant, which highlights historic Baptist distinctives perceived to be under attack during the last decade, now carries less impact than more recent statements on racism, sexuality and Jewish-Christian relations, he said.

"Having a track record now, it's kind of hard to sell the 'idea' of the Alliance. I think we can sell some of the practical things we have accomplished," Caldwell said.

In other business, the Alliance board approved structural changes, eliminating a worship committee and renaming another from "public relations" to "membership" committee.

They also approved a study of the effectiveness of the Alliance's communications efforts, including the feasibility of spending a projected \$18,000 next year for subscriptions to the Alliance's edition of Baptists Today, which is free to members and accounts for about 4,000 of the publication's 15,000 subscribers, Hasteley said.

The board rejected a recommendation to eliminate its women in the church committee. While acknowledging that women currently have equity in the Alliance, board members argued for continuing a symbolic dedication to

women's issues and broadening that concern beyond matters related to the ordination of women.

They also approved a recommendation to eliminate the board's public affairs committee but accepted an amendment offered by Priscilla Asbury of Monroe, La., to guarantee a social-justice emphasis on the board by inviting official representation from three organizations: the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, the Baptist Joint Committee and the Interfaith Alliance. Those groups join Baptist Women in Ministry, which previously has had a presence on the Alliance board.

While expressing interest in keeping a variety of public policy and justice issues alive, board members acknowledged that the organization lacks the resources to duplicate efforts already performed by other groups. Instead, they will emphasize networking and compiling resources for Alliance members.

Alliance president John Roberts, pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore, Md., told directors one of his goals is to rebuild trust destroyed by 15 years of Baptist battles. "An ongoing concern for us is how to rebuild trust: how to trust other Baptists, for example," he said.

"It's an issue for us that I think does have global implications. How do people learn to trust again? I have no answer for that, but I would like for that to be a shared emotional and spiritual agenda for all of us," Roberts said.

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ACTS says negotiations at impasse; RTVC cancels trustee meeting

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Negotiations to keep ACTS, the Southern Baptist cable TV network, on the air are "at an impasse," network president Jack Johnson said Aug. 8, leaving the future of the network in doubt.

Johnson canceled a special Aug. 11 meeting of trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, which operates ACTS, because network officials have been unable to reach an agreement with VISN, ACTS' New York-based cable TV partner.

Since 1992 ACTS and VISN have shared time on the Faith and Values channel, a cable TV channel which reaches 23 million homes through 1,400 cable TV systems. VISN represents several mainline denominations, while ACTS carries evangelical programming.

Their shared-channel agreement was set to expire Aug. 15, and Johnson called the trustee meeting in hopes of getting approval for a new contract. But talks with VISN and Liberty Media, the other Faith and Values partner were going nowhere, Johnson said.

"I acknowledge a personal disappointment that the events of the last few days have convinced those of us at the RTVC that negotiations with the Faith and Values channel will not be fruitful," Johnson said. "This conclusion is reached in part because of the failure of the Faith and Values channel management to negotiate in good faith with regard to the placement of ACTS programming in the fall schedule."

But VISN head Nelson Price refused to close the door on negotiations. "The conversations do continue at this time and we do hope to reach an agreement," Price said in a statement.

VISN is unhappy with the evangelical slant in some ACTS shows and wants to reduce or move ACTS programming in order to gear the channel more toward a family audience. "It is not our intent to make it less religious but to make it appealing to a broader audience," said VISN spokeswoman Portia Badham.

Johnson said the plan proposed by VISN is unacceptable.

"Because of the demonstrated lack of respect for ACTS in the proposed agreement, and the evident personal bias against ACTS programming, we have canceled the special called meeting of trustees," Johnson said.

The agreement has been up in the air since 10 months ago, when VISN said it would invoke an exit clause in the contract with ACTS. Negotiations were held between the National Interfaith Cable Coalition, parent company

of VISN and 51 percent owner of Faith and Values, and Liberty Media, a subsidiary of cable giant TCI and 49 percent owner of the channel.

The parties agreed to alter the direction of the channel, and only later offered ACTS a reduced role, Johnson said.

ACTS was "held hostage" by those negotiations, Johnson said, and later by "the unwillingness of NICC and Liberty Media to negotiate in good faith on an agreement that would enable ACTS to at least maintain its equity position and participate as before on the channel."

"We cannot keep faith with our constituency and further delay pursuit of our available options," Johnson said.

But those options are limited, according to Johnson and others.

-- ACTS can leave Faith and Values and shop for another compatible channel with which to share airtime.

-- ACTS can move its programming to FamilyNet, an RTVC-owned network that airs on broadcast stations -- but not cable systems -- and reaches a potential 30 million homes.

-- Shut down ACTS, which has been on the air since 1984.

Leasing a new satellite channel for ACTS would be too expensive for the financially strapped RTVC. The high cost of satellite transponder time prompted the original agreement with VISN, which saved the RTVC \$1.7 million a year. Since VISN was bearing the cost of the transponder and uplink, the exit clause was its safety valve if the channel failed to reach a break-even position.

The RTVC may also submit the dispute to arbitration, perhaps to seek compensation for its losses. If ACTS leaves the shared channel, VISN likely will retain the 8 million cable subscribers ACTS brought to the channel in 1992.

Johnson declined to discuss those options in detail. "We won't be commenting on what should or should not be done," he said. "Whatever decision is made will be made by our trustees, then released to the public."

The RTVC will be studying its options in preparation for the trustees next regularly scheduled meeting Sept. 11, Johnson said.

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-- By Greg Warner with information from C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist World Congress provides delegates "a little taste of heaven"

By Trennis Henderson

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (ABP) -- Describing the 17th Baptist World Congress as "a little taste of heaven," Dellanna O'Brien said the international gathering held every five years "is the only time we bring Baptists together representative of all we do worldwide."

"That's exciting," said O'Brien, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention.

O'Brien affirmed that the Aug. 1-6 congress, sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance, offered thousands of Baptists "the ability to see the big picture" in worldwide Baptist ministry.

Emphasizing that the unity displayed by participants from more than 100 nations reflects "what really is important," she added, "It makes you want to put aside the things that are incidental and don't really count and get on with the evangelization of the world."

Oloyede Kayode, a teacher from Osun, Nigeria, was among congress participants who made significant financial sacrifices to travel to Argentina for the six-day event.

Kayode, who was making his first international trip to attend the congress, said his travel expenses equaled four years' salary, which he accumulated with assistance from his wife and other individuals. His family even postponed plans to build a new home in order to save money for his trip. While in Buenos Aires, he stayed free in the home of Baptist church members to help minimize expenses.

Calling his pilgrimage a "once-in-a-lifetime experience," Kayode noted, "It's wonderful. I don't believe it. I pray that in the near future I will have enough money to sponsor another person to come.

"The worship and praise and Bible studies are quite a wonderful experience," he shared. "It is a new experience for me."

Erich Geldbach, a professor of church history in Bensheim, Germany, noted that "the most significant part" of the BWA event "is the internationalization of the Baptist movement, exchanging ideas and being exposed to different ideas from different countries."

Geldbach, who serves on the BWA's Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, added, "It is of utmost importance that we begin to realize that the gospel must be contextualized throughout the world and that still we are one.

"In most countries, Baptists are in minority situations. In many cases we are looked on as cults," he pointed out. "It helps the average delegate from any country to see we are a worldwide fellowship. That is a boost to any delegate."

Marina Sands, president of the National Baptist Women's Ministry and Education Convention in the Bahamas, emphasized that the opportunity for Christian fellowship during the congress "is like a tapestry weaving together with different backgrounds and different views; with the love of Christ we can weave together.

"This one meeting gives us a time to touch each other and feel the love of Christ upon us which says even more than words," she remarked. "The experience here deepens our Christian commitment and service to Jesus Christ."

Arthur O'Halloran is a retiree from Melbourne, Australia, where the next congress will be held in 2000. Greeting visitors to a booth promoting the Australian congress, he said he hopes that delegates both this year and in 2000 "gain enrichment and are drawn closer to God and are encouraged to share the love of God with others."

Acknowledging that "the world is in a mess," O'Halloran said the BWA gatherings offer participants a vivid reminder that "Christ is still alive and is with us."

Matt Wyatt, a college freshman from Fresno, Calif., was among hundreds of young people who participated in the Baptist World Congress. Wyatt, a member of Trinity Southern Baptist Church in Fresno, said the event helped give him "a worldwide awareness of how Christ's work is done and of the needs that are still out there in other parts of the world."

"One of the things that really struck me was that it didn't matter what language we were speaking, God understood every word," Wyatt noted. "It showed how unified we really are.

"I really appreciated the opportunity to get to know some of my Baptist family from around the world," he added. "It didn't matter what ethnic or cultural barriers there were between us; they were all torn down by our common faith and love of God."

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