



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

An Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 41 ~ March 2008

From the Executive Director

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Heather Rittenhouse, AWAB Council President, and I wrote the following article, which appeared in the Atlanta Journal Constitution. We reprint this article here in case you did not have an opportunity to read it and/or learn more about the recent New Baptist Covenant celebration.

Some Baptists ready to include gays

Published on 02/13/08

Baptists from around the nation came together across lines of difference to take part in the recent New Baptist Covenant celebration in Atlanta. Former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton headlined the event, which stressed the importance of unity and harmony as well as the amelioration of suffering around the world. When we learned about the encouraging plans for the New Baptist Covenant celebration last year, our gay-affirming organization, the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, applied to be listed as an official participating organization. However, the event's leaders notified us that they could not list AWAB as an official participating organization because they didn't think they could hold together the large coalition of Baptists needed to create a new Baptist voice in North America while addressing the issue of sexual orientation at the same time. The organizers of the New Baptist Covenant clearly agonized over the decision, but in the end they decided that it was too soon to make inclusion of gay people a part of their vision of unification.

It seemed to us that if we built a response of protest, we would only have proved that we were operating from the outside rather than persistently and gracefully demonstrating that we were, in fact, on the inside. In effect, a protest would have broken down even further the ties that bind us as Baptists. Many Baptists, both gay and straight, know our Bible speaks of hospitality and love rather than of exclusion. Thus, we decided to encourage those Baptists who welcome and affirm gay people to make their voices heard during the celebration.

Some Baptists have spent their energy attacking gays and keeping them outside of the church. In so doing, they have demonstrated that unity among Baptists is not their main goal. We, however, feel differently. Rather than focusing on exclusion, we are spending our energy on graceful engagement from within. And we are seeing very good results. At the New Baptist Covenant gathering, we witnessed abundant signs of hope. During the three-day event, former President Carter noted that Baptists hold diverse opinions about gay people. Best-selling novelist John Grisham called for the church's inclusion of gay people. Rev. Tony Campolo wore a rainbow-colored stole. Hundreds of participants sported rainbow stickers to proudly reveal their support for gay people.

Carter announced that Baptists hold diverse opinions about gay people; yet the celebration proved that Baptists are not as divided as some may believe. Each and every Sunday, countless numbers of our gay and straight brothers and sisters stand side by side in celebration of our faith.

INSIDE

- **From the Executive Director** – pg 1
- **Additional Reflections on New Baptist Covenant Gathering** – pg 2
- **Rainbow Stoles Available** – pg 4
- **Congratulations Are In Order!** – pg 4
- **Baptist-Muslim Dialogue Produces First Steps** – pg 5
- **Upcoming Events** – pg 6
- **Join the Judson Society** – pg 8

About Associational

Associational is published monthly by the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, an organization of churches, groups and individuals that advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons with Baptist churches.

© 2007, The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists,
All rights reserved

Barbara Hulsing, Editor

608-255-2155, mail@wabaptists.org
PO Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725

Regardless of who we love, we are all seeking the same things: Christ's love, salvation, justice, peace and hospitality.

Young people are looking to their parents to live out the value of hospitality. In a recent Barna Research report, 85 percent of non-Christian youth reported that they view Christian churches as hypocritical and say churches show excessive contempt for gay and lesbian people. That may not be surprising, but the same poll revealed that 80 percent of evangelical youth felt the same way toward Christian churches today. Youth today are leading the way toward unity and harmony. Baptists began a vital conversation at the New Baptist Covenant celebration, but the future will depend on listening to youth today. It is a promising way to build true and lasting unity among the millions of Baptists across America. Some of us are listening. The emergence of many gay-affirming voices at the celebration makes it clear that we can experience God's hospitality with the confidence of freedom-loving Baptists everywhere.

Lovingly,
Ken Pennings
608-255-2155
ken@wabaptists.org

Additional Reflections on New Baptist Covenant Gathering

From Fran Langstaff:

At first, I thought I didn't want to go to The New Baptist Covenant because it did not appear that they were welcoming to groups whose missions I strongly support--like The Baptist Peace Fellowship and AWAB. At first, I thought I would go as an "antagonist." Then I got the AWAB message that we were going to be non-confrontational. I, therefore, decided two things: I would wear my rainbow stole at all times while I was in Atlanta, and I would go armed with the scriptures of Jesus.

I carried several scripture passages on small pieces of paper in my pocket: Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 13:8-10, 14:1-22; Matthew 7:1-5; James 2:8-13; 1 Corinthians, chapters 6 and 7, and Romans, the first chapter. Of course, the first 6 passages speak of love of God and love of neighbor and how we are not to judge--that "mercy triumphs over judgment." The passages in which Paul speaks mention homosexuality equally with gossip, slander, arrogance, disobeying parents, adultery, theft, greed, drunkenness, slander, and swindling. Of course, Jesus never mentioned homosexuality.

Imagine my delight at the first plenary session, "Baptist Unity in Seeking Peace with Justice," when Pastor William Shaw used my first passage, noting that we were not only to love the Lord our God but to love our neighbor as ourself. Pastor Shaw asked, "How do we disagree with Jesus in the name of Jesus?" He noted that there should be no discrimination among Christians for we are all one in Jesus Christ; that God doesn't divide us, only human-made issues divide us; that all persons are inherently equal before God; that oneness will make our mission believable; and that to do injustice to anyone is to do injustice to God for we are all made in God's image. Pastor Shaw said there should be no criticism of others or exclusion of any Christian, now or in the future.

I wore my rainbow stole, and many people stopped by to say how they liked it. One I remember in particular was Peggy Campolo. The next morning, Tony Campolo delivered a sermon on "Baptist Unity in Bringing Good News to the Poor." It was a wonderfully inspiring message, and my heart leapt as I saw Tony's rainbow stole around his neck for everyone to see. On this day, AWAB set up a small space but with a very noticeable banner, in part of the Alliance of Baptists' booth. This banner stayed to the end of the Covenant meetings. I was provided with sheets of rainbow stickers and went about asking attendees if they would like to put a sticker on their badge. Not one person spoke unkindly to me and only 2 people said, "No, thank you." Thus, I was encouraged and felt like Baptists are making progress. My biggest concern was whether those in attendance had heard of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, but when I explained to them that we believed in welcoming all who professed Jesus as Lord regardless of their sexual orientation, and felt that Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender persons should be affirmed in their church, I repeatedly got replies like, "Oh, yes, I believe that--put a sticker on me."

In my opinion, every session and every preacher did a great job. The testimonies and messages were better than I had anticipated. The music was outstanding.

The last thing I attended was an ABC breakfast on Saturday morning, and I was pleased to see that I was not the only one there with a rainbow stole.

I came home on a spiritual high and greatly encouraged about the progress towards the acceptance of all people. As a straight AWAB member, I was glad that I had gone to be a presence for justice for some of the finest Christians I have ever known.

From Connie Stinson, Pastor, Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland:

I am just one minister whose charge is a little congregation comprised of little people. The fact that we sit right next to what some folk like to call the most powerful city in the world is a line I sometimes use to make me feel less small.

I took my small self to the New Baptist Covenant Celebration last week. A few of my colleagues-in-ministry, pastors of large congregations with publicly powerful people (a distinction that may or may not be significant here), returned home and reported to their congregations that the conference was, as had been feared by some, mostly comprised of political rhetoric, more “show” than valuable enterprise, after all. These colleagues criticized messages and those who delivered them. I found myself wondering if I attended the same event.

I can see that it would be easy to be cynical. Usually, it happens to those who have been burned or hurt or disappointed or all the above, a plight common among ministers, and likely more common among moderate Baptist ones. We tend to work long hours for little-to-no measurable gain and in little-to-no supportive company. It's often a lonely job. One often ends up “doing stuff” that doesn't appear to be ministry at all, which raises the probability that cynicism will eventually overcome. Being anything but cynical requires trusting in a future that usually doesn't seem likely.

But today I'm not . . . cynical. In fact, for the first time in my adulthood, for the first time since I realized the Southern Baptist Convention would cease being the Church through which God called me as a female teenager to a lifetime of vocational ministry, I feel proud and grateful to be a Baptist! For the first time in my adult life, I feel as though I can confidently say to the world, as well as to my un-churched neighbor, that I am one of “those Baptists” who cares about the state of our world and am resolved to do something to help . . . and that along with other kindred spirits the likes of which met in Atlanta last week, I am building relational bridges to share concerns and plan strategies to address them. I have already spoken with two pastor friends (who had similarly positive responses to the meetings in Atlanta) about an urgent need to come together and begin the process locally.

Beyond acquiring a new sense of moderate Baptist identity, my inner spirit was fed last week. I was deeply moved by the convictions of others in the face of their weariness and loneliness. I shouldn't have been surprised to discover that some highly visible public servants have been deeply discouraged, but I was surprised. Perhaps I have been so consumed by my own troubles that I didn't bother to think about the fact that others in “high places” might have similar ones. Through them, I was reminded of why I do what I do.

There are many Baptist ministers, lay and otherwise, whose hearts are breaking, whose bodies are fatigued, and whose spirits are hungry, but who still manage to carry on. Two-and-a-half days spent with more moderate Baptists than I have ever seen in one place gave me a glimpse of what-could-be if we did a better job combining forces, albeit our weak, broken, weary, spiritually deprived ones. Last week's New Baptist Covenant Celebration gave this tired body and soul a good shot of spiritual adrenaline. It is the only like-event in my 52 years that has had this affect on me, but it might have been enough to keep me going.

From Greg Hogan, Hudson:

The Course is Set for the Future of Baptists

I introduced myself to those attending the AWAB dinner in Atlanta as a “friend that pastors a traditional American Baptist Church.” I had decided to attend the New Baptist Covenant Celebration (NBCC) from the e-mail invitation that was sent to all churches in the ABC-USA. When I saw that President Jimmy Carter was the Co-chair, taking such an active role in the meetings, and that the afternoon sessions featured a Prophetic Preaching seminar, I became excited about attending. I was not disappointed by the event.

Baptists have become very fragmented over the last half century, especially when one of the larger segments of Baptists have taken such a hardened approach toward culture and the function of believers in the church. My impression was that the NBCC asked the rest of us to take stock of ourselves and decide that it is now time for us to go on. President Carter’s keynote speech was very clear: the basis of our faith, the basis of our acceptance of one another, as well as the foundational message we present to the world is that we believe we are accepted by God, only by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The theme of the celebration revolved around Christ’s inaugural sermon in Luke 4:18-19. It was a message of the good news of deliverance and acceptance by God in Jesus Christ. To me, the main drumbeat of the Spirit in the sessions was racial reconciliation and the plight of the disenfranchised children at our doorsteps.

I also took note that the call for acceptance included race, gender, and orientation. The AWAB sign on the host booth was noticed and accepted by many people. There was a noticeable presence of rainbow stickers on name tags and rainbow stoles worn by many clergy. Even one of the preachers in the main session wore one as he preached on the call of discipleship. I especially noted that almost all the eight preachers in the Prophetic Preaching sessions gave a call for acceptance on orientation, some making it a major point in his or her sermon.

As a friend, I am encouraged that this topic of concern has been addressed, made a theme for Baptist social action, and is now a part of the standard for acceptance in our denominations. As a friend, I have not experienced the rejection that many of my brothers and sisters have had to endure. I have not been a part of the battles to be heard that have gone before. I have been in meetings and heard the stinging comments of those who do not take time to understand and love. I am also an optimist and feel that major hurdles have been crossed that will open the basis for our understanding of our GLBT brothers and sisters in Christ. One day all of us will find our place of full standing in Baptist life and even the greater body of Christ. My encouragement to all of us on the journey to maturity and unity in Christ is to stay faithful, run the race, keep our eyes on the prize and on the one who holds the prize in his hand, our loving Savior who has gone before us.

Rainbow Stoles Available

If you are interested in obtaining rainbow stoles as referenced in the above articles, you can order them from AWAB for \$5 each. Stoles are still available in a rainbow-colored, checkered pattern. Or, you can order individually colored stoles in the six colors of the rainbow. Several churches have used the six plain-colored stoles to create a display in the front of their sanctuaries.

To order stoles, contact Rev. Barbara Hulsing at (716) 655-3463 or bhulsing@timeposition.com.

Congratulations Are In Order!

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) of Southeastern Connecticut, which meets monthly at Noank Baptist Church, hosted a January 9th open house in the church vestry. Mike Giconi, the Assistant Director of Alliance for Living, opened the meeting with a warm welcome, thanking Noank Baptist Church and the 43 some persons who attended for their ongoing support.

Noank Baptist continues to be an instrumental catalyst for the formation of PFLAG. This objective grew out of the Noank Baptist Church 2005 strategic plan. Roberta Berry of New Hampshire, the PFLAG Northeast Regional Director, spoke in **recognition of this group becoming an official chapter of the national PFLAG organization!**

The guest speaker for the evening was Bronwen Tomb, an elegantly spoken woman, who was ranked 43rd in her class of 342 cadets prior to being "outed" by a classmate, which, because of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, requires that openly gay people be discharged from military services. Bronwen joins over 11,000 enlisted persons who have been removed from the military over the past 14 years, since "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was made into law. Bronwen spoke of her experiences touring the country with "Soulforce," a group that challenges the punitive anti-gay policies of some colleges. Now completing her degree at University of Connecticut, Avery Point, Bronwen is looking forward to graduation this spring.

PFLAG serves those who are in the LGBT community, families, and friends who are supportive of them, as well as those who are struggling with acceptance and affirmation of a loved one's sexual orientation. There are topical programs as well as social support for those who participate in the meetings.

For information, contact:

The Rev. Dr. Paul C. Hayes, Pastor

Noank Baptist Church, Groton CT 06340

office: 860.536.7129

email: pastor@noankbaptistchurch.org; paulchayes@juno.com

Baptist-Muslim Dialogue Produces First Steps

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 01/23/08) - Leaders from the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), and the Alliance of Baptists met Jan 4-5 in Hartford, Conn. With Dr. Sayyid Syeed of the Islamic Society of North America, [these Baptist leaders met] to begin discussions on ways Baptist and Muslims can speak, share and learn from each other as we seek to fulfill Paul's admonition in Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Members of the taskforce to plan the dialogue include: Rev. Erica Wimber Avena and Rev. Hopeton Scott of Connecticut, Rev. Paul Eppinger of Arizona and Rev. Roy Medley - American Baptists; Dr. Rob Sellers - CBF, Rev. Stan Hastey - Alliance of Baptists, and Rev. Alan Stanford - North American Baptist Fellowship.

"As a result of these consultations, hopefully Muslims around the world will realize that many Baptists want to listen to, learn from, and build friendships with them," said Dr. Robert Sellers, professor at the Logsdon School of Theology in Abilene, Tex. "Moreover, Baptists may also be reminded that dialogue and cooperation across religious lines are not only prudent actions in our fractured world, but also reflect the very nature of Jesus, who came into our context with compassion, gentleness, and a desire to understand us."

The initiative for this effort came from visits last year by Roy Medley, general secretary of ABCUSA, to Lebanon and the Republic of Georgia. In each place, Medley was urged by both Baptist and Muslim leaders of those countries to seek to improve relationships between the two faiths. The ABC Committee on Christian Unity eagerly accepted the challenge and offered an invitation to other Baptists to join in.

"We enter into these dialogues as fully committed disciples of Jesus," said Medley, "understanding that so much of the peace of the world depends upon how Muslims, Christians, and Jews are able to live together with mutual respect and a common commitment to the well-being of all."

The proposed framework for the dialogue includes a national event scheduled in early January of 2009 where representative theologians will meet for presentations, and relationship-building. Then, in addition, four regional meetings primarily focused on bringing together Baptist and Muslim leaders age 40 and younger for dialogue and relationship are also proposed.

Sharing a conference table at the offices of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, attendees reviewed efforts that are currently underway between Muslims and Christians at the international, national and local levels. There are already many grassroots efforts at dialogue. Pastor Hopeton Scott spoke about the dialogue in Bridgeport, CT under the theme "The Tent of Abraham" where in quarterly meetings, Jews, Muslims and Christians have discussed how life milestones, such as birth, death and marriage, are treated by each faith tradition. In the west, Paul Eppinger, leads the Arizona Interfaith Council whose

annual retreat this year will focus on the topic of "Real Dialogue about Real Differences." And in the south, Rob Sellers participates in the Abilene (TX) Interfaith Council where, after meeting for seven years, deep friendships have crossed over faith barriers.

A second meeting is planned for May where an equal number of Muslim representatives will join the taskforce to choose themes and presenters for the dialogue, as well as tackle the logistics of locations and invitations.

Upcoming Events

Alliance of Baptists Convocation

March 28-30, St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, 7100 Saint Charles Avenue, New Orleans, LA

The call is going out . . . for you to come to New Orleans the last weekend in March to create and experience a gathering of the Alliance of Baptists. As a people, we will join together to appreciate all that the city of New Orleans has to offer as we participate in their work of re-creation. We will begin the week by offering our talents and gifts with workdays in some of the areas still struggling to rebuild . . . and we will end our time together on Sunday morning with a celebration of the communion of faith and art at St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church. In the days in-between we will experience the art and hospitality of New Orleans, we will gather in worship, explore creative ways of being the church, affirm our leaders and ministry partners, and celebrate our creative talents and gifts, as we meet together as a people of God.

As we enter our twenty-second year of being the Alliance of Baptists, God is calling us to create in new and exciting ways as we listen to our past, live in our present, and dream of our future. Come to New Orleans and join with friends old and new from around the world, as we listen together for God's call to create.

For details and to register, visit www.allianceofbaptists.org/convocation2008.

Other Sheep

Saturday, April 5, 3 p.m. (followed by potluck dinner at 5 p.m.), Peck Room, Worcester Hall, Andover Newton Theological School, 210 Herrick Road, Newton, MA

The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists/Massachusetts and the Evangelical Fellowship at Andover Newton welcomes Other Sheep to Andover Newton Theological School

Other Sheep is an ecumenical Christian ministry working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within their respective faiths worldwide. Begun in Latin America in 1992, its purpose is to network with and equip those who seek to challenge existing prejudices and discriminatory practices, especially in the areas of theological and pastoral training, human and civil rights, and HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Steve Parelli, Executive Director of Other Sheep, and **Jose Ortiz**, his life partner and Other Sheep co-Coordinator for Africa, will offer a presentation on their 2007 six-week summer ministry to Christian (and a few Muslim) LGBTs in Kenya and Uganda. Invited to Kenya by Ishtar MSM, an HIV/AIDS prevention, support and care organization for gay men, Parelli and Ortiz were asked to address the spiritual needs of LGBTs. During the trip, they led discussion groups, collected stories, visited churches and pastors, appeared on a live radio talk show, and helped organize a PFLAG chapter as well as an Other Sheep East Africa board.

We invite you to come and learn more about the exciting work of **Other Sheep** on the frontiers of international LGBT ministry!

For directions and a campus map, visit www.ants.edu/ants-difference/map/

For more information on this event, contact Bruce Baker at bpenke@aol.com or 617-669-2974.

For more information about Other Sheep, visit www.othersheep.org.

Love Welcomes All: Gay and Straight Together

April 12, 2008, Trinity Presbyterian Church, 900 Blythe Street, Hendersonville, NY

The purpose of this conference is to “explore issues of meaning and belonging in faith communities in light of sexual orientation and gender identity.” All interested people—particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people; parents and friends; ministers and congregational leaders—are invited to consider difficult questions and find positive answers in a supportive environment.

In the last two years, more than 180 people attended “Love Welcomes All” conferences, and their evaluations were very positive. One participant said, “Experiencing the love and caring of allies was the highlight for me.” Another wrote, “Knowing that so many people are supportive of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues was the highlight of this conference.”

This year’s keynote speaker is Mandy Carter, a founding member of Southerners on New Ground. She is an African-American lesbian and an incredibly dynamic speaker. In 2005, Carter was a member of a group of 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (www.1000peacewomen.org), and she continues her work as an award-winning, faith-based community organizer. Workshops of interest to people working to achieve fairness, equity, and justice for all residents of this region will be offered, including “Messages that Work: Advocacy From Your Faith Tradition,” “Realities of Gender Variance,” and “What Comes Next?”

Consider attending, becoming a conference sponsor, and/or giving financial support. Your contributions will be used to keep registration fees affordable and enable us to bring presenters and workshop leaders from outside our immediate area. We appreciate your indicating the level of sponsorship you’re interested in by sending the following information directly to the church address listed below or by responding via email to HHBishop@aol.com:

Name of individual or organization: _____

- _____ Include my name/the name of my organization as a conference sponsor.
- _____ I would like to donate but do not want my name or organization to be listed as a sponsor.
- _____ In addition to including my name or the name of my organization as a sponsor, I’d like to make a contribution to support this vital work. Put me down for
 - _____ Donation of refreshments
 - _____ Donation of food for lunch
 - _____ Other in-kind contribution of _____
 - _____ **Donation of \$100**
 - _____ Donation of \$250
 - _____ Donation of \$_____

Make checks payable to **Trinity Presbyterian Church** with **Love Welcomes All Conference** on the memo line, and mail to:

Trinity Presbyterian Church
900 Blythe Street
Hendersonville, NC 28791

AWAB MID-ATLANTIC GATHERING

April 18-19, Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA

On Friday, Jeffrey Barnes, the performer at the national AWAB gathering in June, 2007, will perform his new piece, "And He Ran Screaming," and leading the audience talkback.

On Saturday, the program invites AWAB members and non-members alike to become fully informed about sex and gender. "What Do We REALLY Know About Sexuality and Gender?" will be addressed by The Rev. Dr. William Stayton, ordained American Baptist clergy, and a nationally known sexologist and sought-after sex educator. Topics are: *What is a boy and a girl REALLY? The Gender Spectrum. Sex Orientation.*

Other leaders include The Rev. Heather Rittenhouse, AWAB council chair; Peggy Campolo, sought-after speaker on homosexuality and the church; and Marcus Pomeroy and Laurie Sweigard, Central's pastors. An evening showing of "For the Bible Tells Me So" is optional.

Call Central Baptist Church for more information at 610-688-0664, email info@cbcwayne.org or check out www.wabaptists.org for information.

Join the Judson Society

Please log onto **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** and join The Judson Society with your monthly gift of \$10, \$25, \$50, or \$100 so that AWAB may generate a consistent reliable source of income

Associational is a periodic e-newsletter of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, a network of 68 churches and hundreds of individuals who have joined together to advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within Baptist communities of faith. Please forward this e-newsletter to interested friends. Copy relevant information into your organization's bulletin and newsletter. To subscribe, send an e-mail to subscribe@wabaptists.org with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line. To be removed from this list, send an e-mail to unsubscribe@wabaptists.org with REMOVE in the subject line. To read back issues of Associational, go to: www.wabaptists.org/associational.htm.

To learn more about the Association, go to: www.wabaptists.org