

World Baptists show grit in Britain: Alliance vigorous after SBC pullout

News in the [August 23, 2005](#) issue

The World Baptist Alliance, holding its 100th anniversary congress in Great Britain amid public anxiety over suicide bombings, failed bombing attempts and manhunts, topped its own attendance prediction with more than 13,000 participants.

The every-five-years gathering was also expecting to be saddled with budget shortfalls after last year's pullout by the Southern Baptist Convention, which claimed the BWA has a "leftward drift," an accusation denied by alliance leaders.

But the alliance began receiving major contributions from North America, including a \$25,000 check from best-selling author Rick Warren. During the July 27-31 congress in Birmingham, Britain's second-largest city, Warren held a news conference and said he didn't agree with the action taken by his denomination.

"I think that it was a mistake," said the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*. "When the Southern Baptists pulled out funding, my wife and I wrote a check for \$25,000 to BWA. I see absolutely zero reason in separating my fellowship from anybody."

The denomination had given WBA \$300,000, reduced from a previous annual contribution of \$425,000. But U.S. and Canadian churches donated some \$500,000 to the organization this year, said BWA general secretary Denton Lotz. Those positive finances led the General Council to approve a 2006 budget of \$2.34 million, (larger than its 2005 budget of \$1.97 million).

In a related matter, the global body approved the membership of two moderate Baptist state conventions in Texas and Virginia with ties to the Southern Baptists. "It is important for Texas Baptists to really understand how big our Baptist family is," said Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "We are not alone." The alliance now has 213 denominational members.

Former president Jimmy Carter, speaking to reporters, said: "I really see an opportunity at this moment for the Baptist World Alliance to become much greater a

factor in Christian life than it has been in the past. I think this is a time for almost explosive growth.”

Carter, who distanced himself from the SBC five years ago, suggested that interfaith dialogues can help “build a common commitment” to combat terrorism as people of different faiths focus on shared principles such as peace, justice and the reduction of suffering. “If we concentrate on those things, that would make the united front against terrorism more effective.”

Carter said that misunderstandings about links between Islam and terrorism have prompted divisions across the globe.

“I think now there is a general feeling, particularly in my country, and maybe now in more recent days here in the United Kingdom, that a person who is a Muslim may be less committed to peace and justice and truth and humility and benevolence and generosity than we [Christians] are,” he said. “That arrogant attitude—to derogate others because of their faith—is a mistake.”

Carter, a longtime member of a church in Plains, Georgia, that is affiliated with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said that he considers the Iraq war to be a mistake and that the U.S. should shut down the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq because past mistreatment of prisoners at those locations is “a disgrace.”

Another speaker, Tony Campolo, a Baptist professor emeritus of sociology and a popular speaker, encouraged interfaith dialogues—including youth pizza meetings. Young people have the “primary responsibility” for fighting the feelings of disenfranchisement among some teenagers and young adults, who he said are susceptible to appeals for suicidal acts.

Delegates unanimously elected David Coffey as president. Coffey, who is general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, succeeds Billy Kim, pastor of the 15,000-member Central Baptist Church in Suwon, South Korea. In outlining values that will shape his presidency, Coffey affirmed belief in the gospel, in the church, and in worship that intersects real-world issues of peace and justice.

“Too often, the world is more aware of what the church is against than what it is for, and this is no strategy for winning lost people to Jesus Christ,” he said. “We need to be more like Jesus, to earn the reputation of being friends to sinners and to give

ourselves in sacrificial service for a broken world.”

As a part of that witness, Coffey stressed the need for unity among Christians. “Unity is a gospel imperative, and disunity is always a major hindrance to evangelism,” he said. “To make poverty history is the duty of every Christian, and we should not need the world to tell us so.”

In his report to the assembly, BWA executive Lotz urged delegates to continue supporting its role as a “drum major for justice” and “drum major for evangelism,” particularly in light of religious oppression and warfare around the world.

He also urged the BWA to remain steadfast in defending the separation of church and state, to work to alleviate suffering through relief and sustainable development, and to enhance opportunities for theological education in the Two-Thirds World.

Baptists also must be forthright in issuing a call to holiness, particularly regarding human sexuality. “We are opposed to premarital sex, extramarital sex and homosexual behavior,” Lotz said. “We believe marriage is a monogamous relationship between a man and woman.”