

People

News in the [April 22, 2008](#) issue

Alistair Brown, general director of the British Baptists' mission agency since 1996, will become the head of an American Baptist seminary, according to the Baptist World Alliance. Trustees of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago elected the Scottish-born Brown as president, to start in the fall semester. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Edinburgh and is chair of the BWA's membership committee.

Prince **El Hassan bin Talal** of Jordan will accept the 2008 Niwano Peace Prize in Tokyo on May 8 for efforts to build peace with justice in the Middle East, especially in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The prize is often seen as akin to a Nobel Peace Prize for the faith community. The award from a Buddhist foundation includes about \$186,000 in prize money. The Oxford-educated Jordanian served, until 1999, as the closest political adviser of his brother, the late King Hussein of Jordan. The prince, president emeritus of the World Conference on Religions for Peace, recently became president of the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue.

Former Soviet president **Mikhail Gorbachev** debunked reports, based on a mid-March visit to the shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, that he had become a Catholic. "Some media have been disseminating fantasies," Gorbachev told the AsiaNews agency. "To avoid misunderstandings I would like to say—I was atheist and I stay atheist." Italy's *La Stampa* first reported the event, and the international press spread the news.

Thousands of people came to Rome for the March 18 funeral of **Chiara Lubich**, the Catholic founder of the Focolare spiritual renewal movement, which has branches in 182 countries and an estimated 2 million adherents. Lubich, 88, a past Templeton Prize winner, died March 14 at Focolare headquarters near Rome. Many unable to enter the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls watched the service, attended by 15 cardinals and 40 bishops, on large screens set up outside. Vatican sources estimated the crowd at 40,000. Focolare means *hearth* in Italian, a name chosen to reflect the

movement's warmth. Though closely tied to the Catholicism, Focolare attracted followers from other denominations and faiths.

Metropolitan Laurus, who helped heal an 80-year rift between the Russian Orthodox Church and the offshoot Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, died March 16 at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, in upstate New York. He was 80. In May 2007, Laurus signed an accord in Moscow with Moscow patriarch Alexsy II of the Russian Orthodox Church at a ceremony attended by Russian president Vladimir Putin. "This historic deed will be forever remembered by grateful descendants," Putin said. In 1927, the Moscow patriarch had pledged loyalty to the Soviet state, and the overseas group had rebuked its mother church and cut all ties.