

‘Living the Good News’: An Assessment of the Significance and Impact of the 23rd Baptist World Congress

Lee B. Spitzer

Revd Dr Lee B. Spitzer is the retired General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA, and currently serves as the Historian for the Baptist World Alliance and as an IBTS Research Fellow. He is the editor of *Good News for the World: BWA Resolutions and Statements, 1905–2023* (Baylor University Press, 2025).

historian@baptistworld.org

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6361-3424>

Abstract

The twenty-third World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) took place on 7–12 July 2025 in Brisbane, Australia. The Congress theme was ‘Living the Good News’ (Luke 4:18–19), inviting participants to explore the following questions: How do we live the good news in today’s world? How can we effectively proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind? How can we set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour? How can we work together to achieve this? What can we learn to take back to our own settings? This article explores the Congress’s programming and key themes, identifies new organisational developments and initiatives, and considers the significance of the event in light of the 120-year-old journey of the BWA. Although no new statements or resolutions were proposed or passed in Brisbane, attention is paid to how the Congress heard and applied the rich corpus of resolutions and statements that the BWA has adopted throughout its history.

Keywords

Baptist World Alliance (BWA); congress; resolutions; mission

Baptists Gather in Brisbane, Australia

The global Baptist family gathered in person (and virtually) for the 23rd World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) on 7–12 July 2025, in Brisbane, Australia.¹ Due to Covid-19, the prior (22nd) Congress, originally scheduled to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2020, was reconfigured to be an online only event.

¹ The author, in his capacity as BWA Historian, attended the Congress in person.

Brisbane was the fourth Asian venue for a Congress, with prior ones taking place in Tokyo (12th Congress, 1970), Seoul (16th Congress, 1990), and Melbourne (18th Congress, 2000). Excluding the 2020 virtual meeting, eight of the Congresses have been held in North America (United States/Canada), seven in Europe, two in South America, and one in Africa.

Congress registration data received from the Baptist World Alliance office reveals that 4405 people registered for the Brisbane Congress, with 4101 intending to participate in person and an additional 304 people joining online. By way of comparison, the 21st Congress (2015), held in Durban, South Africa, reported 2620 registered participants, with an additional 475 attendees who purchased day passes (3095 in total).² However, the previous two Asian venues attracted significantly larger numbers. A total of 10 238 participants came to the Melbourne Congress in 2000 (5695 delegates; 3619 day/evening guests; and 864 others).³ In 1990, 10 687 people registered and attended the Congress in Seoul, where 6900 Korean Baptists hosted 3787 attendees from around the world.⁴

In Brisbane, 3764 people actually attended the 2025 Congress (3460 in person and 304 virtual). The difference between registered (4101) and actual attendees — 641 individuals — was due to an unexpectedly large number of visa denials by the Australian government. All but one (from Ukraine) of the denials involved prospective delegates from Africa and Asia. Three hundred and sixty-six (366) Africans (from 13 countries) and 274 Asians (from 13 countries) were denied entry into the country. The top five denials by country were India (138), Congo (100), Nigeria (84), Burundi (51), and Myanmar (41).

Registered Congress delegates represented 123 countries and territories (89 in person, 74 virtual). Due to visa denials, those in

² *Jesus Christ the Door: Official Report of the Twenty-first Baptist World Congress, Durban, South Africa, July 22–26, 2015*, ed. by Eron Henry (Baptist World Alliance, 2015), pp. 105–106.

³ *Jesus Christ Forever, Yes!: Official Report of the Eighteenth Baptist World Congress, Melbourne, Australia, January 5–9, 2000*, ed. by Wendy E. Ryan (Baptist World Alliance, 2000), pp. 195–196.

⁴ *Together in Christ: Official Report of the Sixteenth Congress, Seoul, Korea, August 14–19, 1990*, ed. by Wendy E. Ryan (Baptist World Alliance, 1990), pp. 165–167.

attendance represented 118 countries and territories (84 in person, 74 virtual). As would be expected, the largest delegation was from the host country of Australia, with 1769 participants (1712 in person, 57 virtual). The five largest international delegations were from the United States (571 in person, 61 virtual), South Korea (159 in person, 1 virtual), India (152 in person, 4 virtual), Papua New Guinea (134 in person), and New Zealand (119 in person, 4 virtual). The largest European Baptist Federation-related delegations came from the United Kingdom (37 in person, 9 virtual), Norway (22 in person), and Denmark (19 in person, 2 virtual). Other significant delegations came from Jamaica (53 in person, 10 virtual), Kenya (52 in person, 4 virtual), Nigeria (43 in person, 11 virtual), and Brazil (28 in person, 8 virtual).

Women constituted a slight majority of both in-person attendees and online viewers. Of the 3460 people in Brisbane, 1825 were female (52.75%) and 1644 were male (47.25%). Online viewership was slightly more even — 156 women (51.32%) and 148 men (48.68%). A majority of attendees were 45 or more years old (64.76%).

Congress Overview

On the three days prior to the start of the Congress, a full slate of courses and experiences were organised for attendees. Two-day summits were intended specifically for women and young people. A mission conference and experience, a BWAid symposium, and an Aboriginal cultural experience rounded out the offering. Throughout the Congress, ancillary special meetings abounded: Bible studies, a preaching symposium, regional gatherings, breakouts and affinity groups, sessions for children and teens, and a prayer room were among the offerings each day.

The plenary sessions were marked by a wide variety of worship experiences, from contemporary to more traditional, and highlighted several distinctive cultural backgrounds — from Korean to African-American. In the opening plenary on Wednesday evening, the flags of the nations pageant highlighted the global reach and diversity of the

BWA family and inspired the assembly. The General Secretary's speech will be discussed in a later section.

Female Baptist leaders played a prominent role throughout the plenary sessions and in other Congress settings. During the Thursday morning plenary session, Dr. Linda A. Livingstone, President of Baylor University, shared the podium with the General Secretary and celebrated Baylor University's membership in the Alliance. The Friday plenary sessions featured four speakers: Dr Jennifer Lau (Executive Director of Canadian Baptist Ministries) and Kay Warren (co-founder of Saddleback Church) in the morning, and Ms. Amanda Khosi Mukwashi (United Nations Resident Coordinator in the Kingdom of Lesotho) and Revd Marsha Scipio (Director of Baptist World Aid) in the evening plenary. In addition, many women served as Bible study leaders and preachers throughout the Congress, including Revd Lynn Green (General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain) and Revd Karen Wilson (President, Baptist World Alliance Women). A highlight of the Congress was the awarding of the BWA Human Rights Award to Sano Vamuzo (of Nagaland) in honour of her social work, advocacy, and peace-making endeavours.⁵

The contributions of these leaders to the Congress's programme were substantial and at times, prophetically challenging. As the founder of *Hope for Brighter Tomorrows*,⁶ Kay Warren brought to the forefront the issue of how the church can serve and bring healing to families impacted by mental health challenges. Jennifer Lau declared that Baptists should respond to the world's needs not as 'bystanders', but rather as Christ-followers seeking to be 'neighbours to those on the margins'.⁷

Based on 1 Corinthians 7:4–11, Marsha Scipio urged Baptists to embrace a 'path forward' that is characterised by 'truth-telling' even

⁵ See 'Around the World: BWA Presents Human Rights Award', *Baptist Standard*, 23 July 2025 <<https://baptiststandard.com/news/world/around-the-world-bwa-presents-human-rights-award/>> [accessed 10 October 2025].

⁶ See the website for further information <<https://www.hopeforbrightertomorrows.org>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

⁷ Quoted in 'Global Baptists Challenged To Live the Gospel', *Baptist Standard*, 14 July 2025 <<https://baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/global-baptists-challenged-to-live-the-gospel/>> [accessed 10 October 2025].

when it might involve ‘difficult, even painful consequences’, because ‘it can also be a catalyst for transformation and ultimately justice’. Living in ‘perilous times’ demands that we speak ‘prophetic truth’. She declared, ‘We as the church will not be paralyzed by the proliferation of the peril, because God still presides over God’s world, Jesus still prays for us at God’s right hand; and the Holy Spirit still has power.’ Bolstered by divine empowerment, like the Apostle Paul, contemporary followers of Jesus may speak the truth ‘with great frankness’. She noted that

the BWA has gathered in perilous times before. In 1934, Congress was held in Berlin as Nazism began to rear its ugly head in Europe. In 1939 the BWA Congress met in Atlanta where segregation and racism were at its peak in the United States [...] My point is BWA has met in the midst of perilous times before. My prayer is that as a global Baptist family, we take up the mantle of truth telling, of frank speech, of prophetic speech, and trust that God would lead us through these perilous times.⁸

The Alliance’s Ministry Emphases

Each World Congress marks the beginning of a new quinquennium for the commissions of the BWA. The work of the commissions is organised by the primary ministry areas as delineated by the Constitution and By-Laws.⁹ With continuing and new leadership, as needed, commissions are tasked with addressing these following themes:

A. Strengthen worship, fellowship, and unity: Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity; Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity; Commission on Worship and Prayer.

B. Lead in mission and evangelism: Commission on Evangelism and Discipleship; Commission on Faith and Business; Commission on Strategic Cities and Least Reached People Groups.

⁸ All message quotations are from Revd Scipio’s manuscript, ‘A Path Forward – Frank Words’ and used with her permission. The message is also summarized in ‘Global Baptists Challenged To Live the Gospel’, *Baptist Standard*.

⁹ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (Baptist World Alliance, 2024), p. 35.

C. Respond through aid, relief, and community development: Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Community Development; Commission on Racial, Gender, and Economic Justice.

D. Defend religious freedom, human rights, and justice: Commission on Human Rights, Peacebuilding, and Reconciliation; Commission on Religious Freedom; Commission on Safeguarding.

E. Advance theological reflection and transformational leadership: Commission on Faith and Technology; Commission on Healthy Churches; Commission on Multifaith Relations.

In the 2026–2030 quinquennium, commissions are expected to gather at least annually as part of the Global Council meetings. Additionally, departments, initiatives, and ministries of the BWA also support the advancement of the primary ministry areas. These include Baptist Men, Women and Youth; the Acts 2 Movement; the Global Baptist Mission Forum; the Baptist Forum for Aid and Development (BFAD); Baptist World Aid (BWAid); and 21Wilberforce.¹⁰

BWA's Reorganisation and Resolutions

In July 2024, The General Council approved a revision of the BWA's Constitution and By-Laws which created a new multi-level organisational structure. In order to involve more voices from around the world in the BWA's deliberations, and in light of the growth of Baptist denominations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, a three-fold leadership structure was approved. Beginning with the 2025 World Congress, the new structure is now in place.

The *Trustee Committee* 'will champion and provide governance in relation to BWA legal and fiduciary responsibilities through missional, pastoral, integrated, and holistic engagement'.¹¹ It will ordinarily have little interaction with the Resolutions Committee.

¹⁰ 21Wilberforce became a part of the BWA in 2020. Its mission is to help the global Baptist family (and others) 'stand with the persecuted and defend the freedom of religion and belief'. See their website <<https://21wilberforce.org/our-story/>> [accessed 18 November 2025].

¹¹ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 2.

It is the responsibility of the new *Leadership Council* to ‘champion and provide governance to those areas that pertain to the BWA mission, vision, and strategic impact in the world’.¹² As part of its work, it will oversee the work of the Resolutions Committee and other standing committees.¹³

The new *Global Council* is intended to be a conversational space that

affirms the identity of the Baptist movement as a worldwide family. The Global Council celebrates and gives thanks for what God has achieved, and is achieving, through the life and work of the Partners of the BWA and seeks to be open to God’s prophetic word to us. The Global Council nurtures intentional representation of godliness, geography, gender, generation, and giftedness, and deepens fellowship among us.¹⁴

The Global Council will meet annually and has the potential to at least double the size of the General Council it replaces. It is comprised of representatives of all Member Partners. Representation by those Member Partners on the Global Council is defined as follows:

Each Member Partner whose own membership is defined by churches and church members will be entitled to representation on the Global Council:

One (1) for each Member Partner of up to 40,000 church members.

Two (2) for each Member Partner with 40,001 or more church members up to 200,000.

Three (3) for each Member Partner with 200,001 or more church members up to 1,000,000.

Four (4) for each Member Partner with over 1,000,001 church members.

Member Partners with 5,000,001 or more members may appoint four (4) representatives and one (1) additional representative for each full million above 5,000,001 up to a maximum of seven (7) representatives.

Each Member Partner whose own membership is defined other than by churches and church members will be entitled to appoint one (1) representative to the Global Council.¹⁵

¹² BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 14.

¹³ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 26.

¹⁴ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 10.

¹⁵ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 11.

Most interesting is the additional clause encouraging partners to appoint up to three additional representatives based on diversity criteria:

All Member Partners may also appoint up to three (3) additional representatives to the Global Council, provided that they are one each of: (1) a female; (2) a layperson; and (3) a person under the age of thirty-five (35) at the time of their appointment.¹⁶

In this new arrangement, resolutions will be considered for adoption by the Global Council.¹⁷

There is no provision in the 2024 Constitution and By-Laws for future World Congresses to process or approve statements or resolutions.¹⁸ However, during the first century of the Baptist World Alliance, resolutions and other statements were proposed, debated, and voted on for adoption at World Congresses. Excluding ‘messages’ passed at the 2005 and 2010 Congresses, the last set of resolutions were approved at the 18th World Congress in Melbourne, Australia, in 2000.¹⁹

Since 1976, the BWA General Council (the predecessor of the newly established Global Council) has taken the lead in considering and approving resolutions.²⁰ In 2015, the General Council accepted a paper on resolutions affirming the following:

1. The diverse worldwide Baptist family, represented through the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), is concerned about the contemporary religious, missional, social, cultural, political and economic issues that affect the global family.
2. One means of giving expression to the conclusions Baptists draw on issues of concern to them, and of bearing witness to this before the world, is through the preparation, adoption and sharing of resolutions proposed by

¹⁶ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024).

¹⁷ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 10.

¹⁸ BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), pp. 28–29, 39.

¹⁹ *Official Report of the Eighteenth Baptist World Congress*, ed. by Ryan, pp. 160–163. See also *Good News for the World: Baptist World Alliance Resolutions and Statements 1905–2023*, ed. by Lee B. Spitzer (Baylor University Press, 2025), pp. 183–187. Throughout this article, resolutions and statements cited by name may be found in the encyclopedia and online at the BWA’s resolutions database <<https://baptistworld.org/resolutions/>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

²⁰ In 2022, the BWA Executive Committee passed two statements, one on *Ukraine* (2022–03.1) and a second on *Restorative Racial Justice* (2022–07.1).

member bodies, commissions, etc., for approval by the BWA General Council.

3. BWA's approach to framing resolutions is informed by biblical teaching and predicated on Baptists' trinitarian faith. The resolutions are shaped by the values and convictions generally affirmed by Baptists and are proposed by members of the Baptist family, or by the Resolutions Committee, which also considers, reviews and amends them where necessary for presentation to the General Council for consideration and possible adoption.²¹

According to the new constitution, the Resolutions Committee is tasked with 'bringing resolutions to the Global Council for consideration [...] All resolutions to be considered by the Global Council must be proposed to the Resolutions Committee or originated by the Resolutions Committee following the values, guidelines, and process outlined in the Resolutions Committee Charter.'²²

Although no resolutions were proposed for consideration to the 2025 World Congress, a new resource was introduced to the Baptist family during the event. Baylor University Press has published *Good News for the World: Baptist World Alliance Resolutions and Statements 1905–2023* (Spitzer, 2025), and as the title indicates, this encyclopedia contains the text of 422 resolutions, statements, sermons, and messages that were created and adopted by the BWA's World Congresses, General Council, and Executive Committee. It aims to serve as a standard reference work for historians, Baptist theologians and scholars, Baptist denominational and missional leaders, and clergy who seek to appreciate and share the global Baptist family's pastoral and prophetic perspectives on key religious, social, and political issues.

The encyclopedia is also intended to serve as a fundamental resource for the commissions as they address the primary ministry areas and are tasked with offering proposed resolutions in the 2026–2030 quinquennium for consideration by the Resolutions Committee and adoption by the Global Council. Proposed resolutions are expected to

²¹ 2015 BWA General Council Baptist World Alliance Resolutions Paper.

²² BWA *Constitution and By-Laws* (2024), p. 29.

take into consideration previous resolutions the BWA has adopted, citing them as precedents and building upon them when addressing new situations.

Many of the breakout sessions during the Congress dealt with themes addressed in the corpus of BWA resolutions that have been adopted since the fellowship's inception in 1905, including human rights, indigenous peoples, mission and evangelism, restorative justice, war and peacemaking, creation care, humanitarian aid and the poor, discipleship and leadership development, slavery and human trafficking, domestic violence, worship, and prayer.

It was my privilege to participate in a breakout session with Dr Enoch Šeba (Director IBTS Amsterdam) and Dr David Starling (Morling College, Australia) that focused on the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. Baptists have a complicated relationship with the historic creeds of the ancient church. Throughout the past four centuries, Baptists have sought to claim kinship and identify with the historical church (orthodoxy) while resisting any ecclesiastical or dogmatic binding or coercive authority that might limit Baptist soul freedom and conscience. The history of the BWA reflects this tension; over the past 120 years, BWA Congress speeches and resolutions affirmed many truths and doctrines expressed in the historic ecumenical creeds. These messages and resolutions implicitly acknowledge, and are in sustained and serious dialogue with, the faith Baptists share with other streams of the wider Christian family. Furthermore, although not a creedal people, many Baptists make use of creeds in worship. The Apostles' Creed was recited by the delegates during the 1905, 1955, and 2005 World Congresses. In like manner, during one of the 2025 Congress plenary sessions, outgoing President Tomas Mackey invited delegates to recite the Nicene Creed, as a worshipful expression of Baptist devotion and Christian identity.

The New Baptist World Alliance Studies Program/Center

At the BWA General Council meeting in Lagos, Nigeria (July 2024), Baylor University (BU) and Truett Seminary were welcomed as institutional members of the Baptist World Alliance. This was a

milestone in the BWA's ongoing positive relationship with both Baylor and Truett (through their affiliation with Texas Baptists). Revd Dr George W. Truett served as the fifth president of the BWA from 1934 to 1939 alongside General Secretary J. H. Rushbrooke, and he also served as a trustee of Baylor University. Truett Seminary's Revd Dr Joel Gregory was a plenary keynote speaker at the 21st Baptist World Congress (2015) held in Durban, South Africa. Dr Todd D. Still, the Dean of Truett Theological Seminary, helped lead a Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE), held in Lagos, Nigeria (2024); 136 people from 43 countries attended. Dr Doug Weaver, chair of Baylor's Department of Religion, is currently co-editing with Dr Melody Maxwell a volume of biographical chapters on BWA general secretaries, presidents, and other BWA leaders.²³

In Brisbane, Baylor University and Truett Seminary hosted a luncheon at which Baylor's President, Dr Linda A. Livingstone, and General Secretary Elijah M. Brown signed a general memorandum of understanding on behalf of their organisations to 'serve together in a shared call to pursue the mission of God out of our Baptist identity both for the church and for the world'.²⁴ They, along with Dr Still, announced the creation of the Baptist World Alliance Program (with the goal of it becoming a centre) that will be located on Baylor University's campus in Waco, Texas. Significant financial support for the Program has already been raised, and the search for a Program director (a faculty appointment) will commence before the end of 2025.

The Baptist World Alliance Studies Program will seek to serve 'emerging generations of Baptist leaders (both clergy and lay) who would benefit greatly from focused education and training in Baptist history, polity, beliefs, leadership, evangelism, and integral mission that is situated within the contemporary global context'.²⁵ The Program will offer both non-graduate course participation certificates and a graduate-

²³ Baptist World Alliance Program/Center at Baylor University – Operated by George W. Truett Theological Seminary – *Memorandum of Understanding*, signed on 17 June 2025.

²⁴ Baylor University/BWA Ceremonial *Memorandum of Understanding*, signed on 10 July 2025. See also the University website <<https://news.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2025/baptist-world-congress-underway-brisbane-australia>> [accessed 17 November 2025].

²⁵ *Memorandum of Understanding*, 17 June 2025.

level BWA Global Leadership Certificate. The Program Memorandum of Understanding states,

This certificate would consist of a series of courses designed to provide existing or emerging BWA leaders with a global perspective on foundational areas of Baptist life, mission, and leadership. Classes would be offered as online asynchronous experiences or as in-person intensive classes at BU or BU extension locations, BWA office or BWA extension locations, at BWA global or regional gatherings, or as part of BWA training in various locations around the world. Courses would be research project focused and designed to leverage student leadership and their contextualized experience.²⁶

A Call to Collaborative Global Mission

In his World Congress opening plenary session message, BWA General Secretary, Revd Dr Elijah M. Brown, cast a wide-ranging vision for the entire Baptist family to accept God's call to live the good news of Jesus by embracing 'collaborative global mission'.²⁷ Based on an exegesis of Acts 2 and the example of the Jerusalem church's life and ministry,²⁸ Dr Brown encouraged the assembly to face the world's troubles with faith, determination, and the love of God:

As we see a world filled with wars and persecution, poverty and hunger, displacement, depression, separation, and isolation, we want to live like that first church in the world, the church in Acts 2. We believe that our mundane can become God's miraculous. Our simple can become God's supernatural. Our ordinary can become extraordinary in God's Kingdom. A church without borders or boundaries, that does not give into the Babylons of this world but who believe the Word of God is powerful and alive and calls us to live as an incarnational community, disruptable disciples, freedom pursuers, anointed proclaimers, Holy Spirit disciples, who are Living the Good News, as we embody the presence of Jesus with missionary love.

Brown urged the audience to imagine Baptist congregations across the globe witnessing to the gospel: 'An Acts 2 church in action. In every neighborhood, every language, every nation, for every person.

²⁶ *Memorandum of Understanding*, 17 June 2025.

²⁷ All quotes are from Dr Brown's message manuscript, 'A Call to Collaborative Mission', 9 July 2025. Shared with the author and used with Dr Brown's permission.

²⁸ See Baptist World Alliance, '2033 Acts 2 Movement' <<https://acts2movement.org>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

As we look to the greatest anniversary in the history of the world.’ That anniversary is the 2000th-year celebration of Jesus’s death and resurrection in 2033, and it serves for Brown as the inspiration for reaching new heights of Baptist witness and outreach during this pivotal time of human history: ‘In light of 2033 as the greatest anniversary in the history of the world — for the first time in BWA history — we are calling every Baptist, every Baptist convention and union, every Baptist mission agency, humanitarian initiative, university and seminary, every church, every brother and sister, to pursue an unprecedented Holy Spirit-filled collaborative global mission.’ This ‘collaborative global mission’ invites Baptist churches to embrace ‘five paths’ of service. Each path has an ambitious measurable goal to journey towards as 2033 draws nearer.

The Witness Path

Beginning on Pentecost, the Jerusalem Church shared the gospel with their neighbours and everyone else who would listen (Acts 2:2–4; 41). Brown asks, ‘By 2033, could we work for 450 million testimonies shared? [...] Global revival with a call to share half a billion personal testimonies about Jesus? Some might think how can that be possible? If all 53 million Baptists share their testimony once a year for the next 9 years, that is 450 million times. Here is the commitment: will you share your personal testimony at least once a year?’

The Bible Path

Based on Acts 2:42, this journey calls Baptists to embrace the discipline of reading at least one chapter of the Bible daily. Additionally, Brown urged Baptists to participate in efforts to create translations of the Bible for the 1159 languages that currently lack God’s Word in written form. One can imagine that with the aid of emerging versions of artificial intelligence applications, progress towards this goal may very well be achievable by 2033, with or without Baptist support.

The Care Path

Citing Acts 2:44–45, Brown applauds the Jerusalem Church’s ‘radical’ hospitality and generosity: ‘They shared a common meal with one another as part of their worship as brothers and sisters and sold their

property and possessions and gave to any who had need. It was generosity that generated a movement.’ He then asks, ‘By 2033 could we give witness through 1 billion intentional acts of service? This is not impossible. If every Baptist helps 3 people per year, by 2033 we will reach 1 billion.’

The Freedom and Justice Path

Quoting Acts 2:46–47 and reaffirming the historic Baptist core convictions of religious freedom and liberty, the General Secretary issued a challenge to Baptists to ‘stand with those who face persecution’ — and specifically mentioned Nicaragua, Cuba, Myanmar, and Ukraine (at the hands of the Russian military) as countries where Baptists suffer persecution. He challenged the assembly (and by extension, the entire global Baptist family), to join a movement of one million people who will sign a ‘Covenant on Religious Freedom’²⁹ that states ‘our commitment to religious freedom for all people of all faiths or no faith and that faith can only flourish if it is not tied to nationalism, including Christian nationalism’.

The Neighbour Path

Perhaps the most creative suggestion in Brown’s five-path vision is embedded in the final path. He asks, ‘Can we raise up 1% of all BWA Baptists as lay chaplains for their neighborhood?’ These 530 000 lay

²⁹ The Covenant can be found at on the Action Network website under the heading Baptist World Alliance, ‘2033 Acts 2 Movement, Religious Freedom Covenant’ <<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/global-covenant-on-freedom-of-religion-and-conscience>> [accessed 17 November 2025]. On a personal note, I signed the Covenant on 14 August 2025 and was the 639th signature recorded. As of 26 October 2025, 696 signatures have been collected. Why has the response rate, especially from delegates and attendees of the Congress, been so low? Technological issues may have come into play; for example, I was unable to access the sign-up page using the QR code during the plenary, but had no issues later back at home. Perhaps some people were resistant to signing a document they had not had time to study carefully. Since the Congress, there have been some attempts to introduce the Covenant to BWA supporters via online communications and press releases, but clearly a more aggressive, systematic, and sustained approach will need to be developed if the goal of 1 million signatories is to be reached by 2033.

chaplains would seek to ‘minister to their neighbors through relationship building, intercessory prayer, and acts of service and kindness as the Holy Spirit leads’.

Since this *Acts 2 Movement* and its *5 Paths* represented the Congress’s specific and intentional response to the theme of ‘Living the Good News’, it is appropriate to assess its content, dissemination, implementation, and the practical chances for it being fulfilled by 2033.

The *evangelistic and witness* aspects of the Acts 2 Movement and its 5 Paths are supported by numerous significant statements and resolutions affirmed by the BWA’s World Congresses (22), General Councils (33), and Executive Committees (10) throughout its 120-year history. In like manner, *religious freedom and liberty* has been the central focus of 28 World Congress, 33 General Council, and 15 Executive Committee statements and resolutions, while *social justice and progress* has served as the core concern of 18 World Congress, 47 General Council, and 4 Executive Committee statements and resolutions.³⁰ Baptists would not be surprised to hear that evangelical witness, devotion to reading the Bible, caring for one’s neighbour, and promoting freedom and justice should be characteristic of Baptist spirituality and service. Accordingly, the General Secretary’s proposal may be fairly interpreted as a detailed (and challenging) response to some of the historically central concerns of the global Baptist family.

What makes the ‘Call to Collaborative Global Mission’ historically unique is its invitation to Baptist individuals, local congregations, and denominational partners to embrace and fulfil its stated goals within a dauntingly brief time frame. Most importantly, it anticipates voluntary, and certainly not coercive, adoption and implementation. It is an aspirational call to personally represent the kingdom of God within one’s ministry context in order to achieve, alongside hundreds of thousands of fellow Baptists, a collective testimony that reaches every corner of the globe.

³⁰ See Thematic Table of Contents in *Good News for the World*, ed. by Spitzer, for a listing of the specific documents.

Having laid out a vision for the next decade at the World Congress, the Baptist World Alliance no doubt will face many challenges as it seeks to disseminate the ‘Call to Collaborative Global Mission’ throughout our worldwide family. It cannot do so without the support and energetic cooperation of continental (regional), national denominational, and organisational entities that are part of the Baptist family. How else will local churches and their pastoral leadership learn of the initiative and serve in concert with it? For example, the General Secretary indicated in his Congress message that he hopes the ‘first ever Baptist World 40-Day Movement for Mission from Easter to Pentecost 2026’ will be launched next spring so that ‘as one family we can teach through these five pathways’. Sharing this opportunity and encouraging churches in one’s network to participate might exponentially increase the number of congregations that join the movement in some capacity.

Implementing the vision presents challenges as well. It is unclear what role the BWA’s newly launched Leadership and Global Councils will play to promote the movement’s growth and reach its goals. On a technical level, how will the BWA collect progress/participation reports from thousands of individuals, churches, agencies, and organisations that embrace the movement and its paths? This is a very complicated logistical issue. The collection and processing of an avalanche of updates could very well overwhelm the BWA office and/or the entity assigned to produce reports. A question may also be raised concerning how to utilise incoming reports. Does the BWA hope to provide statistical updates or just anecdotal examples of how the paths are being experienced?

Finally, what is the import of the anniversary date of 2033? Does it merely serve as the culmination of the movement’s efforts (an end date), and thus be a celebration of whatever level of fulfilment has been achieved by the global Baptist family? How will participants in the movement be recognised and affirmed? Will the Acts 2 Movement be replaced with a new 5- or 10-year plan, or might it be extended (with modifications, no doubt)?

Conclusion

What is the significance of the 23rd World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in light of its 120-year-old journey? From a historian's perspective, it is too soon to offer a definitive assessment. At a minimum, for example, fair-minded observers would prefer to wait until 2033, to appreciate how the Acts 2 Movement played out, was received by Baptist leaders and churches throughout the world, and to what extent the goals of the vision were reached.

Nevertheless, some preliminary observations may be offered for consideration. First, the symbolic value of meeting in Brisbane serves as a reminder that the global Baptist movement is alive and vibrant in Asia, Africa, and South America, even as it struggles to experience revival in North America and Europe. In his plenary message, General Secretary Elijah Brown noted that in the last decade, 'the BWA family has grown 32 percent', with Baptists in Africa achieving a 119% growth rate and the Asia Pacific region growing by 27%.³¹

At the conclusion of the Brisbane Congress, it was announced that the next BWA World Congress would be hosted by 'a country in Europe'. It has been two decades since a World Congress has been held in that region (the 2005 Centenary World Congress took place in Birmingham, England). However, one might wonder why the global family does not gather next in South or Central America to celebrate its 11% membership growth rate,³² and where the BWA has not held a World Congress since 1995 (its 17th Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina). The 22nd Congress was scheduled to be in Brazil, but was cancelled as an in-person event due to Covid-19. Perhaps current political and economic challenges make it difficult for the BWA's Congress to return to Latin America at this point, but as Australia proved, visa restrictions and high travel costs are a global phenomenon, and a European venue will not be without its own challenges. On the other hand, the 2023 BWA Council met in Stavanger, Norway in concert with an inspiring EBF evangelism conference. Perhaps a witness-oriented Congress in conversation with the 5 Paths unveiled in Brisbane

³¹ Brown, 'A Call to Collaborative Mission'.

³² Brown, 'A Call to Collaborative Mission'.

might have the potential to support the so-called ‘quiet revival’ amongst young people (Gen Z) that is being reported in the United Kingdom and other countries in Europe.³³

Second, the BWA’s acceptance and celebration of women in ministry and leadership on all levels was amply demonstrated throughout the World Congress’s week in Brisbane. As God raises up new generations of women (and men) who are called to serve and lead the global Baptist family, it is to the global Baptist family’s advantage to affirm and support their ministries.

Third, the BWA’s organisational realignment (Trustee Committee, Leadership Council, and Global Council) will have a significant yet presently undetermined impact on the BWA’s life and productivity. Will the new structures invite more diversity of voices, more equitable influence distribution, new opportunities for friendship, and extended avenues of collaboration in ministry? Will the increases in Council size make decision-making more cumbersome and complicated, slowing down innovation and the taking of risks, or will it open up new possibilities for hearing God’s voice and responding to that voice with creativity, passion, and spiritual conviction?

Fourth, by design and intention, the Brisbane gathering is the third consecutive World Congress that has not issued an official statement, resolution, message, or proclamation about Baptist identity, core convictions, or concerns, that might be shared with the global Baptist family or the non-Baptist world. While the various plenary speakers, preachers, breakout session presenters, and workshop leaders addressed aspects of the Congress’s theme, ‘Living the Good News’, none of these presentations can claim to *represent the conviction of the delegates* regarding how God was speaking to and through the Congress. In 1990, the 16th Congress adopted the Seoul Covenant on evangelism;³⁴ in 2005 and 2010, Congresses in Birmingham and Honolulu respectively adopted ‘messages’ giving voice to Baptist

³³ See Hazel Southam, ‘The Quiet Revival: Gen Z Leads Rise in Church Attendance’, Bible Society <<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival>> [accessed 26 October 2025].

³⁴ 1990 BWA World Congress, *The Seoul Covenant*.

convictions regarding a panoply of issues.³⁵ In 2025, the Acts 2 Movement was announced and an invitation was extended to embrace it by adopting practices and disciplines to fulfil its goals, but the delegates were not given any opportunity to affirm or endorse the initiative as a whole, as an expression of the theme, ‘Living the Good News’.³⁶ As a result, in effect the Congress community ‘lost its voice’ — for it approved no official statement to communicate to the Baptist family and beyond.

Accordingly, the BWA might profitably use the Brisbane 2025 experience to consider what has been both gained and lost by its decision to forego issuing (when appropriate) statements, messages, and even resolutions at World Congresses. There are several strong arguments for not including resolution-making in Congresses. The crafting of thoughtful and prophetic statements that have value and faithfully represent historic Baptist core convictions (as opposed to an influential or insistent person’s particular position) in a timely manner is difficult and often truly daunting. Debates on such statements can be divisive and harmful, while the desired ideal of consensus is often beyond reach. Many delegates to World Congresses may have little familiarity with the BWA’s history, practices, and positions regarding issues that are often controversial and complicated. Arguments can be made that the Leadership and Global Councils may be superior venues to process resolutions and statements that will appropriately represent the BWA’s official position on issues facing the Baptist family. Nevertheless, the history of the BWA has demonstrated that resolutions and statements containing biblical perspectives, sound wisdom, prophetic value, and timely impact, even at World Congresses, can be crafted, presented, debated, and approved by delegates. In so doing, a Congress might truly speak both to Baptists and the world — and thus regain its pastoral and prophetic ‘voice’.

³⁵ 2005 BWA World Congress, *Message*; 2010 BWA World Congress, *Message*.

³⁶ Based on my observation of the audience reactions, I believe that the delegates would have overwhelmingly approved the initiative. My analysis should not be interpreted as a criticism of the Acts 2 initiative.

Fifth, the launching of the BWA's new initiative — the Acts 2 Movement and its 5 Paths — potentially represents a profound transformation, not only within the BWA, but also in the global Baptist family's life and mission. This surprising initiative seeks to penetrate through the layers of Baptist polity (continent-region/nation/state-province/association) and enlist the energies of thousands of local churches and individual disciples to collaboratively present a varied but intentional witness — in less than a decade! For this reason (and only if the Baptist family embraces the missional call), the 23rd World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance which took place on 7–12 July 2025 in Brisbane, Australia, may very well, in time, stand alongside some of the greatest World Congresses (such as the 1905 Inaugural Congress and the 1934 Congress in Berlin), and be looked upon as a major spiritual journey milestone in the pilgrimage of the Baptist World Alliance and the global Baptist family it serves.