



**AN INVITATION TO PARTNER ANEW IN THE
21ST CENTURY WITH THE LARGEST AFRICAN-
AMERICAN RELIGIOUS BODY IN THE USA:**

*THE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION USA, INC. AND
CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD*

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“We are grateful for the invitation to partner anew with Christian churches throughout the world. The official visit of our National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. with the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox Center at Chambesy, and the Vatican have complemented our Convention’s commitment to serve Jesus Christ, only, always. The visits have given new perspectives on what it may mean to have a closer working relationship with churches throughout the world in the 21st century,” said the Rev. Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the National Baptist Convention USA.

With 347 national church bodies in 100 countries, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia, conveyed his readiness to find new ways to build closer relationships with the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. This invitation was rooted in community prayer and worship among the delegation, a delegation from the Church of Scotland, WCC staff and friends at the Oikoumene Center Chapel of the WCC. The services featured songs and intercessory prayers for and from the churches and communities throughout the world. A meditation on “Roll Away the Stone” (Mark 16:1-8) was also shared. The meditation was based on the women’s visit to the tomb where they found the stone of the sepulcher rolled away because Jesus had been raised. “The visit to Geneva, Switzerland was a great experience for sisters and brothers to join together in prayer and fellowship,” said Mrs. Sallie Titus, National President of the Ushers and Nurses for the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.

Members of the WCC Staff Team reinforced the invitation of Dr. Kobia as they identified the importance of the newly formed six program departments of the WCC. The following programmatic areas within the departments were shared: the Decade to Overcome Violence, HIV-AIDS particularly in Africa, Ecumenism in the 21st century and the Global Christian Forum inclusive of WCC members and churches not traditionally affiliated with the WCC such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals, Faith and Order, Health and Healing, Water and Human Rights Advocacy and programs related to

the bicentennial of the abolition of slavery in Great Britain were specifically featured in the program. There was also a meeting about how WCC is funded and its development priorities.

The National Baptist Convention delegation also took time to share its priorities and focus. Dr. Shaw shared the focus of the Convention on “Jesus Christ Only, Always as the Convention’s foundation for his VISA (Vision, Integrity, Structure and Accountability) program. The various national church leaders of the delegation shared their additional perspectives (see list of delegates at the end of this release).

Additionally, there was also a meeting with African staff of WCC and with the first African global leader of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi. The delegation was heartened by the concern of WARC to address matters that have been traditionally associated with faith and order and of life and work. He highlighted the concern for reconciliation and justice within the priorities of WARC. He also shared his African-American Baptist experience in Vicksburg, Mississippi as a youth in secondary school. He affirmed the importance of Africans and African Americans linking together in their faith and encouraged further exploration in building up this relationship.

The delegation also made a historic visit to the Orthodox Institute in Chambesy. The conversation was enriched by the presentation of the host, Dr. Gary Vachicouras. The delegation had opportunity to visit the chapels and to hear an overview of Orthodox history, theology, liturgy and iconography. “The ecumenical journey to Geneva, Switzerland was an awesome broadening experience as the rich diversity and the keen scholarship of the WCC unfolded before us...WCC adds an essential dimension to the vibrancy of our Church life” said Pastor and Mrs. Donna Ringgold, members of the Ecumenical Journey. After the visit in Geneva, Switzerland, the delegation traveled to Vatican City. “Geneva is a great city. I was impressed by the presentations, beauty of the landscape, historic and contemporary structures. These memories will never be forgotten.”

“The Baptists are Here!” said the Pope on Wednesday , April 25th as he recognized the delegation by having members stand at their platform front seats and later greeting Dr. Shaw at the Papal Audience of close to 30,000 at St. Peter’s Square. President Shaw sat within the inner circle on the stage which included special dignitaries. As Head of Church representing the delegation and the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. he was officially greeted by the Pope. The Pope also took time to briefly greet those sitting in the first rows of the special seating. This included a few members of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. Many of the attendees had stood in lines for hours prior to the official program and service led by the Pope. The audience was filled with families and many others who had sojourned from all over the world. After participating in the Papal Audience, the delegation was given a special guided tour of the St. Peters Square, the Pope’s chapel, St. Thomas Courtyard, the Sistine Chapel and the largest Catholic Cathedral (Basilica) in the world, St. Peter’s.

The delegation was officially hosted by the Pontifical Council on Promoting Christian Unity and Cardinal President Casper. The “Council” finds its roots with the Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. Since 1960 the “Council” has been entrusted with the promotion, within the Catholic Church, of an authentic ecumenical spirit according to the councilor decree *Unitatis redintegratio*. The “Council” also aims to develop dialogue and collaboration with the other Churches and World Communions. Since its creation it has developed a cordial cooperation with the WCC. From 1968, twelve Catholic theologians have been members of the “Faith and Order” Commission and Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC. The” Council’s “ task is also to name Catholic observers at various ecumenical gatherings and in its turn to invited observers or “fraternal delegates” of other Churches or ecclesial Communities to major events of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is engaged in international theological dialogues with several Churches and World Communions that include Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Pentecostal bodies as well as the Baptist World Alliance to which the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. belongs. The “Council seeks to promote meetings with Evangelicals.

The delegation also met with Monsignour Father Felix Machado of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He clarified the role of the “Council” by stating the evangelical and relational mission of the Catholic Church with leaders of various religions. He stated the Council’s origins were linked to the history of the Pontifical Council of Promoting Christian Unity, Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. The “Interreligious Council” includes dialogue with many religions, including Islam, but does not include the Jewish community. Rather, there is a separate Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Mgr. Machado spoke of the importance of ties with WCC concerning interreligious dialogue. He observed that there is a certain sincerity conveyed when entering into dialogue with other faiths and that the Christian message can become confused when there is not unity. He stated that many Christians are in multi-religious contexts and that mutual understanding was import for peace to exist. He stated “ We serve a God of reconciliation and peace...There will be no peace until there is peace among the religions.” He said the relationships built up over the years were particularly timely when 911 happened. He also referred to the distinctions Pope John Paul II made between “coming together to pray” versus praying together at interreligious gatherings. He said these kinds of “pastoral helps”, resources and relationships are benefits of interreligious dialogue.

Much is expected in light of the delegation’s visits this past week and subsequent week as the delegation moves on to church and community visits in South Africa and Kenya. The founding of the “Convention” was rooted in its concern for our African brothers and sisters and thus this has been a historic concern. The delegation has been moved by the host of invitations and hospitality extended to them. The delegation is prayerfully reflecting on its response and official proposals about how to systematically address its global church future in the 21st century.

Official Delegation of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. Ecumenical Journey:

- **The Rev. Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. (HEAD OF CHURCH) and Pastor, White Rock Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA.**
- **The Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith**, the Convention's Ecumenical representative and the Executive Director of The Church Federation of Indianapolis (Facilitator/Organizer of the Ecumenical Journey)
- **The Reverend Dr. Harry Blake**, General Secretary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.
- **Dr. Hugh Dell Gatewood**, President of the Woman's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.
- **Dr. Kenneth Lyons**, President of the Moderator's Department of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.
- **Mrs. Sallie Titus**, President of the Ushers and Nurses Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention
- **The Reverend Alvin Love**, State President of the Baptist General Convention of Illinois and Chairman of the TOPIC Technology Ministry of the Convention
- **The Reverend Dr. Randy Vaughn**, President of the Texas Baptist State Convention
- **The Reverend Dr. John Ringgold**, Pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church, San Diego, CA
- **Mrs. John Ringgold**
- **Mrs. Vanessa Tavares**, President of the Women Mission Union of the White Rock Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA
- **Mrs. Jeanette Cooper**, member of the Board of Trustees of the White Rock Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA.

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

April 22-24: Visit at World Council of Churches, Bossey Institute (University of Geneva), Orthodox Institute in Chambèsy, United Nation High Commission of Refugees.

April 24-26 Vatican City: Papal Audience, Pontifical Council on Christian Unity, Pontifical Council on Interreligious Concerns.

April 27-29: South Africa: Vice Chancellor's Residence of the University of South Africa, Site of the Children's/Youth Massacre on June 16, 1976 @ Hector Pieterse Museum, Anti-Apartheid Museum.

April 29-May 2: Nairobi, Kenya: All Africa Conference of Churches, Africa Union, Kenyan Baptist Convention, Church World Service, Sudanese Refugees (Darfur Genocide).

May 3-4: South Africa: Chief of Staff of the President of South Africa, USA Embassy visit, Electoral Commissioner for South Africa, South African Council of Churches.