

# **SBC women's group backs Baptist Alliance: Woman's Missionary Union breaks ranks with SBC leaders**

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The leadership of the Woman's Missionary Union, the 1-million-member women's auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, has voiced support of the Baptist World Alliance, breaking ranks with SBC leaders who want to sever their ties with the worldwide organization.

Echoing the sentiment of overseas Baptist groups, the WMU executive board on January 13 issued a call for unity among the world's Baptists. Some observers fear the planned SBC-BWA split will divide Baptists worldwide into two competing camps, since the SBC has announced plans to start an alternative organization.

"As members of the body of Christ, we need each other—to pray for one another, to encourage one another, to learn from one another, and to stand together in one accord as a strong and bold witness to a lost world," said Wanda Lee, WMU executive director-treasurer, who also serves on the BWA executive committee.

In December an SBC study committee called for Southern Baptists to withdraw from the 99-year-old Baptist World Alliance over allegations of liberalism—allegations strongly denied by BWA leaders and many of its 211 affiliated Baptist unions. Support for the plan from within the SBC has been muted. The plan will be presented to the SBC Executive Committee February 16-17 and, if approved, to the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

The actions would end all SBC funding of BWA—until recently, \$450,000 a year—as of October 1. The Southern Baptist Convention, with 16 million members nationwide, is the largest member of the Baptist World Alliance, which represents 47 million Baptists.

During a retreat near WMU's Birmingham, Alabama, headquarters, the group's executive committee reaffirmed the 93-year relationship between WMU and the BWA's women's department, which WMU helped form in 1911. Many of the leaders told how relationships built through the Baptist World Alliance changed their lives, according to a WMU news release.

"It is through fellowship with Christ and other Christians that we experience personal growth and develop a deeper understanding of the needs around the world," said Lee. "In the context of our missions task, it is through this fellowship that we become more effective as we grow in our passion and a sense of urgency to be light in a dark world."

The 116-year-old Woman's Missionary Union is considered the world's largest Protestant women's mission organization. Although not under the control of the SBC, WMU raises much of the money that Southern Baptists spend on missions. In 1993, WMU declined the SBC's request to surrender its auxiliary role and become an agency of the SBC.

In supporting the Baptist World Alliance, WMU said it also will continue to promote and support the annual Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer offering, which provides the only funding for BWA's women's department. *-Associated Baptist Press*