

## INFORMATION SERVICE

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### **For Immediate Release**

### **BWA congratulates Pope Francis; will attend inauguration**

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Washington, DC (BWA)--Leaders of the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA), representing 42 million Baptists in 227 member organizations in 121 countries, offered congratulations to Pope Francis who was elected the 266th head of the Catholic Church on March 13.

The election of Francis, formerly Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina, by the papal conclave, came after the resignation of Benedict XVI in February. He is the first Latin American and first Jesuit to be elected pope.

BWA President John Upton said, "The BWA celebrates with the Catholic Church the announcement of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis. The prayerful discernment process of the Catholic Church in selecting the pope has been a comfort to us all," Upton stated. "Pope Francis will have our prayers as he begins his responsibilities."

General Secretary Neville Callam said, "The Baptist World Alliance welcomes the election of Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope Francis. As archbishop of Buenos Aires, the former cardinal's commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel, his record of solidarity with victims of social injustice, his affirmation of the value of a simple lifestyle and his exemplary humility has provided much encouragement to the community of believers in Christ."

Callam indicated that the new pope "will be accompanied by the prayers of the members of the world Baptist family, who also anticipate the pope's positive contribution to the realization of the vision of the church reflected in the High Priestly prayer of our Lord."

Upton will represent the BWA at the inauguration of Pope Francis on March 19 at the Vatican. Callam, who has a prior engagement in India, is unable to take up the official invitation from the Vatican to attend.