

ABC Creation Justice Network

Report to the Board of General Ministries (with attached ABNS press release)

Oct 17th, 2016

The American Baptist Churches Creation Justice Network is off to a strong start. Our 10-person steering committee met for the first time in September to begin the process of organizing our work. Our process is to establish our vision statement as a foundation, then define our areas of mission, our strategies, and goals. A subcommittee of our steering committee is designing a three year plan to map out what we hope to accomplish, and when, over the life-cycle of our Mission Initiative Grant. We are also planning to form a larger advisory board of about thirty people which will enable us to draw on the skills, connections, and passion of ordained and lay leaders, and include voices from the many cultures and perspectives within ABC Life.

It is encouraging that we will be able to lean for support on other denominations and our ecumenical partner, Creation Justice Ministries. Creation Justice Ministries has introduced us to an organization called eco-America that may be able to provide additional technical and promotional support as well as, possibly, additional funding. Another example: the UCC has a model for a “green churches network” that we might be able to borrow best practices from.

We have been very energized by the response of American Baptist leaders and churches to the formation of this new initiative in ABC Life. We’re hearing from lay and ordained leaders who are dedicated to the work of eco-justice and are excited to see this Creation Justice Network forming. We’re collecting worship, educational, and action resources, as well as stories, for our webpage; every week we’re adding new names to our list; and we’re preparing to engage and mobilize our network as we map out our plans, which we hope will include an event at the American Baptist Mission Summit in Portland, Oregon in the summer of 2017. We’re grateful for the opportunity to lead a Bible Study for the BGM on Nov 18th with the Reverend Dr. Owen Owens, retired American Baptist director of Ecology and Racial Justice, National Ministries, now American Baptist Home Mission Society. Owens’ work represents our denomination’s historic vision of eco-justice that intersects with racial and economic justice; many ABC leaders and churches have been carrying this vision forward in the past few decades. Our work is largely about harnessing the power of this vision for transformation in our denomination and world.

Please read the below ABPS press release for a fuller picture of what we're about.

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 10/10/16)—The ABC Creation Justice Network, a new ABC initiative, met September 22-23 in Sherborn, Mass. The Network, which received a grant from the Mission Initiative Fund, was formed based on the premise that each day we see God's magnificence in creation. As God's creations, Christians are called to become good stewards of God's world.

The Steering Committee met due to awareness of the growing concerns over climate change and other environmental injustices that disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable, including working people whose livelihoods are threatened when new sustainable energy sources replace old ones.

The Network calls all American Baptists to live into the hope and possibility of God's justice and peace being established on Earth as it is in Heaven. Through practices of dialogue, prayer, education, action, and contemplation we are seeking to cultivate spiritualities of care for creation, support sustainable lifestyle convictions, and integrate justice concerns for ecology, race, and economy into ABC life. Instead of separateness and a consumer mentality, the Network will work to help us see the interconnectedness in life and to move toward an ethic of care and justice for all life.

“Nearly fifty years ago, American Baptists were on the leading edge of the movement among religious communities in the ministry of ecological stewardship and human justice – eco-justice. Individuals and American Baptist congregations around the country have continued their commitments to or initiated this vital work in our time when people and Earth are crying out for justice, healing and renewal. The American Baptist Creation Justice Network is a way to inspire, resource and connect American Baptist congregations in a common ministry on behalf of all of God's creation,” said Tom Carr, Suffield, CT, co-coordinator of the group serving along with Ian Mevorach, Natick, MA.

The main target audience is the local church; our mission is to support congregations to work locally toward creation justice, whatever that looks like for them in their particular context. Practical and useable resources will be developed and recommended for use in worship, Sunday school classes, and retreat settings. Through our Network, we will share our stories, inspire and teach one another, and find ways to work together and partner with others to achieve even greater impacts for creation justice on state, national, and international levels.

At the November 2016 Board of General Ministries meetings to be held in King of Prussia, Penn., the groups co-coordinators Mevorach and Carr, along with Owen Owens who authored *Spiritual Helps in Hard Times: The Bible's Hope for Life on Earth*, will lead the board in a small group Bible study on creation justice.

Members of the Steering Committee are: Ashley Anderson, Boston, MA; Karyn Bigelow, Washington, D.C.; Dwight P. Davidson, Granville, OH, Stacey Simpson Duke, Ann Arbor, MI; Kathleen Moore, Albany, NY; Jamie Washam, Providence, RI, David Wheeler, Portland, OR; and Don Ng, Sausalito, CA.

In addition to the above Steering Committee, there is an Advisory Board comprised of many people who bring expertise on many areas of creation justice concerns. There are plans to sponsor a number of events at the 2017 Biennial Mission Summit, June 30-July 2, in Portland, Oregon. For more information, please contact: Ian Mevorach: ian@commonstreet.com and Tom Carr: psbcarr@aol.com.

American Baptist Churches USA is one of the most diverse Christian denominations today, with approximately 5,000 congregations comprised of 1.3 million members, across the United States and Puerto Rico, all engaged in God's mission around the world.