

## **BGM Item 3B:**

### **Board of General Ministries Reports: ABCUSA/OGS and Associated Ministry Organizations**

**Board of General Ministries Reports:  
ABCUSA-Office of the General Secretary and  
Associated Ministry Organizations**

**TREASURER'S OFFICE:** Highlights of Treasurer's Office, Accounting, American Baptist Churches Information Systems, Building Management, Traffic, AMOs –  
December 2017 – June 2018

**ABCUSA:**

- Worked on securing new office space
- Worked on plans for ABCUSA to provide in-house IT for ABCUSA and other interested in-house ABC entities
- Prepare for 2019 Budget
- Finalized 2017 Audit
- Annual insurance reviews/renewals
- Prepared and presented Analyses and Financial Statements to BGM/ABCUSA Finance Committees, BGM and BGM EC; staffed meetings
- Oversaw work of legal counsel in several areas
- Personnel supervision for Accounting, ABCIS, Building Management and Warehousing
- ABCIS – Created and enhanced several reports for ABCIS users

**REGIONS:**

- Conferred with Regions and churches on financial and administrative issues
- Ongoing Receiving Units (collecting agency) responsibilities for 13 regions
- Philadelphia Baptist Association - Providing accounting services
- Cleveland Baptist Association – Finalizing accounting services agreement

**ASSOCIATED MINISTRY ORGANIZATIONS (AMOs):**

(AB Historical Society, AB Women's Ministries, Ministers Council, AB Computer Center)

- Completed 2017 Audits
- Accounting functions, ongoing consultations, insurance reviews, renewals, quarterly meetings with AMO executives re: financial and operational matters
- ABCC-Worked on dissolution of AB Computer Center; operations will cease as of June 30.
- Ministers Council – Finalized transitioning administrative services agreement

**588 ASSOCIATES:**

- Prepared 2017 Audits
- 2017 Tax Returns; accounting functions; leasing and building management; insurance reviews/renewals
- Supervision of maintenance staff and day-to-day operations
- Worked extensively with partners, Mission Center consultants and legal counsel on sale of the Mission Center
- Worked on relocating external tenants

-- Alan Musoke, Associate General Secretary for Finance/CFO/Treasurer

## ***Celebrating Ministering Women*** **Radical. Redeemed. Ready.**

The year 2020 will mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Women in Ministry Project**, which was birthed out of the 1980 WIM conference at GLCC and which eventually became ABWIM (American Baptist Women in Ministry). To celebrate this remarkable anniversary and ABC USA's courageous, cutting-edge commitment to women in leadership, while also recognizing the challenges that still exist, a denomination-wide event is being planned for **June 16-19, 2020**.

We have much to celebrate in ABCUSA's courageous commitment to and legacy of women leaders, such as (to name just a few):

- **Dr. Lulu Fleming** - the first African American woman to be commissioned for missionary service in 1866
- **May Jones and Edith Hill** - two of the first women to be ordained (1892, 1894)
- **Helen Barret Montgomery** - in 1921 was the very first woman to be President of the Northern Baptist Convention, or for that matter of any Protestant denomination.

**We did not get here alone. And so we invite the full family of faith to join in celebrating.**

- It was AB Women's Ministries who **first** called on the denomination to study the role of women in professional church leadership
- The Ministers Council who commissioned the SWIM study (1979)
- MMBB who sponsored that 1980 conference bringing women in ministry together
- The General Board who authorized a Task Force on Women
- ABHMS who established the program Feminism and the Church today
- International Ministries who has commissioned many women to the mission field

Rev. Soozie Ford and Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles are co-chairing the planning team. Stakeholders from ABCUSA entities came together for an initial meeting to conceptualize the event and to begin the process of forming a planning team. Out of that meeting emerged the theme: Celebrating Ministering Women/ Radical. Redeemed. Ready.

**Celebrating Ministering Women** — represents the long legacy of women leaders both ordained and non-ordained while acknowledging and celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of the Women in Ministry Project which eventually became ABWIM.

**Radical** – ABCUSA has carried out a **radical witness** *and* **radical witness is still needed**.

**Redeemed** – When all God's gifts in all God's people are fully accessed, embraced and utilized, churches flourish and our world is transformed.

**READY! We are READY. Are you?**

**Mark your calendar for June 16 – 19, 2020. Plan to be there!**

## Sacred Safe Space ABCUSA

*“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)*

As Christians, we are called to love God and love others, honoring the image of God with which we have each been created, embracing, as General Secretary Rev. Dr. Lee Spitzer said in his pastoral letter, “the Baptist and biblical core conviction of *the infinite worth of every human being because we are all made in God’s image.*”

To this end, this emerging new denomination-wide initiative will educate, empower and equip pastors, church leaders and laity to respond appropriately to acts of violence, abuse and exploitation, and to implement policies and procedures to ensure that our sacred spaces are also safe spaces.

It will enable congregations to become safe and sacred spaces where everyone is treated with love, respect and dignity, no one is dismissed, disparaged, or dehumanized, abusive behavior is not only **not** tolerated, it is recognized, challenged, and addressed.

This initiative will  
give voice to victims and survivors,  
strengthen policies on misconduct and  
increase awareness of healthy boundaries,  
creating safe and sacred communities of justice and love.

The **Core Leadership** team carrying out this initiative is:

### **Leadership Team**

Rev. Tamara Jackson, ABCNJ Sacred Safe Spaces Coordinator

Rev. Dr. Shane Kinnison, Board of Governors, Ministers Council

Kenna S. “Lucky” Ray, Executive Director, AB Men

Bob Slechta, President AB Men

Rev. Gina Jacobs Strain, Executive Director AB Women’s Ministries

Rev. Dr. Marsha Scipio, Associate General Secretary, Missional Initiatives and Partnerships

**ABCUSA Coordinator**, Rev. Dr. Patricia Hernandez,  
Associate General Secretary ABWIM and Transition Ministries

# **Third Baptist Muslim Dialogue**

## **Introduction**

The third Baptist-Muslim Dialogue was held April 16-19 at the American Baptist Assembly in Green Lake, Wisconsin. Arriving in the midst of the biggest snowfall ever recorded in the month of April, delays were abundant, but only two persons ended upon cancelling entirely, one presenter and one attendee. A total of 62 participants gathered for the event, coming from 19 states and provinces across the U.S and Canada.

The first two gatherings took more of an academic approach to the events, gathering professors and national leaders as they focused more upon finding common ground for future dialogue. That common ground surfaced in the discovery that both faith traditions practice "Love of God and love of neighbor" as a core practice of growing in one's faith. Several of the presentations from the first two events were published in two different editions of the American Baptist Quarterly and copies of these Quarterlies were distributed to the participants at this event.

## **The Third Gathering**

The target group for the third dialogue was Baptist and Muslim religious leaders fifty years of age and younger who, together with their congregations, had willingness to pair with others to build long-term relationships, foster mutual understanding and participate in a joint project to enhance the welfare of their community. In addition to leaders of local congregations, participants also included chaplains where they lead groups which would sustain ongoing dialogue with one another.

A key learning from the event is the level of discrimination that occurs among Muslim leaders on a regular basis. Many have developed coping skills to deal with the direct and indirect violence against them. One Imam posted on his Facebook account that Muslims also do not eat chocolate in the hopes that someone will drop off candy bars instead of the regular supply of hog parts that arrive on the doorstep of the mosque. Another Muslim leader strongly encouraged a protestor holding an assault rifle aimed at their mosque to attend their free clinic to get a mole on his face checked out. After a lengthy dialogue, the protestor agreed and discovered that the mole was indeed cancerous.

Mitch Randall, director of the Center for Baptist Ethics, captured much of the conference on video and will be producing a series of videos about the event in the coming weeks. A special word of thanks goes to Roy Medley, who provided much of the planning for the event, and to Cathy Brubaker, who provided exceptional administrative support for the event.

## **Next Steps**

The shared stories provided both a sense of hope and urgency to continue the dialogue that surfaced among the participants. An initiative is never fully implemented until persons other than the founders are furthering its cause. There are signs that this is taking place as a group of twelve persons gathered during a block of afternoon free time on the final day to discuss plans for the fourth Baptist Muslim dialogue. The planning group includes local Baptist and Muslim leaders who expressed a commitment to advance the respect, understanding, and support of one another that surfaced during the event.

## ABCUSA Partnership with the National Institute for Civil Discourse

ABCUSA launched its partnership with the National Institute of Civil Discourse (NICD) in January. ABC was one of the first denominations to partner with NICD on the Initiative to Revive Civility. The **Initiative to Revive Civility (IRC)** is a multi-level approach to engaging individuals and communities in a model of civil conversations with the hope of building relationships that promote civility across political and cultural lines. The church as established institutions within communities can help facilitate these discussions and promote mutual respect for individuals. American Baptist have made a commitment through the years to encourage civil engagement through Mission Summit Conversations and engaged in challenging discussions to gain understanding through Baptist Talk. The Initiative to Revive Civility further enhances our ability to effectively engage with each other and members of the communities in which we serve on issues that affect our church and society.

Our national partners and regional executive ministers were introduced to NICD during the National Leadership Council meeting in April. I conducted a live interview with Dr. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, the Executive Director of NICD. Dr. Lukensmeyer discussed the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords as the impetus to launch NICD and she made the case for civil discourse as she reflected on the current state of the socio-political climate in our nation. She stressed the importance of the Initiative to Revive Civility for times such as this and for clergy to acknowledge the role the Church can play in promoting more civil conversations in our churches and communities. Members of the NLC were then able to ask questions. Following the NICD presentation, some regional ministers expressed interest in bringing the civil discourse model into their regions.

On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, Dr. Lukensmeyer joined Dr. Lee Spitzer for the ABC Michigan Annual Clergy Retreat held in Dewitt, Michigan. Dr. Spitzer and Dr. Lukensmeyer spent two days with pastors in the Region sharing their expertise and reflections on the theme, *Ministers of Reconciliation: Being the Church in a Divided World*. Dr. Lukensmeyer opened the Retreat with a presentation, *Incivility and Political Dysfunction: What Can We Do About It?* It was followed by a workshop by Dr. Spitzer and myself on four models for promoting civil discourse within the church and community, including a model of Christian Friendships within the Church and ABC's *Baptist Talk*. Conference participants had time to process the information in small groups and to ask thought-provoking questions. The first day of the retreat concluded with a session facilitated by Dr. Lukensmeyer where clergy engaged in dialogue as part of the NICD's National Week of Conversations that took place from April 22<sup>nd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>. Clergy had the opportunity to put the NICD methodology into practice and join hundreds of groups around the nation who also participated in the National Week of Conversations. Pastor Lara Freeburg, Vice President of the Michigan Minister's Council and conference coordinator commented, "It was so encouraging to hear how both our speakers were actively pursuing ways to improve the ways that people in our nation are having conversations about diversity. It gave me hope for our denomination and for our nation!" We are now working with other Regions to conduct similar workshops.

I am currently planning a Retreat with ABC of the Central Region to promote unity through civil conversations with Dr. Lukensmeyer and her team. NICD has ambassadors in some areas across the country; we are connecting those regions, like the Cleveland Baptist Association who expressed an interest, with NICD staff to explore how the Initiative to Revive Civility will be implemented and made accessible to their pastors and congregations. In April I was invited to attend the Philadelphia Baptist Association's Clergy Missiological Conversation forum.

The Initiative to Revive Civility will be integrated with the Baptist Talk conversations for the 2019 Biennial.

Respectfully Submitted: Marsha Scipio, AGS for Missional Initiatives and Partnerships

## ABCUSA Partnership with ecoAmerica

We have partnered with ecoAmerica; one of the leading advocacy and research organizations for climate change and eco-Justice in our nation. In order to build climate leadership in non-traditional sectors, ecoAmerica launched Blessed Tomorrow. Blessed Tomorrow brings faith leaders together to address climate change from a Biblical perspective and encourage churches to view climate solutions as a moral and spiritual imperative to care for God's creation. This initiative will improve our national presence on issues of climate change and institutionalize the work of the Creation Justice Network, the ABC Task Force established by the General Board.

Since finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding with Blessed Tomorrow, I have had several meetings with Anita Fete Crews, the director of Blessed Tomorrow, in consultation with Rev. Thomas Carr and Rev. Dr. Ian Mevorach, the leadership of the Creation Justice Network, to shape this partnership to meet the needs of our ABC Family. In February I was invited to join the Blessed Tomorrow Leadership Circle, which is a coalition of faith and denomination leaders who are active in the creation care movement and spearhead the work of Blessed Tomorrow.

The ABCUSA Creation Care Initiative was officially launched with the Pastoral Letter from our General Secretary, *Journeying Toward the Summit by the Sea: A Pastoral Letter on Environmental Care and Creation Justice* in observance of the 48<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. This Pastoral Letter was a collaborative effort; members of the steering committee of the Creation Justice Network provided critical input as Dr. Spitzer edited the final drafts for release.

We have committed to contributing to the ecoAmerica website Blog every other month. In April, Rev. Karen Bigelow, a member of the CJN steering committee submitted an article on climate change and food security.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> we co-sponsored and participated in the National Climate and Faith Leadership Forum: Committing to Climate Action and Advocacy, held at Auburn Seminary in NYC. Leaders in the field shared the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of climate concerns with other issues of social justice and strategized on how to localize the conversation to improve understanding and action within our congregations and communities about mitigating our climate impact and collaborating on advocacy opportunities.

We are launching a Creation Care section on the ABC website. Through this link members of the ABC Family can access resources to increase their climate knowledge - including the "Let's Talk Faith and Climate handbook" for clergy, climate advocacy resources, news articles on what ABC churches and others are doing to mitigate climate impact, and links to partner organizations for additional tools and information.

We are working with Blessed Tomorrow to create a video to encourage our churches to "choose to care" about God's creation. We have held brainstorming sessions with members of the Creation Justice Network and the staff of Blessed Tomorrow. Out of this brainstorming session emerged a creative brief for the video. We are now at the stage of developing a script and identifying clergy and congregations to participate. Blessed Tomorrow is coordinating the production team.

Blessed Tomorrow and the Creation Justice Network will partner with us to develop opportunities for clergy and the youth at the 2019 Biennial.

Respectfully Submitted:

Marsha Scipio, Associate General Secretary for Missional Initiatives and Partnerships

## Puerto Rico Sister Church Initiative

by Rev. Dr. Kevin A. Walden

Associate General Secretary for Congregational and Pastoral Effectiveness



We currently have 60 churches on the mainland and 40 in Puerto Rico in the sister church initiative. This is an exciting start.

Recently, Kevin joined the joint ABCNJ and ABCOPAD mission team to Puerto Rico and when not working at the job sites spent time visiting with pastors and congregations. We nearly doubled the amount of sister churches in the initiative from Puerto Rico.

It was extremely humbling hearing the stories and seeing destruction in both property and in the families of our American Baptist brothers and sisters. And yet, our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico are determined to give God glory for every little thing. It is incredibly inspiring.

By creating sister church relationships, we seek to achieve the following aims:

- 1) to provide spiritual and relational support for the churches of Puerto Rico as they recover from the 2017 hurricanes
- 2) to educate our mainland churches about the history, ministry contexts and challenges our Puerto Rican churches face, and
- 3) to celebrate what God is doing in Puerto Rico, in anticipation of the entire ABCUSA family gathering in San Juan for the 2021 Biennial Mission Summit

We envision the friendships between sister churches to include:

- 1) A three year commitment to pray for one another, communicate with one another (through letters, photos, email, skype, etc.) at least once every three months, and visit one another as travel plans permit.
- 2) An openness to ***communicate in both Spanish and English.***
- 3) Promote exchanges of friendship and encouragement between children of the sister churches (letter exchanges, art, craft gifts).
- 4) A willingness of mainland churches to participate in the 2021 Biennial in San Juan, and for Puerto Rican churches to welcome them for Sunday morning worship during that celebration.

*Sister churches are not expected to provide direct financial support. All funds for Puerto Rican relief are encouraged to flow through One Great Hour of Sharing. If a Puerto Rican sister church has reconstruction needs, we encourage volunteer relief mission projects to be coordinated through the Disaster Response ministry of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies and the Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico region.*



## Fresh Expressions Initiative

by Rev. Dr. Kevin A. Walden

Associate General Secretary for Congregational and Pastoral Effectiveness



Over 500 leaders attended the Fresh Expressions Conference in Reston, Virginia March 15-17, 2018. A Fresh Expression of Ministry is aimed at bringing the Gospel to unchurched and de-churched people who are uncomfortable with visiting traditional modes of church.

The exploration of the Fresh Expressions model of ministry is an initiative of the Office of the General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches, USA in fulfillment of one of our ministry priorities - to lead our family into new church growth, evangelism and creative service. Over ten percent of those attending the conference were American Baptists from eight regions, many of whom received a Palmer Grant for the purpose of the exploration.

Conference events highlighted testimonies, forums and workshops aimed at inspiring attendees to imagine Fresh Expressions in their communities. Inspiring testimonies came from leaders who are practitioners of Fresh Expressions of ministry in their neighborhoods. Some attendees were brought to joyful tears as they heard of the ways in which unchurched people were impacted with the Gospel. One of the most surprising comments that was shared repeatedly was that a fresh expression of ministry does not take a lot of money to accomplish. A fresh expression does, however, take passion and vision for the lost.

In response to what she experienced, Lori Jennings, a lay leader from GraceCrossing in Phoenixville, PA shared, *"The Fresh Expressions Conference was a place that I felt I was surrounded by people that understood me and had the same heart as I do to reach those far from God. Even having that heart, I didn't know what to do with this passion. I was able to sit through workshops that gave real life, tangible ways to make a difference. It was freeing."* Lori had started a fresh expression of ministry in her church, but didn't know what to call it or where to find support. The conference and the support of her fellow American Baptists gave her hope and inspiration.

Pastor Isabel Rivera of First Spanish-American Baptist, Nashua, New Hampshire, attended the sessions designed for Spanish speaking leaders. Pastor Isabel is leading a fresh expression in her neighborhood, and she too was struggling for support. She said, *"I met lots of people and they were all feeling just like me!"* Fresh Expressions national director, Dr. Chris Backert, told us that some of the most exciting new fresh expressions of ministry are occurring in the Latin American

communities. Several of the regions who explored Fresh Expressions will be hosting Vision Days where a Pioneer leader and coach will help them explore the ministry concepts.

Fresh Expressions Video of ABC Church: NextGen: <https://youtu.be/ervFk73QwHU>  
To Explore Fresh Expressions: [www.freshexpressionsus.org](http://www.freshexpressionsus.org)

Fresh Expressions Reflections by American Baptist Executive Ministers

*The Steeple to Street conference was energizing! As an executive minister I found the cross currents of denomination, age, gender, race, and ethnicity enlivening. It reminded me of how expansive is Christ's Kingdom and the "Kingdom" keeps breaking in!*

Rev. Dale Edwards, ABC of Vermont and New Hampshire

*Fresh Expressions gives existing churches and groups of churches a method for discovering new ways to express Christ in our changing context. This is a gift to the entire Church.*

Rev. Dr. Robert Cochran, D.C. Baptist Convention

*The Fresh Expressions National Gathering provided an excellent overview of what the Fresh Expressions movement is all about. Without a doubt we are living in a new mission era. Embracing this reality leads to a quest for new approaches in church planting, leadership development and evangelistic outreach. These critical topics, and more, were part of the conversations that unfolded through the worship experiences, forums and workshops offered at this conference. This was a wonderfully designed event, enriching in a multitude of ways. I'm grateful that our team was able to participate.*

Rev. Dr. Charles Revis, Mission Northwest

*The whole event was wonderful. A number of thoughts keep flowing through my mind that were brought up at the conference. 1. When we think of a church, we think of people coming to it. When we think of a mission, we think of people going out from it. I am starting to think of all of our churches as missions, and all of their people as missionaries. 2. Another comment that keeps me thinking is this one, "we are not planting churches, but we are planting the Gospel". What I loved about the conference is that the plantings of Fresh Expressions is something that every church can be involved in, and the financial cost would be minimal. 3. The final thing that I heard over and over again was the dependence on the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. Great, but a little scary for those who like to be in control.*

Rev. Paul Gibson, ABC of The Great Rivers Region

*The American Baptist Churches of New Jersey is located at the intersection of several major global American cities: New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, DC. If the church is to remain vigorously present and relevant in its communities, it needs to have the capacity to reach a new generation of peoples with the gospel but whose language and hearts were not cradled in established, traditional churches - and who will never go to those churches. Fresh Expressions is one of the movements in this new mandate from whom ABCNJ wants to hear and learn. The "Steeple to Street" conference in Reston, VA was an excellent beginning.*

Rev. Dr. Elmo Familiaran, ABC New Jersey (Interim)

## The Leadership Project

by Rev. Dr. Kevin A. Walden

Associate General Secretary for Congregational and Pastoral Effectiveness

In an American Baptist context, pastoral leaders are called out from within the congregation to provide leadership. Pastoral leaders, while called to leadership are considered equal in the body with the rest of the congregation. A called out one typically believes they hear the call into leadership from the Lord, but then that call is affirmed by the congregation. The call therefore is a combination of both the individual and those who know their gifts and ability to serve. The local congregation issues both a preliminary license to preach and later the opportunity for ordination. Pastoral leaders remain in that accountability relationship with a local congregation their whole career.



### Recognized ABC Professional Leadership Status

	Female	Male	Total
ABC Ordination (7)	1299	5529	6828
Ordination Recognized by ABC (6)	170	1351	1521
Ordained by Region Standards (5)	26	240	266
Ordained by Association Standards (5)	10	118	128
Ordained by Local Church Standards (5)	79	315	394
Other Denomination Ordination (4)	178	1466	1644
Commissioned (3)	65	372	437
Certified Lay Minister (2)	74	168	242
Licensed (1)	317	1853	2170
Lay Professional (0)	1479	1627	3106
	3697	13039	16736



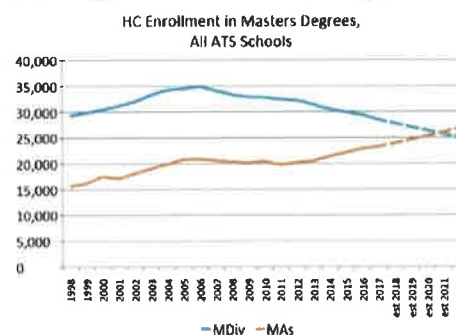
Professional Leaders in the ABC – Women and Men leading faithfully by the content of their character from all levels of education and out of a strong sense of a spirit-led calling

Experientially, denominational leadership have tried to maintain an equity in licensing and ordination standards throughout the growth of the denomination. This has been challenging as those practices and processes are governed on the local congregational level. As regions developed, they became instrumental in helping coordinate processes. However, it is still a challenge to maintain equity from region to region. Since 1965,

a standard ordination processes includes a Bachelors plus a Masters of Divinity degree. However, out of our currently active 16,736 pastoral leaders, only 40.7% have attained that level of ordination or equivalency.<sup>1</sup> ABC congregations seem to value education, but the strong need for leadership and impassioned calls encourage them to consider leaders who do not rise to the standard set in 1965.

A recent article from Religion News Service<sup>2</sup> noted that over the past 20 years there appears to be a drop in seminarians seeking a 3-year M.Div. degree in favor of a 2-year M.A. degree in religion. Our experience denominationally suggests that this is due to several reasons: the desire and need to work while in seminary, the desire for seminary to be readily applicable to everyday ordinary life and ministry, the cost of the seminary programs in an ever-increasing part-time vocational ministry setting, the willingness of congregations to call someone without an M.Div. degree. Internal statistics show agreement with the statistics above and a growing increase in non-ordained clergy.

### HC Enrollment in Masters Degrees, All ATS Schools



Historically, the denomination has leaned on the spiritual formation of local pastors and churches to provide the foundation for pastoral leaders who will thrive. Some leaders were wonderful mentors and provided great opportunities for congregation members to discern and follow the Lord's call into

<sup>1</sup> ABCUSA denominational study of Recognized Professional Leadership Status (leadership credentials), March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> May 11, 2018: <https://religionnews.com/2018/05/11/more-seminary-students-leave-the-master-of-divinity-behind/#>

ministry. Experientially, seminarians share with us that although they felt a call into ministry and are seeking formal education; they are feeling ill equipped in the spiritual formation aspect of being a follower of Jesus. This is true for both our young seminarians, but it is also true for many in our congregations. There is a breakdown between Biblical knowledge or orthodoxy and the application of the Christian faith in everyday life or orthopraxy.

Dr. Archibald Hart, founder and dean emeritus of the Fuller Theological Seminary school of Psychology, has tracked clergy in many denominations for years. In a lecture in 2010, Dr. Hart stated that in his studies he has found that only 20% of newly called clergy finish ministry well. The challenges as were stated in his lecture are that newly called pastors: 1) Find the call to ministry and the practice of ministry too disparate, 2) Believe they are not equipped for the stresses and challenges of ministry personally and professionally, 3) Feedback from their spouse and children communicate that their professional call is interfering with their personal call to lead the family or 4) Experience a personal or professional failure, which demands they conclude their ministry.<sup>3</sup> Experientially, these statistics seem to ring true to those in regional ministry, and it is of great concern to our denominational leaders.

We are continuing to study and are working to implement strategies to work alongside our regional leaders to encourage and equip American Baptist pastoral leaders and congregations.

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<sup>3</sup> Lecture, Dr. Archibald Hart, Fuller Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Course: The Pastor's Personal Health, June, 2010.

## **OFFICE OF REGIONAL MINISTRIES (Activity from Jan - June of 2018)**

**Unity:** The National Leadership Council meeting received positive reviews from the regional and national participants. The NLC meeting began with a farewell dinner for recent/upcoming retirees including John Williams, former Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region, Marcia Patton, former Executive Minister of the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches, Marshall Peters, Executive Minister of the Mid-American Baptist Churches, and Virginia Holmstrom, former Executive Director of American Baptist Women's Ministries.

According to ABCUSA Bylaws, two of the purposes of the NLC are to build and foster relationships among the staff and suggest means of improving the functioning of the denomination. This year's meeting focused upon those two priorities as various entities shared updates and dialogued with one another both formally and informally. The participants also began a discussion about the primary source of funding for OGS, namely United Mission.

**Strengthening Our Regions:** Over the last several years, I have averaged working with about three executive minister search committees at any given time. Currently, there are six openings among our 33 regions. It is a pleasure to work with each of these regions at their varying stages of progress and I am happy to report that all of the searches are going well. ABC of Mid-America, ABC of the Central Region, and ABC of New Jersey have recently narrowed their applicant lists to a smaller number of potential candidates and each of these regions is on track to conduct interviews this summer. ABC of Rochester/Genesee, ABC of Ohio, and ABC of Metro Chicago are in the earlier stages of their searches. The Ohio region is continuing to grieve the loss of Rev. Dr. Ernest Jones who died earlier this year. Dr. Jones also previously served on the Board of General Ministries.

**Growth:** I write a leadership development monthly column for the executive ministers to share with their leaders and congregations in whatever form they choose to disseminate it. This year, I am focusing upon the theme of "Connections" for these columns and thus far the topics have included building appropriate connections between retired and newly called pastors, ways to engage regional board members more effectively, connecting with God and others through the fruits of the Spirit, and reviews of two books, *Co-Active Leadership* by Karen and Henry Kimsey-House and *Faithful Presence* by David Fitch. I also reviewed a book entitled, *Conflict Management and the Apostle Paul*, co-authored by one of our own region staff, Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula.

**Partnerships:** I helped to facilitate a meeting of 62 Baptist and Muslim leaders during the week of April 16-19, at our ABA in Green Lake. The 18 inches of snow that arrived the day prior to the event caused delays for many participants, but only two were forced to cancel their trip entirely. The goal of the event was to partner a Baptist congregational leader and a Muslim religious leader for an ongoing dialogue. Participants formed several of these partnerships and made plans to combat injustice and violence upon returning home. I, personally, was surprised by the level of discrimination that these Muslim leaders experience on a regular basis. Executive Minister Doug Avilesbernal, Executive Minister for the Evergreen Baptist Association said, "Prejudice is unavoidable. This week I learned what happens when we challenge it within and without." Rev. Kathy Pickett, pastor of Prairie Baptist Church added, "Meaning for me was discovered in the rise of positive energy, healthy questions asked, and shared laughter and respect, as new friendships developed around the table of common meals."

--C. Jeff Woods, Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries



## AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY & TRANSITION MINISTRIES

### ABWIM

**Vision:** ABWIM seeks the full participation and full partnership of men and women in ministry in which both women and men are able to fully utilize their God-given gifts and fully live out their God-given call.

#### **Some Highlights:**

- **Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges** - This initiative began in response to an invitation from Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili to build relationships with women in ministry in the Republic of Georgia. The focus is on breaking barriers that deny, diminish, and denigrate women and religious minorities and the image of God which we each bear, and building bridges amongst groups that have been marginalized or denied place in the power structure of society. A return pilgrimage is planned.
- **“Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready.”** - ABWIM in partnership with AB Women’s Ministries is planning an event to celebrate the rich legacy of women in ministry and to work towards a future where all God’s people—men and women—can fully live out their call to ministry. The culmination of the planning process will be a denomination-wide celebration **June 16 – 19, 2020**, marking **the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Women in Ministry Project**, which grew out of the first Women in Ministry conference in 1980.
- **Sacred Safe Space** - This emerging new denomination-wide initiative will educate, empower and equip pastors, church leaders and laity to respond to acts of violence, abuse and exploitation, and to implement policies and procedures to insure that our sacred spaces are also safe spaces.

### TRANSITION MINISTRIES

**The goal** of Transition Ministries ABCUSA is to partner with regions in resourcing churches during times of transition in a way which enhances their ministry and empowers them to journey into the future as vibrant missional congregations.

**Our mission** is to provide intentional interim ministers who are adept and experienced in leading churches through transitions. These interim pastors guide the congregation on a journey which involves celebrating their history, clarifying their identity, articulating their mission, and moving into a fruitful future.

As this ministry resource continues to develop, Rev. Dr. Larry Swain continues to serve as the Transition Ministries Training Coordinator. Currently we are planning an introductory training event in Rhode Island. Conversations are underway for Level 1 training in several regions as well as the first Level 2 training event. If your region would like to host a training event, please contact me.

In both of these ministry resource areas—ABWIM and Transition Ministries—I am thankful for the wisdom, guidance and support of General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Lee Spitzer, the ABCUSA Leadership Team, the ABWIM Advisory Team and the Board of General Ministries—without whom none of this could happen. Thank-you!

Patricia P. Hernandez, Associate General Secretary, ABWIM and Transition Ministries

JUNE 2018



*A mission-focused, value-driven strategic Human Resource Management service made available from The American Baptist Home Mission Societies for American Baptist regional and national organizations. We are committed to deliver excellent HR services*

*grounded in American Baptist values and mission.*

Since the November 2017 report, we continued to provide ongoing HR services to employees by supporting their salary and benefits needs. HRMATTERS serves ABCUSA as well as the AMOs – AB Historical Society and AB Women’s Ministries and the AB Computer Center. We have continued to focus our energies on benefits and staffing. These months have seen a number of staff transitions in various organizations. We have sought to provide compassionate and compliant support to executive leadership for each of these transitions.

A key project with ABCUSA has been working with the General Secretary to review the current ABCUSA employee handbook. Particular attention has been placed on employee benefits, paid time off and training guidelines. In addition to updating the employee handbook, we have collaborated with the General Secretary to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century staffing model that supports the organization’s mission and vision while affirming the experience and expertise of existing staff.

One of the most pressing needs for ABCUSA is the implementation of a performance management strategy. The first step is to ensure that position descriptions are up-to-date and supporting the overall organizational priorities. The next key step is to ensure a formal process for evaluation and feedback is in place. The third step, equally essential, is to provide ongoing training and development opportunities for ABCUSA staff. This will be a core component of the updated employee handbook in order to ensure the retention of top talent to deliver on the missional objectives of ABCUSA.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Miraz, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-CSP  
Human Resources Executive



The most significant event on our calendar this spring was the Legacy of Walter Rauschenbusch conference in early April. About 150 people attended the opening night's keynote speaker and the reception ABHS hosted. Many people visited our Reading Room and looked at the exhibit on Rauschenbusch we prepared. Overall, the conference was a great success. We videorecorded most of the speakers and are preparing those videos to upload to the ABHS YouTube channel.

We've hosted a number of visitors to the Historical Society. We welcomed some of our partners, a delegation from International Ministries. Executive Director Sharon Koh and Associate Executive Director of Mission Advancement Zofia Dripps had not visited the Historical Society before. Our preparations included pulling out important and interesting records from the ABFMS/IM collections, as well as our 16<sup>th</sup>-century Polish Bible (Zofia is a native of Poland) and photos from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century missionaries to Swatow, China, where Sharon's family was from. We also hosted the Baptist history class from McAfee School of Theology and have had several researchers. Other visitors included a group of 50 men on a Baptist history tour of Georgia, and a program manager from AIB TV, an Atlanta-based cable television station. AIB-TV is doing a series on historical societies in the area; they recently came and filmed for a program scheduled to air in July.

We had a table in the exhibit hall at the annual meeting of the American Baptist Churches of the South (ABCOTS), which gave me the opportunity to meet some pastors and lay people from this region. We would love to supply an ABHS exhibit to your regional meeting, or to speak to your region's meeting or Ministers' Council. Please invite us!

Perhaps the most exciting news is that we completed our search for a digital archivist! We anticipate that a new staff member will be joining us in July. This is another step in our digital archives project, funded by donors to our *At Your Fingertips* campaign. We are about 85% of the way to our goal of \$550,000; I invite you to give generously and help us complete this campaign successfully.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Priscilla E. Eppinger". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Priscilla E. Eppinger  
Executive Director



## ABCUSA Ministers Council Report

May 1, 2018

Dear Dr. Spitzer and Members of the Board of General Ministries,

The Ministers Council Board has been planning for some time to restructure the national Council to live within our means. That requires an annual budget of \$75,000, in contrast to the \$250,000 budget of recent years. Because both our Administrative Assistant and our Executive Director found alternate placements in 2016, it seemed wise to prioritize the question of a sustainable way of functioning. We are in the midst of that process. Our general endowment at the end of 2017 was \$691,314 and we are striving to keep it in tact.

A part of the search for lowering expenses in the computer age was ending our contractual agreement with ABCUSA to provide support services, some of which are available online to non-profits for very little cost. As of January 2018, the national office of the Ministers Council moved to a space in the Baptist Church of West Chester (ABC). One part-time employee uses this office, our Member Services Coordinator Lisa Simpson, who began February 2018. Ms. Simpson brings experience with small businesses, data management, customer service, and American Baptist Churches.

The change in location does not alter our AMO relationship to ABC. We are fully committed to American Baptist Churches USA, regions, and churches and will cooperate in every way within our means with programs and emphases.

Our current plan is to NOT hire an Executive Director. We are exploring these ideas:

1. a volunteer Ministers Council Ambassador whose expenses will be paid as he/she represents ministerial leaders at national gatherings,
2. maximizing the internet for connecting and programming, and
3. distributing endowment income funds in partnership with other ABC entities that serve ministerial leaders.

The best plan that emerges will be voted on by the Chapter Representatives at the 2018 Annual Meeting, which will be held in November (rather than August) in conjunction with the 2018 Space for Grace in Philadelphia.

National Ministers Council has also hosted a Lenten prayer series, a "Self-care" webinar, and a visioning call on Health Care Support for clergy. We are conducting a special project on outreach to inactive and struggling chapters and gathering data on Together In Ministry groups prior to offering means of support for both existing and new groups.

With God's guidance, we will remain a vital and effective means of encouraging excellence in ministerial leadership.

Yours,

*Darla Turlington*

Darla ("Dee Dee") Turlington, President  
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### **ABMEN-USA ACTIVITIES AND PLANS FOR 2018**

ABMen-USA Disaster Relief Teams spent several weeks in Puerto Rico in both February and March 2018. They repaired and or replaced the roofs of several churches. Jack Cobb, ABMen-USA National Disaster Relief Coordinator, is in consultations with Ms. Vicki Goff of ABHMS, working to determine the dates and locations for future ABMen-USA Disaster Relief Teams to continue providing assistance in Puerto Rico in 2018 and beyond. Work also continues in Texas and Louisiana.

The ABMen-USA Bi-annual Disaster Relief Training Conference took place in Nebraska in March; Volunteers returned to Green Lake Conference Center for the "Work Party" the first week of April; ABMen-USA President, Bob Slechta and Vice President, Bill Morningstar, traveled to Montana in May to present a "Leadership Training Workshop" to the men there; President Bob Slechta and Executive Director Lucky Ray will travel to North Dakota in June to present various topical "Workshops" to the men during their annual "Roundup"; We planned to return to Bacone College in Muskogee, OK the second week of June to continue our efforts to improve the facilities there, but that mission has been postponed for another time; In September, we will return to Green Lake Conference Center for the Annual ABMen-USA General Board Meeting September 5-7 and then, also at Green Lake Conference center, beginning Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup> through Sunday, September 9<sup>th</sup> for the Annual ABMen-USA National Conference with keynote speaker, Dr. Jerry Cain, former President of Judson University and guest speaker, Dr. Lee Spitzer, General Secretary, ABC-USA; THEN beginning Sunday afternoon on September 9<sup>th</sup>, we begin the September "Work Week" for our ABMen-USA Volunteers at GLCC; Plans are being made for an October "Workshop" for the men in Connecticut; October 14<sup>th</sup> is Men's Sunday during which ABMen around the country will inform their congregations of our national Ministries and our Mission; A Mission trip to Nicaragua, sponsored by ABMen-USA, is being planned for November 2-11, 2018.

ABMen-USA will continue to partner with ABHMS in helping to provide assistance to Puerto Rico through the "Rebuild, Restore and Renew" Ministry. We are also working together to obtain a couple of "Shower / Laundry" trailers to be used during our Disaster Relief efforts. Also, ABMen-USA will partner with Green Lake Conference Center in planning for a joint effort to help restore some of the facilities at GLCC.

In His Service,

Lucky Ray

Executive Director, ABMen-USA

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We strive to be "the hands and feet of Christ" by being actively engaged in discipleship and building relationships through Missions, Evangelism and Nurturing activities.