

## **ABC and the ACT NOW to End Racism Rally**

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, American Baptists from all across the country joined our faith partners on the Mall in Washington, DC for the *ACT Now: Unite to End Racism Rally*. April 4<sup>th</sup> marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The event was organized by the National Council of Churches. The ACT Now Rally was the main event to launch the Truth and Racial Justice Initiative - an ecumenical effort to address racism and promote the healing of communities in our nation. ACT Now – *Awaken to the truth of the pervasive presence of racism; Confront racism through truth-telling and action; and Transform hearts, minds and behaviors that perpetuate racism.*

I represented ABCUSA on the Point Persons Team helping to strategize and mobilize churches and organizations to support the event. Regional Executives, Dr. Cheryl Dudley and Dr. Elmo Familiaran worked with me to promote the event among the regions and members of the ABC family. On the day of the event I served on the Hospitality Team, coordinating special guests' registration.

American Baptist from as far east as Rhode Island to our brothers and sisters from Wisconsin and Chicago came together for the Rally. We coordinated a bus from Valley Forge. Staff members from ABHMS and IM joined us on this excursion to the nation's capital. Associate General Secretaries, Dr. Kevin Walden and Dr. Patricia Hernandez hosted our ABC family and guests as they arrived on the Mall at the ABC tent. We had a chance to connect as a family and to introduce Rally attendees to the ABC family.

The commemoration of the assassination of Dr. King began at 7:00am that morning with a Silent Prayer Walk from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial to the stage on the Mall. Dr. Lee Spitzer joined with other denomination leaders, clergy and staff of the NCC as they marched to the beat of drums, remembering Dr. King's sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct." The March was followed by an interfaith service. The Rally commenced on the main Stage around 9am with several featured guest speakers and entertainers including Dr. Jim Wallis, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, Rabbi Jonah Posner, Dr. Jennifer Harvey, Danny Glover, Marvin Sapp and Yolanda Adams. Heads of Communion were scheduled to speak, but were cancelled in an effort to condense the program due to inclement weather. The event concluded with moving remarks and a challenge from Bishop Darrin Moore, Chairperson of the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches.

The ACT Now Rally was the main event of the three-day launch of the Truth and Racial Justice Initiative. On Tuesday evening, NCC held a service in collaboration with the St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, DC: "Then and Now: An Ecumenical Gathering to End Racism." The service featured several heads of communion and the board members of the NCC. The three-day event concluded with a National Day of Advocacy and Action where attendees were able to participate in workshops on various topics and visit their state representatives.

Racism stands against love. God's love for all humanity, Jesus' love for his Church and our love for each other. ABC will work with our ecumenical partners to respond to this clarion call.

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

In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly. Psalm 5:3, NIV

This is a season of transition for American Baptist Women's Ministries: Virginia Holmstrom, our esteemed leader, retired at the end of February. Rev. Gina Jacobs-Strain began as the new Executive Director on March 1. She is serving with great enthusiasm and intention as she visits ABWM groups from California to New York State to New Jersey to Rhode Island, leading workshops, worship, and preaching. She has noted that this is a period in which she is looking back at the history of American Baptist Women's Ministries and at the same time leaning forward. She is listening to the voices of the women, young adult women, and girls sharing relevant issues and their persistent hope to make a positive impact on the lives of women and girls and therefore our denomination. AB Women's Ministries has not wavered in their compassion and commitment to share the Gospel, to do the Gospel, and to equip and empower women and girls to lead in our churches, communities, country, and beyond our borders.

Women have and will always be at the forefront of issues that are relevant to both our denomination and our country. We were thinking ahead in the 1950s about social justice, leadership skills, economic power, and equity for women globally. We knew that the church's biggest resource, women, must be grounded in the word of God so that they could build God's kingdom by working within all capacities of the local church as well as in our communities. We continue to share the powerful love of Jesus Christ, mentor young women and girls, and be open to authentic conversation. ABWM is looking to build bridges and open gateways as we deepen relationships with our denominational partners, sustain interfaith and ecumenical dialog, and seek partnerships with like-minded organizations. We are looking forward to collaborating with the Office of the General Secretary as we launch Sacred Safe Spaces nationally.

#### *Upcoming Events:*

In 2018, we invite women to reboot, to soak in the word of the Lord, and to fellowship with sisters in Christ at the American Baptist Women's Ministries annual conference, "FEEL: Fully Exploring and Engaging in God's Love," and "Transitions," a national gathering for girls (ages 12-18). American Baptist Women Ministries continues our emphasis on building communities and intercultural competency and we anticipate joyful connections sister to sister and heart to heart. FEEL and Transitions will be held at Judson University, Elgin, Illinois, July 19-22. We will co-host our annual conference with American Baptist Home Mission Society Intercultural Ministries and American Baptist Women in Ministry. We will also pause in September for our Harvesting Shalom Wellness Retreat, September 28-30, at Canonicus Camp and Conference Center, Exeter, Rhode Island, for a personal spiritual and wellness inventory and plenty of time to exhale. We will co-host that event with American Baptist Women in Ministry. Each event is a balance of study, fellowship, and, of course, quiet time for refectation so that you will be renewed. We are a vital partner in the planning of the Biennial Mission Summit in 2019 and the 2020 Women's Conference.

Our mission has not changed, yet the issues and the ways we lift up women and young girls is evolving. Most importantly, we are an organism of breathing and loving women, united in our zeal for the Lord! We are praying and dreaming big dreams with expectation!