

Ministry Update for the BGM Executive Committee

Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer

March 1, 2018

This has been a very productive season of ministry for the Office of the General Secretary. On January 1, 2018 we welcomed Marsha Scipio and Kevin Walden to the team, and Pat Hernandez, Tina Turner and Bridget Lipin began serving in their new capacities. The Leadership team has held two multi-day meetings, and I am pleased to report that collectively, they are a great team who are eager to support one another's ministries.

Partnerships and Collaborative Initiatives

Since November's Board meetings, the team has made significant progress in pursuing the new partnerships and collaborative relationships we have been talking about:

- Carolyn Luckensmeyer, director of the *National Institute for Civil Discourse*, will speak to the NLC in April, via GotoMeeting. She will also co-present with Lee and Marsha at the ABC Michigan Pastors Event in April.
- The partnership with *ecoAmerica* and *Blessed Tomorrow* is progressing well. We will be adding an ecology-focused section to our website, creating a video and we hope to work together on curriculum for the youth track at the 2019 Biennial. Marcia and others will be part of a major ecumenical ecoAmerica planning meeting in May in NYC.
- Approximately 30 ABC pastors and regional staff will be attending the national *Fresh Expressions* conference in March 2018. This is an excellent result, partially funded by a Palmer grant.
- The US Holocaust Memorial Center, AB Historical Society, DC Baptist Convention and OGS are collaborating on a clergy education event, *Local Churches and Global Moral Issues: Resources for ABC Pastoral Leaders*. It will be held on September 10-12, 2018 in Washington DC. The program will include a 2-day workshop at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, led by the Museum's Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust, and on day 3, a half-day wisdom gathering dialogue with DC Baptist Convention leaders. Participation will be limited to 24 ABC pastoral leaders, in order to facilitate in depth conversation. The cohort will explore how our churches can become bold witnesses that communicate Jesus' command to love our neighbors.

OGS continues to partner in significant ways with existing ecumenical ministry partners. Some highlights:

- Marsha, Kevin and I had an excellent lunch meeting with the new *Baptist World Alliance* General Secretary, Elijah Brown. I will be attending the BWA meetings in July 2018.
- Following a meeting with Jim Winkler, Executive Director of the *National Council of Churches*, OGS has spearheaded ABCUSA's participation in the ACT 50th anniversary commemoration of Martin Luther King's assassination in Washington DC (April 3-5, 2018). We are working on a bus from the Mission Center, and in collaboration with Cheryl Dudley (Metro NY) and Elmo Familiaran (ABCNJ), have invited all Executive Ministers to encourage participation.

- In league with other Baptist organizations, I have encouraged our members to act on behalf of Dreamers. See <http://www.abc-usa.org/2018/02/26/american-baptist-leaders-join-baptist-leaders-in-urging-baptists-to-call-elected-reps-to-protect-dreamers/>.
- Jeff Woods has been spearheading the organizing of the *Baptist-Muslim Dialogue*, which will take place in Green Lake in April 2018.

OGS, in partnership with members our ABCUSA family, has been involved in several initiatives, including:

- OGS, in partnership with Puerto Rican Baptists and ABHMS, has launched the *Sister Church* project. See <http://www.abc-usa.org/2018/02/22/iglesias-bautistas-de-puerto-rico-abcusa-sister-churches-initiative-announced/>.
- Pat Hernandez, Associate General Secretary for Women in Ministry, this week convened a planning group representing the entire ABCUSA family, as we plan for the *Women in Ministry 2020 40th anniversary celebration* and conference in Green Lake Conference Center. The theme is *Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready.*
- In response to the heightened sensitivity to *sexual harassment*, I have brought together a working group to address this issue. Pat has agreed to take the lead on behalf of OGS, and AB Women (Virginia Holmstrom and now Gina Jacobs-Strain) have been involved since the conversation began in December. I am pleased to share that the leaders of AB Men have also agreed to be a part of this effort, which concerns us all.
- In May 2018, I will be participating in an ABCUSA delegation traveling to China. This trip is being organized by IM.
- As General Secretary, I convene the *National Executive Council*. This is a challenge, for several reasons. When I arrived in June 2017, the group was dispirited, unsure of why they should meet, and weary of focusing on selling the Mission Center. I am, however, encouraged about the progress we have made since then. We are seeking to refocus on strategic issues and cooperation. Most significantly, our last meeting on February 27 generated excellent creativity on how to organize the April 2018 National Leadership Council meeting.
- Jeff Woods has worked closely with me and the rest of the Leadership team on reconstructing the agenda of the *National Leadership Council* meeting in Green Lake. Based on the input from NEC and REMC, we have provided significant new space for Executive Ministers to contribute to the meeting (rather than passively listening to reports from national partners) and for the beginning of the strategic discussion we need to initiate on the future of United Mission. Our ABCIS staff person, Geri Blier, has been most helpful in providing long-term trend charts to help frame the discussions.
- The impact of the pastoral letters I send out continues to grow. The latest, on "A Higher Way: Baptists and Our Neighbors" (see <http://www.abc-usa.org/2018/02/01/a-higher-way-american-baptists-and-our-neighbors/>) has been widely distributed by regional executive ministers, other organizations and churches/pastors/individuals. I am particularly pleased that Executive Ministers played a key role in creating the letter, which contributed no doubt to their willingness to share it with their constituency. I

hope it serves as a good example of how to fuse the harmonizing and prophetic roles of the Office of the General Secretary.

OGS Team Initiatives

The OGS team members are working creatively – and collaboratively – on projects, including:

- *United Mission* continues to receive our attention, as we restructure and indeed, resurrect, how we promote this offering. Tina Turner has done an excellent job in creating new materials, including:
 1. Beautiful new table tri-fold displays, which we will deploy at all events OGS staff attends.
 2. Banners highlighting our mission priorities.
 3. United Mission inserts that are both region-specific and general.
- Bridget Lipin, as *Communications* Coordinator, and the team have been working on the refreshing of the www.abc-usa.org website, to bring it up to date in terms of look, structure and ease of use. She is also working diligently to wind down the operations of the Computer Center.
- ABCIS and Computer Center staff have been collaborating on an extraordinary updating of ABCIS tentatively called “ABC-Core.” More than an updating of the ABCIS database, it will provide ABCUSA/OGS with a social media community platform incorporating elements of Facebook, LinkedIn and Slack. It could revolutionize the way we and regions communicate with clergy!
- Kevin Walden and ABCIS staff have been mining data on *ABC Clergy Ordination* status. We believe this will be helpful to regions and partners, as we seek to support and provide continuing education to those serving our churches.
- Laura Miraz and I have been working on updating the *OGS Personnel Manual and the Salary Grid*. We have also been working with *Office and Travel* to hire a third Meeting Planner.

Pastoral Visits and Speaking Engagements

In fulfillment of the promises I made during the call process, I have intentionally prioritized my travel to reflect the needs of our ABCUSA family and to minister pastorally to those needs.

- For 2018, I have scheduled just three international trips: China (May), BWA in Zurich (July) and the Philippines, to represent ABCUSA at the 75th anniversary commemoration of the Hopevale martyrdom (December).
- Thus far, I have scheduled pastoral trips to the following regions in 2018: Puerto Rico (January), Connecticut (February), Vermont/New Hampshire and Wisconsin (March), Michigan, Nebraska and the 4 region Prairie Conference (April), Massachusetts (May), Kansas (June), ABC Dakotas, ABC Rocky Mountains (September), and Ohio, ABCOFLASH, ABCOPAD, Wisconsin and Arizona (October). Other team members will represent OGS at regional events I have not been invited to; KJ and Tina have been organizing this representational initiative. I have also been invited to other events, such as the AB Men’s National Retreat (September) and the Rhythms of the Spirit Retreat (October).

- In January 2018, I met with Baptist-related university presidents in Florida. There is a clear desire on the part of many to have closer working relationships with ABCUSA/OGS. In February 2018, I had the privilege of being hosted by Duke Divinity School and its Baptist House, led by Baptist scholar Curtis Freeman. I was asked to speak about *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust* and it was well received. My private conversations with Curtis has led to two significant introductions to Baptist leaders I have not yet met. Following the NLC meetings in April, I will be the speaker for Northern Seminary's Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Thank you for the privilege of serving ABCUSA, OGS, and the BGM board!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee B. Spitzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer
ABCUSA General Secretary