

# **TOGETHER IN MISSION**

## **The Report Of The Study Commission On Relationships As Amended and Adopted By The General Board on December 9, 1976**

The current American Baptist denominational structures were established by vote of Delegates at the 1972 Convention held in Denver, Colorado. This vote dealt with the ABC's national bodies and called for further study, within five years, regarding the ABC's affiliated bodies (regions, states, cities). To answer this call, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches, USA in 1974 created a Study Commission on Relationships.

The Study Commission on Relationships made its initial report in June 1976 and a final report in December 1976.

At its December 1976 meeting the General Board received, modified, and approved the Study Commission's recommendations. The approved recommendations reflect changes needed in current denominational structures to establish covenantal relationships among the Regions, State Conventions, Standard City Societies and the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.

### **NAME OF THE DENOMINATION**

The denomination's name shall be retained and reinterpreted to include two constituencies.

### **CONSTITUENCIES OF THE ABC/USA**

The constituencies of the American Baptist Churches in the USA shall be Cooperating Churches and Region/State/City Corporations whose Boards have entered the Covenant of Relationships.

(In this document "ABC" should be read as "American Baptist Churches in the USA"; "R/S/C" should be read as "Region/State Convention/City Society.")

### **Cooperating Churches**

The General and Regional Boards shall adopt common criteria for a "Cooperating Church."

Regional Boards shall receive and dismiss local congregations as Cooperating Churches of the R/S/C and of the ABC according to the common criteria for a Cooperating Church.

After receiving a local church's application to be a Cooperating Church, a Regional Board shall begin action within six months and shall act within one year of the receipt of the application, reporting its decision to the General Board. If the Regional Board does not act within one year, either the Regional Board or the applying church shall send the application to the General Board.

When the General Board receives a report that a Regional Board has either denied or not acted upon the application of a local church to be a Cooperating Church of the R/S/C and of the ABC, the General Board shall decide whether to receive the church as a Cooperating Church of the ABC (but not of the R/S/C), according to the common criteria for a Cooperating Church.

### **Region/State/City Corporations**

(No change from SCODS.)

## **WRITTEN EXPRESSIONS OF THE NEW RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Covenant of Relationships and Statements of Agreement**

The new relationships shall be recorded in a written "Covenant of Relationships Among the General, National and Regional Boards of the American Baptist Churches," with some attached "Statements of Agreement."

The Covenant of Relationships shall include at least the following items:

- a) A statement of the biblical expectation to be in covenant with God and with each other
- b) The covenanting parties and their constituencies
- c) The theological and operational assumptions of the plan of relationships
- d) The process for ratifying the Covenant
- e) The process for amending the Covenant
- f) The process for withdrawing from the Covenant

The initial Statements of Agreement shall deal with such items as:

- a) Responsibilities of the General Board
- b) ABC Functions of National Boards
- c) ABC Functions of Regional Boards
- d) ABC Functions of Both National and Regional Boards
- e) Common Budget Covenant
- f) Secretaries of the ABC
- g) Selection Process for Executive Ministers of Covenanting R/S/C's
- h) Appraisal Process for Executive Ministers of Covenanting R/S/C's
- i) Adjudication of Differences
- j) Review of Covenant of Relationships and Amendment of Statements of Agreement
- k) Ratification of Decisions
- l) Policy Responsibilities of Covenanting Boards
- m) Accountability of Representatives and Officers
- n) Church-Seminary Model Covenant

Statements of Agreement are designed to be modified from time to time in light of growing experience within the Covenant of Relationships. The Covenant itself, though amendable, is designed to continue for a long period of time.

The General, National and Regional Boards shall adopt and periodically review the Covenant of Relationships and Statements of Agreement.

The Executive Committee of the General Board shall appoint a Commission to review the Covenant of Relationships and the Statements of Agreement within 5 to 7 years of the effective date of the Covenant. The membership of the Commission shall be representative of the covenanting boards. The Executive Committee shall send the Report of the Commission to all the covenanting boards.

### **ABC Bylaws**

The General Board shall propose either a new set of ABC Bylaws or Amendments to the Delegates in Biennial Meeting. The proposed Bylaws or Amendments shall include SCOR recommendations and whatever else the General Board desires.

### **MEMBERSHIPS OF THE ABC Delegates in Biennial Meeting**

Each constituent Region/State/City Corporation may elect to the ABC Biennial Meeting as many Delegates as there are Districts in its area.

#### *Biennial Meeting*

The name of the National Nominating Committee shall be changed to the "ABC Nominating Committee."

The name of the National Program Committee shall be changed to the "Biennial Program Committee."

The following committees shall become Standing Committees of the General Board:

ABC Nominating Committee

Biennial Program Committee

Credentials and Caucus Committee

### **Representatives-At-Large (No change from SCODS.) Election District Representatives**

Constituent Cooperating Churches and Constituent Region/State/City Corporations shall work through the same Election Districts to elect their shared Representatives.

A Representative elected by Delegates in an Election District Assembly, shall represent and be accountable both to the constituent Cooperating Churches which comprise the Election District and to the constituent Region/State/City Corporation in which the Election District is located. Election District Representatives shall report to their constituents.

Representatives, assisted by their Regional Secretaries, should become aware of the attitudes and opinions of those they represent. The Representatives shall not be instructed by either constituency as to how to vote on any issue.

Delegates in Election District Assembly shall elect an Alternate Representative.

The four-year term of an Election District Representative and Alternate shall begin on the January 1 following election except when a Representative and Alternate cannot complete a four-year term. In that case, the Election District Assembly shall convene to elect another Representative and Alternate from another category for a new four-year term. The new term shall begin at the next meeting of Representatives. The incumbent Representative shall serve until the new Representative and Alternate are elected.

A Representative may serve no more than two full consecutive four-year terms, or any part thereof, not to exceed a total consecutive service of eight years as a Representative of an Election District; this service shall not preclude election as an At-large Representative either before or after service as an Election District Representative.

Certain Election District Representatives who change their memberships to American Baptist Churches outside the Election Districts which elected them may serve as "Special Representative-At-Large" for the remainders of their terms. This Special Representative arrangement applies only to Presidents of National Boards, Chairpersons of National Boards' Finance Committees, the Chairperson of the General Board's Budget Review Committee, or members of the General Board's Executive Committee.

#### *Election Districts*

The number of Election Districts within each Region shall continue to be determined by the current ABC Bylaws.

The boundaries of and the number of churches within each Election District shall be determined by joint action of the Regional Board and the General Board.

When grouping Cooperating Churches into Election Districts, an attempt will be made to have approximately equal numbers of Election District Delegates in each District.

The General Board shall act upon plans for grouping Cooperating Churches into Election Districts. Any differences between the General Board and a Regional Board regarding the plans shall be a matter for Adjudication.

The General and Regional Boards shall adopt criteria and guidelines for Election District procedures.

The quorum for an Election District Assembly shall be at least one Delegate from each of not less than 55 percent of the Cooperating Churches within the Election District.

Regional Secretaries shall staff Election Districts.

Nominees for the Election District Representative and Alternate shall be rotated generally among the following categories:

a) Clergy

b) Laymen

c) Laywomen

An Election District's Representative and Alternate shall be elected from the same category for no more than two consecutive terms.

A Representative and Alternate of an Election District shall be from the same category—either clergy or laymen or laywomen.

A Regional Secretary, in consultation with the General Secretary, shall determine any variation in the rotation of categories for the Representative and Alternate of any Election District for which he/she is responsible. Approximately equal division among the categories shall be maintained across time.

An Election District Nominating Committee shall submit to the Delegates in an Election District Assembly one or more nominees for each position. The person who receives the most votes for each position is elected to that position.

Each Cooperating Church of an Election District shall receive a copy of the Nominating Committee's slate of nominees at least three weeks prior to an Election District Assembly.

One member of an Election District's Nominating Committee shall be named by the Regional Board.

The term of a member of an Election District Nominating Committee shall end when the Committee's slate of nominees has been acted upon by the Delegates in an Election District Assembly.

In the year prior to an Election District election, an Election District which convenes more often than once every four years, may elect as its Nominating Committee, five members and three alternates (rather than 10) from each of eight (rather than 15) of its Cooperating Churches.

### **BOARDS OF THE ABC** **General, National, Regional**

There shall be three sets of legislative boards for the denomination:

- a) General Board,
- b) National Boards,
- c) Regional Boards.

Related Boards shall be known as "National Boards."

Covenanting Region, State or City boards shall be known as "Regional Boards."

#### **Memberships**

The President of the American Baptist Historical Society shall be a Representative.

Each Election District Representative shall be a member of a Cooperating Church of both the American Baptist Churches and a Region, State or City.

The Credentials and Caucus Committee shall recommend the election of a Representative as a member of the General Board. Election District Representatives shall be members or observers of their Regional Boards.

#### **Functions: Assignment, Implementation, Evaluation**

The General Board shall determine and assign ABC functions to itself, to ABC and General Board Committees, to National Boards, to Regional Boards, to the General Secretary, and to Staff Councils.

When the General Board assigns an ABC function, it shall state its expectations.

A General Board assignment with expectations which cannot be successfully negotiated shall be a matter for Adjudication.

For the present, the National and Regional Boards shall continue their current activities. Within five years the General Board upon recommendation of the General Staff Council, shall determine the ABC functions and assign them with its expectations.

National and Regional Boards shall implement the ABC functions the General Board assigns to them in accord with the General Board's planning policy and stated expectations.

National and Regional Boards shall design, carry out, and report to the General Board on programs (and projects) to implement the ABC functions assigned to them.

Regional Boards shall determine their own regional functions, programs and projects.

The General Board shall set policies and criteria for evaluating the performance of assigned functions, in terms of the expectations it states with each assignment.

Regional Boards are responsible for evaluating their regional functions, programs and projects in accord with whatever planning policies they may have.

#### *General Board Executive Committee*

There shall be twenty members on the General Board Executive Committee.

Nine members of the General Board Executive Committee shall be nominated by the President in consultation with the General Secretary and elected by the General Board. Two of the nine shall be At-Large Representatives. Seven of the nine shall be Election District Representatives from Election Districts located in seven different Regions/States/Cities. Of the seven members, at least two shall be from R/S/C's located in each of the three ABC geographical sections.

The eight members of the General Board Executive Committee who represent the four National Boards shall be elected by the General Board from among its membership upon two nominations by each of the National Boards.

The General Board Executive Committee shall:

- a) recommend policies governing overall planning and coordination within the ABC
- b) coordinate the work of the General, National, and Regional Boards
- c) recommend appropriate assignments of ABC functions
- d) in crisis situations, adopt ABC Resolutions
- e) appraise the work of the General Secretary
- f) be the Search Committee for a General Secretary
- g) perform such other functions as the General Board may assign.

#### *General Board Planning and Evaluation Committee*

Four members of the Planning and Evaluation Committee shall be elected by the General Board from among its membership upon one nomination by each of the National Boards.

Six members of the Planning and Evaluation Committee shall be elected by the General Board from among its membership upon nomination by the President in consultation with the General Secretary. Of these six, four shall be Election District Representatives; two shall be At-Large-Representatives.

The General Board Planning and Evaluation Committee shall:

- a) act in advisory capacity to the General Board Executive Committee
- b) propose policies governing overall planning and coordination within the ABC
- c) recommend policies for evaluating assignments the General Board makes to National Boards, Regional Boards, Commissions, Committees, and other groups, organizations, or individuals



- d) assist the General Board Executive Committee to facilitate and monitor the implementation of planning and evaluation policies within the American Baptist Churches
- e) perform such other functions as the General Board or its Executive Committee may assign.

#### *General Board Budget Review Committee*

The members of the Budget Review Committee shall be elected by the General Board from among its membership. At least three members shall be Election District Representatives.

#### **Policy Statements and Resolutions**

Only the General Board can adopt Policy Statements of the American Baptist Churches.

The General Board shall consider a request to develop, amend, or rescind a Policy Statement or Resolution of the American Baptist Churches from any of several sources: Cooperating Church Region/State/City Corporation Delegates in Biennial Meeting ABC Committee General Board Committee National Board Regional Board ABC Representative

ABC Committees, General Board Committees, National Boards and Regional Boards may develop and recommend ABC Policy Statements for General Board action, on their own initiative or by request of the General Board Executive Committee.

The General Board shall receive and adopt or return recommended ABC Policy Statements.

ABC Resolutions must be rooted in ABC Policy Statements.

The General Board Executive Committee shall determine whether a resolution is rooted in an ABC Policy Statement.

National and Regional Boards may develop and adopt Resolutions on their own initiative or by request of the General Board Executive Committee.

The General Board Executive Committee shall determine whether a Resolution, once adopted by a National Board or Regional Board should be sent to the General Board for concurrence as an ABC Resolution, or simply (rarely) reported to the General Board as an ABC Resolution.

The General Board may adopt ABC Resolutions which are non-programmatic or pan-board in scope.

The General Board, National Boards and Regional Boards shall implement ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions within the areas of their assigned functions, subject to General Board review.

The General Secretary shall coordinate the implementation of ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions.

The General Board shall establish policies and criteria for systematic review of ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions, and for their implementation.

National Boards shall develop and adopt national Resolutions based on ABC Policy Statements within their assigned functions.

Regional Boards shall develop and adopt regional Resolutions based on ABC Policy Statements within their assigned functions and geographical areas.

Region/State/City Boards may develop and adopt resolutions appropriate to their geographical areas.

The General Board Executive Committee shall determine the ABC function(s) to which each ABC Policy Statement or ABC Resolution is related.

Upon determination of the Executive Committee of a National Board that a crisis situation exists and must be addressed by a Resolution, that Committee may adopt a Resolution. Upon concurrence of the Executive Committee of the General Board, the Resolution shall be an ABC Resolution.

#### **Budget Covenant and Mission Support**

The "Common Budget Covenant Among the American Baptist Churches in the USA, Its Related Corporations and Its Affiliating Organizations," approved during 1976 by their boards and signed by their presidents and chief executive officers, shall be one of the Statements of Agreement.

#### *Amending the Budget Covenant*

Parties who desire a change in the Budget Covenant shall petition the Budget Commission. The petition shall state the desired change and shall give reasons for the change. The Budget Commission shall report its recommendations to the Budget Review Committee and the General Staff Council. The Budget Review Committee and the General Staff Council may concur, reject or take no action on the Commission's recommendations. The Committee and the Council shall report the petition with all actions and recommendations to the General Board.

If the General Board approves the amendment, it shall be sent to the other covenanting parties. All covenanting parties must approve the amendment to change the Budget Covenant.

If the General Board denies the petition for changing the Budget Covenant, the proposed amendment dies.

#### *World Mission Support*

The denomination's policy on raising the American Baptist Mission Budget shall place within the Office of the General Secretary the administration of the Division of World Mission Support.

The General Secretary shall provide Mission Support functions within the Office of the General Secretary.

The Director of the Division of World Mission Support shall supervise the field staff in consultation with the Regional Secretaries.

#### **Other Functions**

##### *Goals and Objectives*

In accord with the ABC Planning Policy, the General Board, the National Boards, and the Regional Boards, shall determine and adopt common goals and objectives for the denomination; and the National Boards and Regional Boards shall each determine and adopt particular goals and objectives.

##### *Ordination Standards*

The General Board shall set American Baptist Churches in the USA ordination standards on recommendations of the Commission on the Ministry.

Regional Boards may set regional ordination standards.

##### *Memberships*

The General Board shall decide what memberships the American Baptist Churches will hold in national and international religious bodies.

Regional Boards shall decide what memberships their region, state convention or city society will hold in regional religious bodies.

##### *Other*

A Regional Board shall continue to determine its own corporate identity, representative process and decision making procedures. A Regional Board shall represent the American Baptist Churches in the USA within the Board's geographical boundaries.

### **Ratification of Decisions**

A Policy Decision by the General Board in the following areas shall be effective only after two-thirds of the voting Regional Boards have voted approval:

- a) Merger with another religious body
- b) A change in American Baptist "free church" polity
- c) A change in the Charter or the Statement of Purpose of the American Baptist Churches
- d) Authorization of a denomination-wide capital funds campaign
- e) Programs which require mandatory participation by Regional Boards through contribution of funds or assignment of staff
- f) Other areas as determined by the General Board

### **Adjudication of Differences**

A covenanting board experiencing some difference with another covenanting board, shall send a written statement of the difference to the other board. The two boards shall try to resolve the difference. If the difference is not resolved, the statement shall be sent to the General Secretary with a request for Adjudication.

The General Secretary shall submit the written statement of the difference to an objective third party mutually agreed to by the differing boards and the General Secretary. The third party, usually, shall be the General Board Executive Committee. Each of the differing boards shall select a person to join the third party in the Adjudication. The General Secretary shall take part in making the decision. The decision of the third party shall be determinative.

## **SECRETARIES OF THE ABC**

### **General, National, Regional**

#### *Secretaries*

The Secretaries of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. shall be:

The General Secretary

Associate General Secretaries (if any)

Assistant General Secretaries (if any)

National Secretaries

Associate National Secretaries

Regional Secretaries

The General Board shall elect the General Secretary and the four National Secretaries as corporate officers of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

#### *The General Secretary*

The General Secretary shall continue to be the chief administrative officer of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

The General Secretary shall be responsible for implementing all General Board Policy Decisions and for coordinating the implementation of ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions.

The General Secretary shall be accountable to the General Board for staff in the Office of the General Secretary and for National and Regional Secretaries.

#### *Associate and Assistant General Secretaries and Treasurer*

(To be determined by the General Secretary in consultation with the Executive Committee of the General Board)

#### *The National Secretaries*

The chief executive officers of the National Boards shall be known as "Executive Directors." The Executive Directors of the four National Boards shall be National Secretaries of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

National Secretaries shall be responsible for implementing ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions, and Policy Decisions of their respective National Boards.

#### *Associate National Secretaries*

In consultation with the General Secretary, National Secretaries may each appoint one Associate National Secretary from among the staff of their respective National Boards.

#### *The Regional Secretaries*

The chief executive officers of the Regional Boards shall be known as "Executive Ministers." The primary accountability of Executive Ministers shall continue to be to their Regional Boards and Corporations. Upon their election by covenanting region/state convention/city society corporations, Executive Ministers shall automatically become Regional Secretaries of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Regional Secretaries shall be responsible for implementing ABC Policy Statements and ABC Resolutions, and resolutions and policy decisions of their respective Regional Boards.

#### *Appraisal of ABC Secretaries*

The Executive Committee of the General Board shall appraise the General Secretary at least once every four years and shall report to the General Board.

National Boards, in company with the General Secretary, shall appraise the work of the Executive Directors/National Secretaries at least once every four years.

Both the selection and quadrennial appraisal processes of an Executive Minister shall be a Statement of Agreement. The statement shall include the non-voting participation of the General Secretary.

The General Board, in consultation with National and Regional Boards, shall set policies to appraise the performance of the ABC Secretaries.

#### *Compensation Policies*

The ABC General and National Boards have adopted a common "Executive Compensation Policy and Salary Structure." Regional Boards may relate to that policy and structure.

## **STAFF COUNCILS OF THE ABC**

There shall be three Staff Councils of the American Baptist Churches:

- a) General Staff Council
- b) National Executive Council
- c) Regional Executive Ministers Council

Each Council may adopt standing rules for the conduct of its affairs.

### **National**

A "National Executive Council" shall replace the current Executive Council and shall relate to the General Board through the General Secretary or through the General Staff Council.

The membership of the new National Executive Council shall be the General Secretary and the National Secretaries.

The National Executive Council shall facilitate and coordinate the planning and implementing work of the General and National Boards.

### **Regional**

A "Regional Executive Ministers Council" shall replace the current Executive Ministers Council, with its concurrence, and shall relate to the General Board through the General Secretary or through the General Staff Council.

The membership of the Regional Executive Ministers Council shall be the General Secretary and the Executive Ministers of both Covenanting and Affiliating Regions, State Conventions, and City Societies.

The Regional Executive Ministers Council shall coordinate the planning and implementing work of the General and Regional Boards.

### **General**

A "General Staff Council" shall replace the current National Staff Council. The General Secretary shall be chairperson, and accountable for the Council to the General Board.

The membership of the General Staff Council shall include:

- a) members of the National Staff Council and members of the Regional Staff Council
- b) Associate National Secretaries
- c) Executive Directors of:
  - 1) American Baptist Men
  - 2) American Baptist Women
  - 3) Commission on the Ministry of the American Baptist Churches
  - 4) Division of World Mission Support
  - 5) Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches
- d) one member appointed from among its membership by each "Underrepresented Group of the American Baptist Churches" in consultation with the General Secretary.

Executive Ministers of Affiliating Organizations shall have voting rights in the General Staff Council on all matters except those pertaining to the Covenant of Relationships or the Statements of Agreement. The continuation of these rights shall be reviewed by January 1, 1981.

On recommendation of the General Secretary, the General Staff Council may co-opt other persons to be non-voting members of the General Staff Council.

The General Staff Council shall:

- recommend goals for consideration by the General Board
- carry out assignments given by the General Board regarding definition and assignment of functions and the expectations of each
- advise and assist each National and Regional Secretary in the General Staff Council regarding program evaluation responsibilities
- participate in the process, established by ABC planning and evaluation policies, to review the program evaluation reports which national and regional boards make to the General Board; report the results of this General Staff Council evaluation to the General Board.
- recommend Policy Statements, Resolutions, and Policy Decisions for consideration by the General Board
- recommend to the National and Regional Boards administrative policies and procedures for implementing General Board decisions and assignments
- recommend to individual Secretaries, specific public statements based on General Board-adopted Policy Statements, Resolutions or Policy Decisions
- be voting Delegates to ABC Biennial Meetings
- receive staffing assignments from the General Board; attend General Board sessions with the right to speak regarding these assignments
- by invitation, attend meetings of National Program Boards, Regional Boards, as a body or a delegation, with the right to speak
- recommend ABC program emphases according to the General Board's policies on planning and coordination
- recommend procedures to coordinate staff actions to implement General Board decisions
- participate in the denomination's process for Adjudication of Differences
- participate in the Common Budget Covenant process
- prepare and provide staff training and orientation opportunities to implement the General Board's personnel policies and procedures
- on assignment by the General Board, recommend to the General and Regional Boards common criteria for a "Cooperating Church"
- perform such other duties as the General Board may assign.

### **PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY STAFF**

ABC Staff shall issue public statements based on ABC Policy Statements, on ABC Resolutions, or on Policy Decisions or Resolutions of their own boards.

ABC Staff shall report to their board or executive committee all public statements issued since the last board or committee meeting, describing their authority for each statement made.

American Baptist persons or groups who object to a public statement made by an American Baptist staff person may register their objections directly with the staff person who issued the statement. If the objection is not withdrawn, the staff person shall refer the objection to the appropriate board or executive committee for a final action. The board or committee shall communicate its action to the persons or groups who registered the objection.

### **GLOSSARY**

**Function**—the normal or characteristic action of a corporation or board; a special duty or performance required of a person or an organization in the course of work or activity.

**Policy Decision**—a determination made by a board in the fulfillment of a function within an assignment made to that board; a Policy Decision is the sole responsibility of the board concerned.

**Policy Statement**—the declaration of a basic position of the General Board on a broad principle of general concern. A statement of values on biblical authority and theological insight; emerging out of Judaic, Christian, and Baptist tradition; and consistent with the Charter and Statement of Purpose of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

**Resolution**—a statement calling for specific action based upon an approved ABC Policy Statement. A Resolution may authorize or instruct ABC staff to engage in a certain activity or may urge members of other groups to speak or act in a certain way.

**Statement of Concern**—a public statement of the Delegates in attendance at any session of a Biennial Meeting of the American Baptist Churches; it seeks to express the position of such Delegates on moral, spiritual, political, economic, social, denominational and ecumenical matters to American Baptists and to the rest of society.