

Board of General Ministries Report  
June 2020

## Relationships with National

- The NEC have had several good meetings both in person and online. Some of the outcomes of working together include:
  - NEC members committed to a day of fasting and prayer each week during Lent and offered a joint press release of encouragement to others practicing the spiritual disciplines during the Lenten season.
  - We clarified our goals for NEC meetings.
  - We agreed to place a peace pole in each of our buildings as a sign of unity and will issue a press release once the projects have been completed.
  - We issued a 21 day call to prayer at the onset of COVID-19.
  - We produced a 1 minute video message during the global pandemic sending the message to all American Baptists that, “We are American Baptists and we will get through this.”
  - We agreed to have a national staff picnic in July, but the event has been postponed for now.
- By invitation, I attended an ABHMS event hosting ABC executive ministers and sought to increase the harmony of the meeting. I have also participated in several conference calls hosted by ABHMS.
- By invitation, I attended the MMBB pastors colloquium, networking with pastors and staff.
- OGS held an open house at the Roblee Building that was very well attended by national staff.
- I spoke with IM personnel about the status of congregations and appropriate ways to support IM.

## Staff

- OGS called Judith Christiansen to serve as our OGS HR consultant.
- Yvonne Carter has agreed to be the liaison for the National Institute for Civil Discourse.
- Individual meetings were held with each OGS staff person prior to the pandemic.
- We have several “no agenda” lunches planned for 2020 to build community.
- Staff development/training will be an emphasis for 2020.
- We launched the process for exploring the concept of an IT and Communications intern, but progress was halted due to the pandemic.
- We are in the process of deciding the best way to reconstruct ABCIS. We have engaged the services of a consulting firm and several needs assessment interviews have been conducted with ABCIS constituents.
- The staff are testing out Microsoft Teams software for internal communication.
- The communications office distributed a hard copy newsletter to ABC constituents.

- The Women of Color in Ministry Project (WOCIM) and the American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) of the American Baptist Churches USA, drafted a grant proposal to provide 20 churches pastored by women from each area of the country (north, east south and west) with multi-faceted training to enable these congregations to succeed.
- On May 8, 2020, the ABC Creation Justice Network Team hosted a webinar training to equip persons with the knowledge, hands-on experience, and resources to speak and act confidently from a firm biblical grounding on climate change and solutions.

## Events

### Celebrating Women Event

- The Celebrating Women Event, Radical, Ready, Redeemed, has been rescheduled for 2022. We appreciate the support of Green Lake to help us move this conference.

### Mission Table

- The Mission Table event has been rescheduled for June of 2021 in conjunction with the Biennial Mission Summit. While the planning team had already met and completed the design and workbook for the original date, the event may have to be redesigned in light of a new reality following the global pandemic.

### NLC

- The NLC meeting has been postponed to November 18-20, 2020, assuming that groups of this size will be permitted to gather by then. The primary agenda of this meeting will focus upon learnings from the global pandemic. There will be two retirement celebrations of NLC members at the meeting:
  - Robert Cochran (Planning Committee: Pat Hernandez, Steve Bils, Marie Onwubuariri)
  - Tom Wiles (Planning Committee: Cheryl Dudley, Sooz Ford, Al Fletcher)

### Biennial Mission Summit

- Currently, I am continuing to serve as the chair of the Biennial Program Committee.
- The BMS Planning Team met for a three-day meeting in February. The meeting was very productive and helped to focus the plans for the 2021 BMS in Puerto Rico. Here are some highlights from that meeting:
  - The theme of “Imagine” was adopted as the 2021 BMS theme.
  - Plenary and workshop speakers were prioritized.
  - OTABL will be held in conjunction with the BMS.
- I drafted a decision-making matrix detailing who has authority to make each decision related to the BMS.
- I am in the process of preparing a budget for the BMS.
- We have a signed contract for Biennial Mission Summit Producer, Jeremy Fackenthal.
- We have a signed contract for Biennial Mission Summit Negotiator, Annie Marcucci.

- Zina Jacque and Judy Fackenthal have agreed to staff the Orientation to American Baptist Life.
- All of the plenary speakers have been confirmed for the 2021 Biennial Mission Summit and we are in the process of preparing a release announcing them.
- Two meetings of the Staff Advisory Group have also been held.

## **Regional Ministries**

- Currently, I am continuing to fulfill the role of AGS for Regional Ministries.
- ABC Michigan has called Brian Johnson to be their next Executive Minister. I was able to meet with Brian for his orientation just prior to social distancing restrictions being put into place.
- The DCBC Search Committee have agreed upon a single candidate to present to their board. The name has not yet been made public.
- Tom Wiles has announced his retirement from ABC of Rhode Island as of June 30, 2020. I have had several virtual meetings with the ABCORI Executive Committee to help them name an Interim Executive Minister and conducted an exit interview with Tom.
- Documents have been prepared for the REMC Nominating Committee including a summary of needs, description of committees and council, and historical chart of officers.
- I consulted with two regions (Wisconsin and ABCOPAD) regarding executive minister evaluations.
- I led a pastors retreat in Chicago and two local church retreats for the regions.
- I provided several messages for local churches during Holy Week; as well as, hosted an online Maundy Thursday service for region staff.
- I taught an online session for an ABC Polity Class at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.
- Rebecca Driscoll responded to an invitation to lead Creation Justice workshops for PR.

## **COVID-19 Activities**

Since the onset of COVID-19, OGS has been extremely busy in responding to the needs of the ABC family. Some of the highlights of our response are shown below.

- We instituted a work at home policy for OGS staff. A few staff, whose jobs require office access have been rotating days in the office.
- We have held several online committee and all staff meetings to continue to the work of OGS.
- I have held weekly conference calls with the executive ministers since the outbreak of the pandemic; as well as, periodic calls with the REMC officers, the NEC, various other national and regional leaders and several groups of pastors from various regions.
- We created a resource page for COVID-19 resources at [www.abc-usa.org/coronavirus](http://www.abc-usa.org/coronavirus). This website has been cited as an excellent source of information by “Baptists Today” as well as other denominations.
- We distributed information about financial assistance including the Paycheck Protection Program, One Great Hour of Sharing grants, and financial assistance from MMBB.

- OGS applied for and received a grant from the federal Paycheck Protection Program.
- We convened a conference call of the ABC Camping and Conferencing Personnel in conjunction with Robin Stoops, Executive Minister for ABC of Nebraska and Jeff Johnson of ABHMS to discuss the upcoming ABC camping seasons.
- A survey with input from the NEC and REMC assessing the impact of COVID-19 among our ABC congregations has been distributed and will be analyzed in June.
- With input from the regions, we developed a discussion guide for reopening houses of worship. Many parts of the ABC family have thanked us for this document which has also been translated into Spanish.
- Letters from the office of the General Secretary during the pandemic have included topics on:
  - Facts about staying safe, healthy, and calm
  - Supporting your local congregation
  - Identifying financial resources.

## Other

- The US Govt. placed a travel ban on six countries including Myanmar. It does not include the refugee resettlement program, but it may limit and slow down the process for visas. We held a Burma Refugee Commission conference call on the issue and are engaging in some advocacy work in this area. A scheduled meeting in DC of several leaders from Burma with governmental leaders was cancelled due to the onset of the global pandemic.
- In December, I wrote and distributed an annual appeal letter to our donor list and developed a thank you response letter for gifts received. We received over \$5,000 in gifts in response to that letter.
- I signed on to a letter on voter rights.
- I signed onto an Amicus brief in support of a district court decision that rejected new rules proposed by the federal government that would allow the indefinite detention of immigrant children with their parents in unlicensed facilities while their applications for asylum were being considered.
- I distributed a link to the FACT 2020 survey, encouraging ABC responses. This is the largest survey of congregations in the U.S.
- I met with Jeff Dromeshauser regarding the Church Mutual insurance agreement.

Respectfully submitted

Dr. C. Jeff Woods

Interim General Secretary, ABCUSA