

BGM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT SEPT 2021

BGMEC Report Three-month report June to September of 2021

Here are some highlights from the General Secretary's Office since our last Board of General Ministries meeting in June of 2021.

Biennial Mission Summit

- There were 1,115 registrations and 2,275 log-ins for our first ever virtual Biennial Mission Summit in 2021.
- There were 35 Exhibits with 139 hours of available online content.
- The on-demand library has had over 1,600 interactions.
- 95% of the comments regarding the overall Biennial and the hub experience are positive.
- Participants especially appreciated:
 - Accessibility – have not attended the event in many years
 - Coordination and design of Worship; best services in years
 - Interactive booths
 - Diversity in worship
 - Beginning and ending worship on time
 - The online nature of the event allowed me to participate for the first time
 - Pre-roll segments
 - Ability to watch recordings of sessions missed
 - Participating in Sessions using Q&A and Chat features
 - Robust variety of ways to connect and interact
 - Several persons responded, "I don't think that you could have done a virtual Biennial any better than this."
- Some of my specific involvements included:
 - Efforts to reach our quota of registering 200 different ABC congregations.
 - Participating in a radio show to promote the Biennial.
 - Recruiting participation from Executive Ministers.
 - Recruiting the NEC to participate in a "Silver Linings Video."
 - A communion meditation.

Myanmar

We have continued our efforts to bring improvement to the devastating situation in Myanmar resulting from the military coup that occurred on Sunday, January 31, 2021. We are very pleased to announce that advocacy efforts have resulted in \$50,000,000 of humanitarian aid for Myanmar. Noting that one-third of the world's population lives in Myanmar or one of its bordering countries and that COVID-19 is most susceptible to mutations in areas with high infection rates and lack of medicine should cause us all to advocate for education, medicine, and treatments for Myanmar. Our most recent advocacy efforts are (1) to ask the United Nations to invite the democratically elected National Unity Government (NUG) to present the country's four-year human rights report (drafted just prior to the military coup) in place of the military government and (2) asking WCC members to sign on to a letter in support of the NUG.

There has also been progress on expanded support of the NUG within the country of Myanmar. Our broader efforts over the summer have continued to utilize denominational tools as well as grassroots efforts. Some specific activities are listed below:

- Monthly prayer meetings with the Burma Diaspora.
- Regular meetings with the Burma Refugee Commission.
- Letters to President Biden, Vice-President Harris, National Security Advisor Sullivan, Secretary of State Blinken, General Secretary of the UN, U.S. Ambassador to UN with increasingly specific requests. VP Harris quoted from one of the letters during her recent trip to Asia.
- Expanding advocacy to all of the ABC regions.
- Providing sample letters for individuals to advocate with their local congresspersons and senators.
- Partnering with 21 Wilberforce and the World Council of Churches to promote grass roots efforts of advocacy.
- Promoting humanitarian aid to address the rise in COVID-19 cases in this area as well as the ongoing needs of “Internally Displaced Persons.”
- Informing the Burma Diaspora of the opportunity for “Temporary Protected Status” through the USCIS.
- Calling for increased sanctions that target military leaders, especially in oil, gas, and arms sectors that are necessary to sustain the 400,000 military troops in Myanmar.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

The anti-racism task force hosted several well-attended sessions during the Biennial Mission Summit with some very positive and helpful feedback. I participated in multiple sessions including serving on a panel for one of these sessions. Marie Onwubuariri has been working with the group as they continue to strengthen their proposal for commission status. The group is planning an anti-racism symposium for October 30, 2021.

National Leadership Council

We have pursued several activities to follow-up on the National Leadership Council Meeting in May, including:

- Distributing and analyzing an evaluation of the event.
- Meetings with the NEC and REMC Officers to review the meeting.
- Hosting an August 17th small group discussion on “Cultural Humility” with more sessions to come.
- Recruiting a team of leaders to design prayer and biblical reflection sessions for the NLC, beginning in the fall.

American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS) update

We have commenced the migration phase of data from ABCIS to NetSuite. Staff continue to find the capacity and capabilities of NetSuite to be superb, and the migration of data to be an enormous undertaking.

Regional Ministry

- The following three regions are at varying stages in their Executive Minister Search Committees:
 - American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island closed their application process in August and have narrowed to an interviewee list.
 - American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky has requested additional information from a short list of applicants.
 - American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin is scheduling interviews.
- Rev. Dr. Frank Frischkorn has announced his resignation from the American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware effective at the end of 2021. A search committee will be formed in the near future.
- Rev. Paul Gibson has announced his resignation from the American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region effective at the end of 2021. A search committee will be formed in the near future.
- I have continued to hold bi-monthly calls with the Executive Ministers and the group continues to engage as a learning community during these calls.

Additional Staff Activity

Recent staff activities include:

- I have strongly encouraged staff to take some well-deserved vacation time this summer after an extremely busy spring that included a “Call to Prayer for Myanmar,” an OGS Orientation to ABC Life event, a promotional event for the Biennial, our first virtual Biennial, commencement of NetSuite migration, etc.
- Judith Christiansen finalized a new telecommuting document for staff.
- Judith Christiansen reviewed new staff guidelines during an all staff meeting.
- Pat Hernandez is making adjustments and designing promotion (in conjunction with other staff) for the 2022 “Radical, Redeemed and Ready” conference.
- Tina Kiernan has held four Biennial review meetings with various clusters of staff and leaders.
- Alan Musoke is overseeing the staff team working on the NetSuite migration.
- We received our 2021 affirmation letter for 501c3 tax exempt status that includes the subordinates under our umbrella status.
- Marie Onwubuariri has been following up with Biennial donors and sponsors.

Staff Changes:

- We welcomed Feisal Al-Amry to the staff who will become the new American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS) coordinator.
- Geri Blier, the current director of ABCIS, will retire on September 30, 2021.
- We welcomed Bridget Lipin as she returned to work at the end of July following her maternity leave.

Other Activities

- Provided greetings for the 60th anniversary event of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.
- Provided several congratulatory letters to ministers and congregations including a letter honoring former Executive Minister Louise Barger on 35 years of ordained ministry.
- Gathered feedback on the “Role of OGS” document.
- Designed a leadership team retreat for OGS staff.
- Explored the idea of creating a “Congregational Life Task Force”

- Explored ideas and resources for Christmas 2021
- Drafted an OGS survey
- Led a session for pastors in the Central Region on adaptive change
- Finalizing our first Everyday ABC Conversation (Addendum 1)

Legal Issues

- During 2021 ABCUSA has been named in 13 lawsuits, 12 stemming from local church clergy behavior and 1 from a regional staff person's behavior.
 - 5 cases have been dismissed
 - 2 cases are in the process of being removed to US district court
 - 2 cases are in the discovery phase
 - 4 cases were recently filed in the state of New York
- 2 cases are confirmed to be covered by insurance and the other 9 have been tendered to insurance companies

Respectfully Submitted
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 Interim General Secretary
 American Baptist Churches USA



AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

Office of the General Secretary

BOARD OF GENERAL MINISTRY | Everyday ABC Conversations

EVERYDAY ABC CONVERSATIONS

1. RATIONALE

Due to the popularity of the recent Mission Summit Conversations (MSC) in which over 650 American Baptists simultaneously participated in dialogue during the 2021 Biennial Mission Summit, the American Baptist Churches USA is launching a series of dialogues, entitled, "Everyday ABC Conversations."

Throughout its history, the Office of the General Secretary has carved out space for the gathering and disseminating of information on local and global issues with denominational impact. ABCUSA is the primary convener for denomination-wide conversations.

Since 2013, American Baptists have practiced Mission Summit Conversations at our American Baptist Biennial gatherings. The purpose of these conversations is to provide an opportunity for persons to engage in respectful dialogue about matters of importance. Unlike a traditional conference, the emphasis at the MSC is upon real-time conversation among the meeting's participants rather than the conference speakers or experts in the room. These conversations are based upon the principle of "fluid expertise" in which everyone in the group is seen as a worthy contributor. As Baptists who hold the beliefs of soul liberty and the priesthood of all believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a community of believers, these conversations align with our Baptist identity. MSC create the space for American Baptists to talk about matters of mission and ministry on a grand scale at our national gatherings.

Due to the recent success of the virtually formatted MSC, we have decided to launch a series of these online conversations, expanding these opportunities beyond the ABC Biennials.

2. FORMAT FOR THE CONVERSATIONS

Each Everyday ABC Conversation will begin with a brief introduction of the topic by one or two leaders associated with the subject area followed by 30-40 minutes of small group conversation in randomly assigned groups of 10 persons each. The entire conversation, including presentation, will last approximately one hour.

Discussion questions will be provided for each Everyday ABC Conversation typically beginning with, "What are the implications of what you have just heard for you and your congregation?"

An invitation to each conversation will be sent via normal ABC communication channels. While all American Baptists are invited to attend, participants will be asked to register for each event.

3. CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

The intent of the MSC is to bring together American Baptists for conversations without becoming hurtful or polarizing. To maintain a safe space for conversation, remember your ABC'S:

A: Acknowledge differing perspectives. American Baptists come from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds, possess a diverse set of customs, and speak a plethora of languages. Dialogue depends upon the recognition of differences. American Baptists seldom achieve unity through unanimity, but rather through the recognition that differing parts work together to build upon the body of Christ.

B: Be a good listener. Pass the active listening test: Listen attentively enough to what is being said and how it is being said that you could recite the essence of what was just said to the satisfaction of the speaker. Listen with curiosity rather than to persuade or correct one another.

C: Confidentiality is important. Do not repeat personal stories or those of congregations and institutions. When reporting what happened, be careful not to attribute what was said to specific individuals.

S: Speak honestly and responsibly. Try to use "I" statements and own what you are saying.

4. ADDITIONAL DETAILS

All conversations take place within a certain time, space, and set of circumstances. The global pandemic that we are currently experiencing will no doubt influence many of our conversations. The pandemic has surfaced enormous stress as well as new opportunities for creativity and innovation. American Baptists and the congregations that we are a part of simply cannot perform some of the familiar functions of pre-pandemic days. Our hope is that whatever topic is on the table, that the conversations moves toward innovation and finding new ways to live out God's mission in our world.