

General Secretary - Report for EC/BGM November 2024
Prayerfully submitted by Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain

The Office of the General Secretary continues to build relationships by gathering and connecting within our denomination in a multifaceted manner and by engaging our regions, local churches, and small clergy groups through preaching, presentations, leading, and participating as panelists. Together with the Leadership Team, we curate a culture of Harmony, interdependence, and genuine care. We have engaged in small group fellowship, one-to-one clergy and laity conversations, annual gatherings, and milestone celebrations for regions and local churches. We are developing new resources through ABCUSA's newly launched October Webinar series, which focuses on Domestic Violence Education and Wellness by collaborating with Domestic Violence Educators and MMBB Cares. We are also preparing new Transition Ministry in-person and virtual training for 2025. We will update the WIM brochure and expand our video offering, highlighting testimonies about the joys of being an American Baptist.

Our Everyday Conversation focused on Harmony. It featured local clergy, Regional Executive Ministers, and ABCUSA staff. We are considering new Webinar opportunities for 2025.

I have preached, worshipped, and fellowshiped with most of our regions, and together with the leadership staff, we have engaged all our Regional Executive Ministers, enabling us to share joys and address concerns. I have initiated planning for the annual NLC gathering. I had the honor to engage and support our national partners by preaching at Space for Grace, sharing greetings and prayer at the MMBB Financial Conference, preaching and presenting at various MMBB clergy colloquiums, preaching and participating in clergy discussions at the Massachusetts Multicultural Baptist Ministry Annual Gathering. I also visited the American Baptist Historical Society, and ABCUSA hosted a retirement party for ABHS staff Kay Eland.

I co-wrote a letter with the Board President for our ABC family to inspire Harmony, fellowship, and genuine care and to honor and celebrate Baptist polity, Baptist Freedoms, and our AB family.

As General Secretary, I inaugurated a series of gratitude letters to enhance our donor relationships. Together with the support of MRD, we have generated additional communication and initiated the Biennial Golden Jubilee Society in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Biennial. These efforts have generated new gifts of approximately \$16,000.00 as of 10/1/24. This revenue represents a humble start and yet a significant increase in donor revenue. Moreover, MRD/development met and exceeded the 2024

revenue budget for the first time in several years. We have updated our donor list to include lapsed donors and personal friends. However, our donor list is still nominal. Our 2024 communication schedule included gratitude letters, reconnection to lapsed donors, Christmas cards, and a year-end United Mission Letter.

Our staff, especially MRD and OTCP, alongside the Office of the General Secretary, has successfully launched the registration for the 2025 Biennial, "Come Seek Living Water," on November 1, 2024. Yeah!!!! Please register and share the information with family and friends. I continue collaborating with the Local Arrangements Committee and the worship team to create subthemes that undergird our worship, plenary sessions, and youth programming. Engage (OTABL) has contacted our seminary students and new pastors for the first gathering in November. Our goal, led by the co-chairs, is to deepen our connection to Engage participants before and after the 2025 Biennial.

With great joy and anticipation, I have initiated our annual planning for the NLC gathering in May 2025 at Green Lake Conference Center.

Staff Development:

- ❖ We continue to fine-tune our new staff onboarding process and to support new staff with mentors and regular gatherings. We are featuring our ABCUSA staff in our Everyday Conversations and Webinars.
- ❖ We had our annual office staff picnic in July.
- ❖ We will have our annual holiday party in December.
- ❖ GS will meet with staff in February 2025 for an annual check-in.
- ❖ Together with the Leadership Team we are planning professional development for the staff that enhances our efficacy, deepens our intercultural skills, and awareness of our ecumenical relationships, Baptist polity, and region ministries.
- ❖ In 2025, we will have Employee Appreciation Day, staff presentations and partner presentations at staff meetings.
- ❖ Hired social media ambassador, is creating a social media footprint for ABCUSA and bringing more interest to our website and events such as, Everyday Conversations and Webinars.
- ❖ A few staff have shifted to part-time; Robin Stoops continues to focus on United Mission and Burma Advocacy, and Bridget Lipin has resumed a part-time position in MRD.
- ❖ Hiring Development staff in 2025.

Biennial/Omaha Nebraska 2025:

- ❖ Continue Biennial meetings to discuss successful implementation, timeframes, partner input, site visits, and communication. We have established regular meetings for all committees.
- ❖ Mission Resource Development staff developed the Jubilee Biennial pin.
- ❖ Engage is also connecting with participants.

- ❖ Registration for the 2025 Biennial, “Come Seek Living Water,” opened 11/1/24!

New Opportunities to Deepen Relationships by Providing New Resources:

- ❖ Co-hosted a CFO gathering with MMBB on 5/20, and they have continued to meet and fellowship. ABF hosted the most recent luncheon.

Social Media:

- ❖ Everyday Conversations, with a modified format and tenure, resumed with added resources. The Theme is Harmony. Our attendance has increased significantly.
 - 6/20 – Rev. Dr. C. Jeff Woods and Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops, guest speakers
 - 9/19 – Rev. Dr. Jim Kelsey & Rev. Dr. TaNikka Sheppard, guest speakers
 - 12/5 – Rev. Dr. Valerie Andrews and Rev. Dr. Jeremy Myers, **upcoming**
 - 3/20 – Rev. Dr. Kay Farley and Rev. Michele Turek, **upcoming**
- ❖ October Webinars 3-part series focused on domestic violence and wellness.
 - 10/1 – Tara Aday, Domestic Violence Educator, guest speaker
 - 10/15 – Rev. Earl Thorpe, PhD., MMBB Cares, guest speaker
 - 10/22 – Attorney Charlene Quint, Domestic Violence Advocate, guest speaker

Financial Condition Considerations:

- ❖ Continue to review the One Great Hour of Sharing fundraising and collection process, seeking transparency, accurate donor sharing, and the impact of IM not sharing donor information from OGHS offerings on donor relationships, partner collaboration, and ultimately, ABCUSA’s financial condition. IM’s practice has excluded ABCUSA from developing relationships with thousands of donors.
- ❖ OGS continues to support 80% of salary and operation costs for WRC staff, even though the WRC staff works primarily for IM. IM provides 20%.
- ❖ Implementing new donor communication and prospect development.
- ❖ Increased donor communication from an annual “ask” to 4 gratitude communications.
- ❖ Hiring Development staff in 2025.

Fellowship in Representing ABCUSA on Boards:

- ❖ 7/11-7/14, BWA conference, preached at the preaching symposium and attended the board meeting, *Lagos, Nigeria*
- ❖ 10/16-10/18, National Council of Churches (NCC), *Nashville* (5/15-5/17 in Washington, DC) – National Council of Churches (NCC) Board Meeting, *Washington DC*
- ❖ 10/21-10/23, ABF Board Meeting, *King of Prussia, PA* (4/30 & 5/7 Virtual)- ABF Board Meeting,
- ❖ 10/24-10/26, Green Lake Board Meeting, *Wisconsin*

Collaboration with National and Regional Partners:

- ❖ 7/7-/7-12, Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering, *Lagos, Nigeria*
- ❖ 7/19-7/21, ABWM Women's Conference, *Virginia*
- ❖ 8/14-8/16, Asian Pastor Colloquium, hosted by MMBB, *Georgia*
- ❖ 8/18- 8/21, Latinx Pastor Colloquium, hosted by MMBB, *Georgia*
- ❖ 8/28-8/30, ABCPR, ABHMS Clergy, *Puerto Rico*
- ❖ 9/4-9/7, BGM Executive Meeting, *Omaha*
- ❖ 9/5, *Nebraska Clergy luncheon with the EC, Nebraska*
- ❖ 9/25-9/27, Massachusetts Baptist Multicultural Ministries Conference, *Massachusetts*
- ❖ 10/2-10/4, ABCOFLASH Annual Meeting,
- ❖ 10/3, *ABCOFLASH Special* clergy luncheon and conversation
- ❖ 10/5, ABCNJ 54th Annual Meeting, *New Jersey*
- ❖ 10/10- 10/12 ABC-WI & Special Visit
- ❖ 10/10 Special Visit, hosted by Rev. Dr. Chaks Zadda and First Baptist Church of Waukesha
- ❖ 10/13, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, *Wisconsin*
- ❖ 10/27, Bethlehem Baptist Church 136th Anniversary, *Pennsylvania*
- ❖ 11/9, Metro NY 233rd Annual Meeting, *New York*
- ❖ 12/8, Second Baptist Church 145th Anniversary, *Texas*

Representation of ABCUSA on Boards:

- ❖ 9/9, NEC Meeting, Video and Picture, *Pennsylvania*
- ❖ 10/5-10/11 CUG and NCC, Annual Board Meeting, *Tennessee*
- ❖ 10/21-10/23, ABF, *Pennsylvania*
- ❖ 10/24-10/26 Green Lake Board Meeting

BGM and EC Meetings:

- ❖ 6/11-6/15, EC and BGM Meetings, *Wisconsin*
- ❖ 9/4-9/7, BGM EC Meeting, *Omaha*
- ❖ 11/14-11/17, EC and BGM Meetings, *Pennsylvania*