

DRAFT

BOARD OF GENERAL MINISTRIES KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

NOVEMBER 15-17, 2024
MINUTES

Meeting Location: Alloy Hotel King of Prussia
301 West Dekalb Pike
King of Prussia, PA 19406
Ph: (610) 337-1200

Officers: Nikita McCalister, President
William Poland, Vice President
Paul Higgins, Budget Review Officer
Gina Jacobs-Strain, General Secretary

Parliamentarian: Bill Frederickson

BGM Chaplain: Doug Scalise

During the Board of General Ministries meetings, Chaplain Doug Scalise lit the candle representing Christ's presence while leading devotions and worship. Special music was provided by guitarists Matthew Toupin and Kurt Kaufman, drummer Dwayne Williams, and singers Laura Austin and Yvette Shafer.

Throughout the meeting, the Board of General Ministries read the ABCUSA Focus Statement and ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement in unison:

ABC Focus Statement: "American Baptist Churches are missional congregations that nurture devoted disciples of Jesus Christ who live their lives in mission and ministry for the healing of the world through the love of God."

ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement: "Believing that confidentiality is essential to the worshipful work of the Board of General Ministry of the ABCUSA and integral to its reputation and integrity, I covenant to uphold it in practice and principle."

Friday, November 15, 2024, 2:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

BGM 667 — CALL TO ORDER

American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) President Nikita McCalister welcomed all Board of General Ministries (BGM) Directors and staff, calling the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m. on Friday, November 15, 2024.

Regrets from Directors who could not attend: Not present: Annie Field (ABCVNH), Daryl Ward (ABC-OHIO), Shawna Simmons (ABCGI), Wungreiso Valui (GHC), Emmett Dunn (DCBC), Katharine Hsiao (Intercaucus), and Harry Riggs, the representative for the Regional Executive Ministers Council, from ABCCONN.

Thanks to directors Marilyn Malone and Scott Pegues for agreeing to serve as tellers for this meeting and musicians Matthew Toupin, Kurt Kaufman, and Dwayne Williams, and singers Laura Austin and Yvette Shafer for providing music during times of reverence and fellowship.

BGM 668 — OPENING WORSHIP/BELOVED COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES/STATEMENTS

Chaplain Doug Scalise led a devotion on Luke 6:27-36 (NRSV) and lit the Christ Candle.

All BGM Directors participated in the Beloved Community Activities, where they were given the opportunity to discuss prayer needs and to pray for each other in prayer triads.

The Focus Statement and ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement were read in unison.

BGM 669 — GENERAL CONSENT AGENDA

By voice vote, the BGM approved by general consent the Minutes of the Board of General Ministries June 12-14, 2024, in Green Lake, WI, and to receive the designated reports on the agenda.

Reports from this meeting are included with the filing of the minutes. Not all items from the agenda are listed here in the minutes. Motions and additional notes not included in the reports are noted in these minutes.

BGM 670 — CONFIDENTIALITY PRESENTATION

Paul Higgins and Bill Frederickson stressed the importance of confidentiality in the work being done, emphasizing its vital role in the organization's success, integrity, and reputation. Bill shared two stories highlighting the impact and harm of confidentiality breaches within the BGM.

President Nikita McCalister continued the conversation about confidentiality, emphasizing its importance for creating a safe space where board members can engage openly. She highlighted that maintaining confidentiality is essential for ensuring everyone feels honored and respected, allowing for productive and trusting collaboration.

A discussion was held regarding the distinction between confidential and non-confidential information. It was noted that budget information is available on the website and can be shared publicly. However, any information that is not included in the board meeting summary provided by staff following the Board of General Ministries meetings should be considered confidential. The General Secretary's report will be highlighted in the summary to be shared. It was suggested that more information be included in the summary to ensure clarity and transparency.

A concern was raised that the summary did not include all items discussed, particularly a confidential letter sent to President Nikita McCalister and General Secretary Gina Jacobs-Strain rather than the entire organization. This was considered a breach of confidentiality, as the person

who leaked the letter did not obtain consent from all involved parties. The letter was not presented to the board in June, but a board member with a copy of it made it available to interested board members. Matthew Toupin apologized for sharing the letter and asked for the board's forgiveness. President McCalister accepted the apology on behalf of the board.

It was noted that Robert's Rules of Order states minutes should focus on recording actions and decisions rather than verbatim transcripts of what was said during the meeting.

BGM 671 — REPORT FROM THE ABCUSA PRESIDENT

President McCalister shared her joy in serving as ABCUSA President and emphasized the importance of our shared American Baptist identity and unity in mission. She highlighted the motto "Risk Love," encouraging everyone to listen, learn, and lean into Christ's love. She also affirmed that we are all created in God's image and called to be a beacon of light, showing the world how to love as Christ loves us.

BGM 672 — REPORT FROM THE ABCUSA GENERAL SECRETARY

General Secretary Gina Jacobs-Strain provided updates on initiatives, including opening registration for the Biennial Mission Summit on November 1, Everyday ABC Conversations, and new webinars in October 2024 and February 2025. She also mentioned redesigning the ABWIM brochures and developing resources on transition ministries. Staff are strengthening relationships internally and there are new staff assignments to deepen connections with ecumenical partners.

Dr. Jacobs-Strain shared that gratitude letters with personalized notes have raised \$15,000 in donations. She expressed her enjoyment in serving as general secretary, as well as appreciation for her staff's work within the denomination and new efforts to deepen connections with our ecumenical partners.

BGM 673 — RECESS BGM/CONVENE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President Nikita McCalister recessed the meeting of the Board of General Ministries.

American Baptist Historical Society (ABHS) President Rev. Richard Swindle called the annual corporate meeting of the American Baptist History Society to order. Kathryn Ray moved, and Bonnie Higgins seconded, approval of the agenda.

Merle McJunkin moved, Laura Austin seconded, and by voice vote, the BGM approved the American Baptist Historical Society November 2023 meeting minutes.

President Swindle shared that there are no nominations to present today, but there will be nominations soon.

ABHS Executive Director Priscilla Eppinger shared that all board directors should be receiving reports and newsletters; those who are not should contact her. She provided updates on the JACS project, NAGPRA compliance, and the Ancestry.com collaboration.

Dwayne Williams motioned, Damaris Santiago-Lebron seconded, and the BGM adjourned the meeting by voice vote.

BGM 674 — REGIONAL MINISTRIES

Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries C. Jeff Woods updated the board on the Executive Minister search process and transition support, including conversations with retiring executives and facilitating new leadership. He shared 2024 REMC Survey findings, highlighting clergy support and personal development as top priorities, focusing on bi-vocational ministry and regional training, though mental health tools showed low proficiency. Woods also noted trends in church leadership, including the rise of bivocational and women pastors, clergy burnout, and the decline of full-time and seminary-trained pastors.

BGM 675 — REPORT FROM THE ABCUSA NOMINATING COMMITTEE

By voice vote, David Grummon was elected as an at-large director for ABC of the Central Region (filling the vacancy for 2025), as recommended by the ABCUSA Nominating Committee.

The meeting was recessed for a group picture and dinner at Alloy Hotel's Hammer & Fire Restaurant.

Saturday, November 16, 2024, 9:15 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

BGM 676 — RECONVENING/OPENING WORSHIP/STATEMENTS

President Nikita McCalister reconvened the BGM meeting. Chaplain Doug Scalise led a devotion on 2 Corinthians 5: 16-20 (NRSV) and lit the Christ Candle. The Focus Statement and ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement were read in unison.

BGM 678 — BOARD ORIENTATION /CONFIDENTIALITY WORKSHOP

C. Jeff Woods presented on nonprofit board responsibilities, outlining essential duties such as setting direction, loyalty, confidentiality, and securing resources. He emphasized the importance of regular evaluations, clear expectations, active involvement in fundraising, and board diversity, particularly with younger members.

BGM 679 — AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

Past President Jim Wolfe shared that the BGM Executive Committee formed a task force in March 2022 to explore recognizing American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM) as a national partner, which will require Bylaw changes to be approved at the 2025 Biennial Mission Summit. At the June 2023 BGM meeting, the board voted to recognize ABWM as a national board, resulting in changes to the Bylaws and Standing Rules.

BGM 680 — Standing Rules Committee

On behalf of the Standing Rules Committee Chair, Jan Fletcher, Bruce Van Der Beek motioned to amend ARTICLE XIII of the bylaws and to present the proposed amendment to the delegates at the 2025 Biennial Mission Summit. The motion was passed by secret ballot.

ARTICLE XIII NATIONAL BOARDS:

Section 1. General. National Boards are separate corporations that have been historically entrusted to perform many of the national program functions of the Denomination.

National Boards each have their own boards of directors and have missions and purposes that are distinct and contribute to the life of the Denomination. While there may be occasional overlap in their activities, allowing for collaborative work, each National Board serves its own purpose in the Denomination, under the general direction and supervision of its own board of directors.

Each National Board shall be enumerated in Article XIII of these Bylaws. As such, new National Boards may be named only through the process of amending these Bylaws.

Each National Board must maintain a provision in its respective bylaws requiring such corporation to remain a party to the Covenant of Relationships. ABCUSA shall maintain a contract with each National Board requiring the written consent of ABCUSA before such bylaw provision can be amended or removed, and further providing that such corporation shall not voluntarily withdraw from the Covenant of Relationships without receiving the prior written assent of ABCUSA.

As of the effective date of these Bylaws, the National Boards are:

- The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (“ABFMS”), aka International Ministries (“IM”)
- The American Baptist Home Mission Societies comprised of The American Baptist Home Mission Society (“ABHMS”) and The Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society (“WABHMS”),
- American Baptist Women’s Ministries (“ABWM”)
- The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of American Baptist Churches (“MMBB”), aka MMBB Financial Service

Van Der Beek motioned additional bylaws changes to Article XIII- National Boards (lines 906-924) as stated below and to present the proposed amendment to the delegates at the 2025 Biennial Mission Summit, and the motion was passed by secret ballot.

Article XV, Article XVI, and Article XIX

1. Article VI Section 3 (Page 15. Line 320): Remove the words ...”or of the National Program Boards”
2. Article VII Section 1 (Page 16. Lines 343; 349)
 - a. Change line 343 to read ...each from ABFMS, ABHMS, and ABWM;
 - b. Change line 349 by removing American Baptist Women’s Ministries
3. Article X Section 4 (v) (page 26 Line 709): Remove the word Program from the phrase” National Program Boards” so that it reads “National Boards”
4. Article XIV
 - a. Section 3(Page 32 Line 957): Remove the word Program from the phrase” National Program Boards” so that it reads “National Boards”
 - b. Section 5 Page 32 Line 967: Remove the words ...and the President American Baptist Women’s Ministries
5. Article XVI
 - a. Section (a) (Page 37 Line 1144): Remove the words...and the Executive Director of American Baptist Women’s Ministries,
 - b. Section (c) (1) Page 37 Line 1172: Remove American Baptist Women’s Ministries from the list

Van Der Beek motioned that rule 15 in the standing rules be adjusted, as displayed below. The motion passed with a voice vote.

15.1.1.3

In addition to the duties prescribed in Rule 15.1.1.2, the Associate General Secretary and Treasurer shall:

- in general, have the power of and be responsible for the performance of all the fiscal duties incident to an office of treasurer:
- be responsible for the custody of the funds and securities of ABCUSA.
- be in charge of (oversee) the disbursement of its money.
- cause full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements to be kept in books and records belonging to ABCUSA.
- cause such books of accounts and records to be exhibited at the office of ABCUSA to any of the members of the Board of General Ministries at any time upon request
- cause a detailed statement to be rendered to the Board of General Ministries as often as the Board of General Ministries shall require it.
- cause the funds of ABCUSA to be deposited in such banks or trust companies as may from time to time be designated by the Board of General Ministries.
- cause any securities of ABCUSA to be deposited with such banks or trust companies or in such vault or vaults as may from time to time be designated by the Board of General Ministries.
- The Associate General Secretary and Treasurer shall perform such other fiscal duties as from time to time may be assigned by the Board of General Ministries, the Executive Committee, or the General Secretary.
- In the absence or disability of the Associate General Secretary and Treasurer, any Assistant Treasurer shall have the fiscal powers and perform the fiscal duties of the Associate General Secretary and Treasurer as set forth in this Rule 15.1.1.3.

15.1.1.4

BGM 681 — REPORT OF THE BUDGET REVIEW OFFICER

Budget Review Officer Paul Higgins referenced the financial report prepared by Alan Musoke, Associate General Secretary for Finance/CFO/Treasurer, and provided an update on ABCUSA's financials through September 2024. He noted a \$206,000 decrease in revenue compared to the previous year, with total revenue falling short of the budget by \$2,300. Expenses were down \$427,000 from the previous year and \$160,000 under budget, resulting in a net loss of \$81,000.

Higgins reported that the ABCUSA Finance Committee did not make a formal recommendation due to quorum issues. He also noted that all that were present approved the finance committee report. Matthew Toupin motioned to approve the proposed United Mission (UM) distribution for 2025, reflecting an expected 3.0% decrease in United Mission giving. Marilyn Malone seconded the motion, which was approved by voice vote.

Higgins went on to share the proposed 2025 and 2026 ABCUSA Budgets. The budgets project deficits, with 2025 expecting a loss of \$504,000 (due to the Biennial Mission Summit) and 2026 a loss of \$454,000. By voice vote, the Board of General Ministries approved the

recommendation of the BGM Finance Committee to adopt the proposed 2025 American Baptist Mission Support Estimated Income and ABCUSA budget as presented.

The proposed 2025 budget and the financial report are attached.

BGM 682 — REPORT OF ACTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NIKITA MCCALISTER

President Nikita McCalister sent a “cease and desist” letter in July to all parties using the ABCUSA logo and partnership language, these organizations did so without authorization and compliance with the ABCUSA policy. The Executive Committee approved Alan Musoke as the representative to seek additional information regarding the Recharge Park Installation & Outdoor Public Art Installation Project.

BGM 683 —REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS AND CAUCUS COMMITTEE

Bill Poland reported that the eight caucuses have not yet met as Katharine Hsiao, the Intercaucus President, is seeking a replacement. Each caucus has been allocated \$8,000 and must report how the funds are used. The committee will meet once a new president is in place.

The board recessed for lunch at the Hammer & Fire Restaurant.

BGM 684 — CALL TO ORDER/OPENING WORSHIP/STATEMENTS

President Nikita McCalister reconvened the board, relit the Christ Candle, and the board read the Focus Statement and the ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement in unison.

BGM 685 — REPORT OF CHANGED RELATIONSHIPS

Alan Musoke shared the changes in the church report. As of October 1, 2023, there were 4,688 churches. From October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024, the following changes occurred: 29 churches were reinstated or joined from another denomination (currently active churches), one church changed regions, four new churches were planted and received First Recognition, one mission was closed, 20 churches disbanded, three churches were dismissed, and 39 churches withdrew from ABCUSA. This resulted in a final church count of 4,659.

BGM 686 — PRESIDENT’S NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

President Nikita McCalister reported that the Sparrowk President’s Award recipient is Dr. Susan E. Gillies and the Mowbray Ecumenical Award recipient will be announced tomorrow following the Christian Unity & Interfaith Relations Action Group.

Bill Poland motioned to approve the following persons to serve on committees, Damaris Santiago-Lebron seconded, and the board approved by voice vote.

- Tamara Scott will serve on the World Relief Committee as the new chair.
- Bruce Van Der Beek will serve on the Finance Committee
- Roger Chamberlain will serve as the International Ministries representative on the World Relief Committee

BGM 687 — MISSION RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Director of Mission Resource Development (MRD), Wendy Clemmer, shared that MRD engaged in communications and enhanced outreach through social media, updated brochures, and inspiring videos. The department also collaborated with Women in Ministry on webinars and

will continue with the Everyday ABC Conversations series, with upcoming conversations scheduled for December 5, 2024, and March 20, 2025. Additionally, the Biennial Mission Summit, a family event for all ages, will be held from July 3-6, 2025, in Omaha, Nebraska.

BGM 688 — WORLD RELIEF COMMITTEE

Bill Poland shared an update on behalf of WRC chair Janice Fletcher: 100% of Designated funds were given to the designated disaster. Undesignated funds support our ecumenical partners and projects (grants are provided by ABHMS & IM). A bequest is being established from a donation from a church closing. Funds have been designated for the Office of the General Secretary to provide pastoral support.

BGM 689 — BELOVED COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Directors had another opportunity for prayer triads to pray for each other's ministries.

BGM 690 — ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS

A small dialogue task group was formed at the BGM's request. The group gathered to share their personal stories of how they were called into ministry and their personal views. They noted that they did not bring forward any solutions or motions, as they wished to continue fostering respectful dialogue.

BGM 691 — RECESS OF BGM PLENARY/CONVENING OF BGM IN ACTION GROUPS

The Board of General Ministries meeting was recessed for action groups:

- BGM Finance Committee
- Christian Unity & Interfaith Relations
- Becoming a Beloved Community
- Communicating ABC Identity

Dinner was held in the Hammer & Fire Restaurant, which was followed by an evening vespers service led by ABCUSA President Rev. Nikita McCalister, with a Homily, "Lament, Learn, Move forward" Nehemiah 1:4-7, given Rev. Cedric Jones, BGM Director and senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pa.

Sunday, November 17, 2024, 9:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

BGM 692 — RECONVENING/OPENING WORSHIP/STATEMENTS

Nikita McCalister reconvened the BGM meeting. Chaplain Doug Scalise led a devotional and lit the Christ Candle. The Focus Statement and ABCUSA Confidentiality Statement were read in unison.

BGM 693 — ACTION GROUP REPORTS/PROPOSALS/REPORTS

The action groups shared updates from yesterday's breakout session:

The **BGM Finance Committee**, led by Paul Higgins, reported:

- Agreed to continue using Tait Weller as the auditor firm.

- Received \$7,000 in gifts and Bequests (May 2024 thru Sept 2024).
- Reviewed the reports from the Treasurer.
- Met with Gina Haas (ABHMS) regarding investments with Common Investment and with Christine Roush (ABF) and Merrill Lynch representatives regarding investments with the American Baptist Foundation (ABF).
- Discussed contacting the regions regarding the audit.
- On November 1, the committee discussed the budget and considered switching from a biennial to a triennial format.
 - The discussion focused on the potential impact on staff (providing them a break), reducing the deficit, and the effect on the bylaws, with the goal of returning to the organization's roots.
 - President McCalister shared that while further exploration of this matter is possible, a vote on the proposal will not take place until 2027 due to time limitations.

Christian Unity & Interfaith Relations, led by Chakravarthy Zadda, reported:

- The working group reviewed and made edits to the job description for the dialogue partners/representatives and planned to send this job description to the General Secretary for review following the meeting.
- Resolutions:
 - "Resolution on the Persecution of Religious Minorities, in India and Beyond"
 - "The Problem of Religious Nationalism, in the US and Globally—a Policy Statement of the National Council of Churches"
- The group expressed gratitude to Raimundo Barreto and Chaks Zadda for their representation at the National Council of Churches and their role in creating these important documents.
- Special thanks were given to Chaks for his advocacy for Christians in India. It is hoped that the "Resolution on the Persecution of Religious Minorities" will be received as a statement of support from the Western Church.
- The group unanimously agreed to award the 2025 Mowbray Award to Raimundo Barreto in recognition of his long-term service as a scholar and his representation of the denomination in various ecumenical settings.

Becoming a Beloved Community, led by Yvette Shafer, reported:

- Positive feedback was received regarding the prayer triads, which the Beloved Community organized with the overall goal of helping people to get to know two other members of the BGM better.
- A recommendation was made to invite family members to the last dinner at the July 2025 board meeting before the Biennial and to continue the three-time segments the Beloved Community has been allocated in previous meetings, in particular, to continue the prayer triads at our next BGM meeting.

Communicating ABC Identity, led by Bonnie Higgins, reported:

- Higgins raised the question of how to encourage ABC churches to give to United Mission, noting that many churches are unaware of ABC's mission and what the denomination does.
- Recommendations:
 - Clean up social media to make it more accessible and user-friendly.

- Simplify language to ensure it resonates with the pews and is easy to understand.
- Improve the visibility of ABCUSA online, as it is difficult to find when searching.
- Churches need to help to understand what they are receiving in return from ABCUSA through United Mission.
- Videos about United Mission are still pending, and once available, they will help share the message.
- The use of brochures is a good start for sharing information.
- Webinars were highlighted as a great way to stay connected.
- ABC camps were emphasized as necessary, focusing on starting young with churches.
- Higgins expressed excitement about the Biennial's increased focus on children and encouraged further event promotion.

BGM 694 — RECOGNITION OF RETIRING DIRECTORS

President Nikita McCalister recognized the retiring Directors for their service. **Annie Field** served on the ABCUSA Committee on Christian Unity and as a representative to the National Council of Churches from 2020 to 2024. **Janice Fletcher** chaired the World Relief Committee from 2021 to 2024 and was involved in the “Communicating ABC Identity” Action Group. **Bonnie Higgins** led the “Communicating ABC Identity” group from 2020 to 2024. **Cedric Jones** served on the BGM Executive and Finance Committees from 2017 to 2024 as BGM Chaplain. Dr. Jemerson prayed for our retiring Directors.

BGM 695 — CLOSING WORSHIP AND HOLY COMMUNION

Chaplain Doug Scalise led closing worship, reflecting on scripture 1 Timothy 3:14-15. President Nikita McCalister led communion.

BGM 696 — PRAYER AND ADJOURNMENT

President Nikita McCalister adjourned the meeting and closed it with prayer.

Submitted by,
Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain,
General Secretary

Documents attached:

BGM 669 — 2024 June BGM Minutes Green Lake WI
BGM 669 — 2024 November BGM Agenda Final Revised
BGM 671 — Report from the ABCUSA President
BGM 672 — Report from the ABCUSA General Secretary
BGM 673 — Convene American Baptist Historical Society
BGM 674 — Regional Ministries Report
BGM 681 — Report of the BGM Finance Committee
BGM 681 — 2025-2026 ABCUSA Budget
BGM 681 — Sept 2024 Financial Report
BGM 685 — Report of Changed Relationships
BGM 687 — Mission Resource Development Report
BGM 688 — World Relief Committee