

2011 BIENNIAL MINUTES

FRIDAY AFTERNOON GATHERING, JUNE 24, 2011

WORSHIP - Session in English with Spanish translation

3 – 5 PM

1. Attendees were greeted by gathering music by the Biennial Band, led by Daryl Walker.
2. At 3:00 pm, Patti Stratton, Vice President, ABCUSA, welcomed the attendees.
3. Frank Christine, President, ABCUSA, called the meeting to order. He reported that there are 582 registered delegates and the quorum is set at 194.
4. Jeff Savage, Chair, Biennial Program Committee moved the adoption of the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business at the 2011 Biennial Meeting of Delegates on behalf of the Biennial Program Committee. There was no discussion and the Rules of Procedure were adopted.
5. Jeff Savage moved the adoption of the Provisional Program as printed in the Program Book, subject to any further changes the Committee on the Order of Business might recommend and that the Biennial Program Committee be designated as the Committee on the Order of Business. There was no discussion and the motion was adopted.
6. Dennis Johnson, pastor of Baptist Temple in Charlestown, WV, was introduced as parliamentarian.
7. Frank Christine announced that the information sharing relating to the work of the General Board called for in the ABCUSA bylaws will occur at the Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon gatherings. Frank further reminded the delegates of how to register to speak about an issue, make a nomination, or propose a future bylaws amendment.
8. Jeff Savage introduced Neville Callum, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, who brought greetings.
9. Daryl Walker led in congregational singing, including *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name* and *Lift Him Up*. Alejandria Omartinez led in prayer.
10. Roy Medley introduced the speaker for the afternoon, Dr. Gary Nelson, President and CEO of Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto.
11. The "Say Amen" choir from San Francisco shared their gift of music.

12. Gary Nelson, our main speaker for the afternoon, shared with us regarding the church in the 21st century. In 1955, 75% of Canadians in urban settings attended church; today only 10% do. This is not unique to Canadians. He based his message on Luke 19:1 – 10, the story of Zacchaeus. We need to model our behavior on that of Jesus in this story. First, Jesus found Zacchaeus in the crowd, not in the synagogue. Our God is a seeking God, so why does the church continue to expect people to come to us? Second, Jesus knows Zacchaeus and calls him by name. We need to have genuine community with those around us, so we can call them by name. Finally, Jesus does not expect Zacchaeus to conform to his culture; he goes to his home for dinner. Although the crowd was unhappy, Jesus replied that he had come “to seek and to save that which is lost.” We must be more like Jesus, seeking and saving the lost.
13. Joan Freisen, Executive Minister of ABC of Greater Indianapolis, moderated a panel discussion with Gary Nelson. Panel participants Leslie Braxton, Amaury Tañón-Santos, Karen Yee and Wallace Smith explored missional church concepts further by asking a series of questions. The group explored how to amend structures to help us move from being a “waiting” people to being a “seeking” people; we need to explore why systems were created and how they currently function, then keep those that help and delete those that do not. In Baptist polity, churches created denominations and churches can change the denominations. In the Joshua story, the Ark of the Covenant is not protected but leads the way. God is vulnerable first and is way ahead of us. We are invited to step out of our comfort zones and join him, remembering that Jesus did not come to make us comfortable.
14. Victoria Goff of ABHMS and Angela Sudermann of IM called for the offering to support volunteer ministries. Lizzett Alvarado, soloist, provided the offertory music.
15. Paul Hayes, Chair, Statements of Concern Committee, shared the procedures for Statements of Concern this year.
16. José Norat-Rodríguez led in the benediction.

FRIDAY EVENING GATHERING, JUNE 24, 2011
WORSHIP - Session in English with Spanish translation
7:00 – 9:00 PM

17. Gathering music was provided by the Biennial Band, led by Julio Gonzalez-Paniagua.
18. After an opening song, *Te Alabare*, the opening Plena-style procession occurred, featuring IM missionaries, Regional Executives, and children and church members from Puerto Rico.

19. The Band then led us in a reprise of *Te Alabare*, followed by prayer voiced by Dwight Stinnett.
20. The congregation sang *Celebrate Jesus*, while Trevor Beauford and May Hulst with roving mics asked questions of congregation members Kristian Pamias, Yvonne Martinez Thorne, Danica Hernandez Keefe, and Arthur Francis.
21. We viewed an opening video, and then Josué Gómez welcomed us on behalf of the Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico. Jeff Savage welcomed the congregation, noting that this evening we would have an opportunity to celebrate the 100th anniversary of MMBB, Sumner Grant's years of ministry, and the awarding of the Sparrowk President's Award. He then introduced Patricia Hernandez, American Baptist Women in Ministry National Director.
22. Patricia Hernandez introduced our speaker for the evening, Dr. Carolyn Gordon, associate professor of communication and chair of the Department of Preaching, Fuller Theological Seminary.
23. Julio González-Paniagua and 2 mimes led in the reading and presentation of the scripture.
24. National Executive Council members Roy Medley, Reid Trulson, Joe Kutter, Virginia Holmstrom, Sumner Grant and Aidsand Wright-Riggins led in the presentation of a new two-year initiative as we seek together to listen with new ears to God's call to mission and respond to that call in unique and creative ways. The presentation included a video and a brief meditation on the Abram and Sarai story by Roy Medley. Representatives from groups within our denomination made formal commitments to this new way of carrying out God's mission, and congregation members were invited to make personal commitments as well. Rebecca Rodriguez de Moralez spoke for laity; Wesley Sun spoke for local pastors; Steve Van Ostran spoke for Regional Executive Ministers; and Patty Stratton spoke for denominational officers. Roy Medley led a prayer of commitment and the congregation sang *I Will Do a New Thing in You*.
25. After acknowledging the presence of Cora Sparrowk, her daughter and granddaughter in the congregation, Frank Christine presented the Sparrowk President's Award to Yosh Nakagawa. Joined on stage by his wife, Sue, Yosh Nakagawa thanked the American Baptist Church family for their support over many years, and for the award.
26. Mary Hulst called for the offering to support the One Great Hour of Sharing. Leslie Lee and Steve Gretz provided offertory music.
27. Jeff Savage led in an expression of appreciation for the ministry of MMBB and Sumner Grant, and introduced the video celebrating the 100th anniversary of MMBB.

28. After the video, a song of thanksgiving was sung by the Morehouse College Glee Club.
29. The Morehouse College Glee Club then provided a brief concert.
30. Dr. Carolyn Gordon brought the message on the theme, "Celebrate God's Glory." Asking, "What is God's glory?" is a life-long question. We must come to understand that God is bigger than anything we can imagine, and yet he loves us individually. Sometimes we find ourselves in wilderness places, and these are the most important times to celebrate God's glory. He can help us to survive, thrive and get out alive from these times of testing. If we go through them with Jesus, we can come out of difficult times stronger.
31. Daryl Walker then brought a short musical sermon response.
32. The Biennial Band led the congregation in a song of response.
33. Kati Hendershot brought the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON GATHERING, JUNE 25, 2011
DISCERNMENT SESSION - Session in English with Spanish translation
2:30 – 4:30 pm

34. Frank Christine welcomed the delegates.
35. Patti Stratton opened the meeting with prayer.
36. Frank Christine expressed thanks to the Biennial Boosters and Sponsors.
37. Patti Stratton moved the adoption of the Bylaws amendments on behalf of the General Board.
38. Brenda Fluker, General Board member, and Steve Bils, Regional Executive Minister, ABC of Oregon, brought an explanatory presentation of the changes and their implications. Steve Bils reviewed the history of the development of these amendments, including some of the concerns raised in Pasadena in 2009 and the changes made as a result of those concerns. Brenda Fluker shared the ways that the Bylaws amendments will allow us to move forward in the ways that the NEC presented at the meeting last night as we change our focus to mission.
39. Six delegates registered their interest in speaking to the motion.
 - Grant Ward, delegate from Central Baptist Church, Wayne PA spoke against the motion. He expressed a concern that we have failed to correct a problem with our policy statements. These old statements will continue to be in effect, and the bar to rescind or pass new ones is too high. These are creedal

statements, and do not speak for Central, which is a welcoming and affirming church. Our denomination was once in the forefront of speaking for justice, and these statements trap us in the past.

- Susan Johnson, delegate from Hyde Park Union Church, Chicago, IL spoke in favor of the motion. She agrees with the concerns expressed by Central Baptist, but does not believe that policy statements will solve the problem. The point of these amendments is to update our governance model. The new emphasis will be not on institutional maintenance but on conversation regarding issues of importance.
- Gordon Swan, delegate from First Baptist Church, Newton, MA spoke against the motion. It is a pleasure to be united in love despite differences of opinion. Our fellowship and love must include all of God's children. Proposed Article XV requires a super majority to rescind statements adopted by a simple majority; that is discriminatory.
- Trinetta McCray, General Board delegate and member of Calvary Baptist Church, Milwaukee, WI spoke in favor of the motion. We will always have a tension between holding on to a beloved past and preparing for an exciting future. We worship a God of repositioning; throughout scripture, God moves to accomplish God's purposes. Throughout ABCUSA history, we have adapted as needed. This is an opportunity to focus on God's plans for us.
- Roberto Dieppa-Baez, delegate from Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico, spoke in favor of the motion. It is clear that we need a structure to allow us to meet the needs of today's world. This is not a time to be stuck in endless discussion, but to move forward with God's leadership.
- David Gregg, General Board delegate and member of Grace Baptist Church, Chicago, IL, spoke in favor of the motion. These amendments will provide the flexibility necessary for new times, which are vastly different from the culture our parents' structure was designed to serve. The concern expressed regarding the public witness statements is not enough to defeat the motion, as nobody's identity is threatened by the statements we disagree with. These are symbols; they are important but not prohibitive. These amendments will increase our freedom to do mission creatively with like-minded partners. They will improve the practice of autonomy and inter-dependence central to our Baptist identity.

40. Time being expired for discussion, the delegates voted via ballot.

41. Jim Ratliff brought a financial report. We received an unqualified audit opinion for the years ending December 31, 2009 and 2010 from the accounting firm of Mulligan and Company, LLC. Total assets for 2010 were 37.8 million dollars, a net increase of 1.1 million or 3% over 2009. This increase amount included an increase in investments of \$1.9 million, a decrease of \$174,000 in accounts receivable and a decrease in notes receivable of \$520,000. Total liabilities for 2010 were \$5.6 million, a decrease of \$348,000 or 5% from 2009. Total operating revenues in 2010 were \$6.67 million, a \$1.02 million or 13% decrease from 2009. The biggest reason for this decrease was that 2010 was not a Biennial

year and 2009 was. Other decreases in revenues were in mission support received by ABCUSA of \$297,000 and a \$196,000 decrease in Mission Center building operations income. Total operating expenses in 2010 were \$5.25 million, a decrease of \$1.9 million or 19% from 2009. Major items include a decrease of \$302,000 in Mission Center building operating expenses, a decrease in general and administrative expenses of \$308,000 and a decrease of \$626,000 in Biennial expenses. Net assets as of December 31, 2010 were \$32.2 million, an increase of \$1.5 million over the same time the previous year. The full 2010 audited statements are available on the website or by calling the ABCUSA treasurer's office to request a copy.

42. ABCLA, led by Sam Chetti, brought a moment of tribute and thanks for the leadership of Frank Christine, presenting him with the gift of a cut glass piece symbolizing Pentecost.

43. Patti Stratton closed the session in prayer.

SATURDAY EVENING GATHERING, JUNE 25, 2011
WORSHIP – Session in Spanish with English translation
7:00 – 9:00 pm

44. The Biennial Band, led by Julio González-Paniagua, provided gathering music as the attendees arrived. Daryl Walker also led in music.

45. The Biennial Band, with Annie González-Ortiz, led in a time of worship and praise, with *Al que me siñe de poder*; *Santo, Santo, Santo*; *Bueno es Alabar*; and a reprise of *Al que me sine de poder*. After a prayer led by IM missionary Doris Mayol, the Band then led us in singing *Roca de refugio* and *A su Nombre Gloria*.

46. Jeff Woods and Laura Ayala brought greetings on behalf of regional ministry. Laura Ayala also recognized honored guests in attendance, including the Disciples of Christ General Pastor, a representative of the Catholic Diocese, a representative of the Latin America Council of Churches, and a representative of the Governor of Puerto Rico.

47. Miriam Gutierrez introduced the speaker, Rev. Dr. Roberto Dieppa-Báez, Executive Minister of Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico.

48. The mass choir from Puerto Rico sang *Alabanza* and another selection.

49. Annie González-Ortiz led in a prayer of confession with musical support by the mass choir.

50. The men's choir responded to the prayer with the singing of *Oyenos, Mi Dios*.

51. In English with Spanish subtitles on the screen, Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, presented the Dahlberg Peace Award to Rev. Paul Hayes and posthumously to Mrs. Beverly McNally. Paul Hayes thanked the ABHMS, his family, and his friends, colleagues and congregations over the years. He gave his monetary award to Ricardo and Doris Mayol, IM missionaries working for peace in Chiapas, Mexico. Thomas McNally, on behalf of the family, thanked ABHMS and ABCUSA for honoring Beverly's memory.
52. The Biennial Band led in congregational singing of *Cuan Grande Es El*.
53. Patti Stratton and Josué Gómez called for the offering to support Biennial expenses. Annie González-Ortiz and the Biennial Band provided offertory music.
54. Cynthia Soto sang a solo.
55. David Wheeler led in the reading of the scripture and prayer from Isaiah 35.
56. The mass choir brought a musical number, *Behold*.
57. Roberto Dieppa-Báez brought the message on the theme, "Celebrate God's Power." After thanking the many people from the IBPR who made the Biennial possible, he shared a photo of a small African child huddled on the ground, being watched by a vulture. The photographer won a Pulitzer prize for the photo, but did not help the child. The space between the small child and the vulture represent the hope we have to intervene in God's name for those in need. Yet time is of the essence. If we spend our time arguing with each other about the best way to help, the child is lost. Only God's power can unite us, propel us, keep us vigilant and mobilize us. The power of God shows the way; let us celebrate it!
58. Members of the congregation were invited to respond to the message by raising hands during the singing of *Poderoso Dios*.
59. Salvador Orellana led in the benediction.
60. The congregation departed with singing led by the Biennial Band.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON GATHERING, JUNE 26, 2011

DISCERNMENT SESSION - Session in English with Spanish translation

2:30 – 5:00 pm

61. Frank Christine welcomed the group and announced the results of the vote on the Bylaws amendments. There were 518 votes in favor of the amendments and 44 votes opposed, representing a 92% favorable vote, so the motion is adopted.
62. Patti Stratton led in a prayer of thanksgiving for the new structure.

63. Sharon Gober brought the report of the Nominating Committee to elect the new Board of General Ministries. The vote was taken by uplifted ballot, and the motion was adopted.
64. Sharon Gober brought the report of the Nominating Committee to elect the following officers for the 2012-2013 Biennium:
President: Ruth Clark, Judson Baptist Church, Kansas City, KS
Vice President: Donald Ng, First Chinese Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA
Budget Review Officer: James Ratliff, Olivet Baptist Church, Valley Stream, NY
65. There being no nominations from the floor, delegates were asked to cast their ballots.
66. ABHMS brought a report. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins, III, shared of some of the history of the work begun by John Mason Peck and others, and the ministry spanning three centuries of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies. A video presentation followed.
67. IM brought a report. Reid Trulson shared the history of International Ministries from 1814 to the present, with a power point presentation. Then a brief video, "From Headhunters to Evangelists" was shown. International Ministries will begin a new partnership with Baptists in North East India that will allow additional doors of ministry to open.
68. OGS brought a report. Our newest United Mission video was shown. Roy Medley highlighted the importance of United Mission to our work together. He also recognized regional staff, IM staff and ABHMS staff in the room, all of whom benefit from United Mission. Leo Thorne presented certificates to some of our highest giving churches: PIB de Carolina, Carolina, PR, Rev. Carmen C. Adames-Vasquez, pastor, #1 to total UM represented by Carmen Adames-Vasquez and Roberto Dieppa-Baéz, Regional Executive Minister; South Parkersburg Baptist Church, Parkersburg, WV, Rev. Ed Rogers, pastor, #3 to total UM, represented by Frank Miller and David Carrico, Regional Executive Minister; Prairie Baptist Church, Prairie Village, KS, Dr. Stephen Jones, interim pastor, #4 to total UM, represented by Molly Marshall; Grace Baptist Church of Germantown, Philadelphia, PA, Rev. Dr. G. Daniel Jones, pastor, highest per capita among African-American churches, represented by G. Daniel Jones and James McJunkin, Regional Minister; North Shore Baptist Church, Chicago, IL, Rev. Douglas Harris, Rev. Carol McVetty, pastors, highest per capita among multi-ethnic congregations, represented by Douglas Harris and Carol McVetty.
69. Patti Stratton presided over the presentation by the Statements of Concern Committee, chaired by Paul Hayes, who reviewed the procedures. This year, Statements of Concern are intended to be not a declaration of a position but a way to provoke discussion on issues of importance to us all.

70. Dee Dee Turlington, committee member, brought the statement on “Holy Manners: Civil Discourse and Spiritual Discernment:”

ABCUSA Statement of Concern

HOLY MANNERS: CIVIL DISCOURSE AND SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Public and private discourse in recent years has been characterized by a noticeable lack of civility. Mean-spirited, insulting and demeaning comments and incendiary distortions of the truth have become the standard by which people address others in the media, on the Internet, in households, in classrooms, in the workplace, in religious communities—even all the way to the halls of Congress! At times, these behaviors have characterized our own denominational debates on controversial issues.

As we mark the turn of the decade and gather for the 2011 ABC (American Baptist Churches) USA Biennial meeting in Puerto Rico, we face the challenge of responding to and addressing the loss of civility in society and, more specifically, within our denomination, churches and families. As American Baptists, how can we impact our culture in a way that restores respect for others, particularly with those with whom we disagree?

Theologically, as a people of faith, the answer lies in our willingness to follow Jesus’ teachings and example, which inspire us to treat others with respect, consideration and empathy, especially those we deem “enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48; cf. Romans 12:9-21). In Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV), we read, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me —put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Paul also urged the early church, which was no stranger to disputes, “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2, NRSV).

Such wisdom is ours to own and apply to life. As Christians, we can serve as examples in lifting up all that is good, instead of merely finding fault with the opinions and beliefs of others. It is within our power to listen to others with open minds and hearts, while being constructive and encouraging, yet discerning, in our comments during discussions in order to be models of civility empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We have the opportunity during this Biennial period to restore civility in both public and private ways. We invite American Baptists to practice civility through discussions of the ABCUSA Statements of Concern in preparation for the Biennial gathering. In San Juan, we invite delegates to participate in forums addressing difficult and complex issues facing our nation and churches. There, with intentionality and grace, we hope to speak and act with civility by practicing “holy manners” while engaging others in dialogue.

Most provocative issues are complex with multiple concerns at stake—no one point of view captures the breadth or the depth of meaning. Discernment and dialogue allow us to sort through layers of meaning. *Holy manners* means “respectful yet passionate dialogue

from the perspective of shared faith;" it is "old-fashioned courtesy," plus "seeking the mind of God through the wisdom of the gathered community and beyond." Typically, we exercise holy manners when we face difficult decisions or situations in our personal lives; we often reflect and pray about the concerns at hand, read the Scriptures for insight and wisdom, and talk with a few trusted friends or a pastor for input and perspective. Likewise, when we face difficult situations as the church or tough issues in society, we often pray together, discuss relevant passages of Scripture, study the Christian tradition and share with each other as a faith community about the situation and our experiences to learn from each other while seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit.

This process is commonly known as *spiritual discernment*. We discern together, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us through Scriptures, Christian tradition, human reason and our experience to speak to our situation and inform our conversation. The Spirit urges us to be open to new things God is doing, new insights God wants us to understand and new ways in which God is calling us to serve. In the process, we recognize our opinions and actions may need to be revised, as we are challenged by others who don't share our perspective, or when we mistakenly assume our beliefs and experiences are normative and authoritative for all people. Holy manners insist on openness, providing a context and safe space for those who disagree or who are still wrestling through the issues under discussion.

The primary characteristic of holy manners, or civil discourse, is mutual respect. It involves an intentional way of listening: with the desire to understand others and with openness to the possibility that God is speaking to us through others. It also involves creating a safe environment for conversation without attacking, demeaning or intimidating each other.

The invitation to civil discourse and spiritual discernment is grounded in Scripture, Baptist traditions (i.e., soul freedom) and the best aspirations of our democracy. Our hope at this Biennial is that we will model holy manners when addressing issues of concern—listening and learning from each other, while discerning the mind of Christ.

Questions of Concern

1. In your opinion, what has led to the decline of civility in American culture? What impact has that had in various areas of your life?
2. How do our churches encourage or discourage civil discourse and spiritual discernment?
3. What questions or topics are difficult to address through civil discourse?
4. When does it matter if a group reaches consensus on an issue? When does it not matter?
5. When have you significantly changed your opinion on a moral concern based on a conversation you've had with another person? How did you sense God was speaking to you through that other person?
6. What are your ground rules for civil discourse?
7. How can all opinions and views be heard and respected in a discussion?
8. How is the mind of Christ discerned in the process of civil discourse?

9. How might children learn civility?

Suggested Actions

As a citizen:

1. Be aware of and responsive to how things are said, as well as what is said;
2. Contact elected officials and media representatives on the issue of civility and hold them accountable; and
3. Engage others who have different beliefs, experiences, and opinions than yours and practice civil discourse with them to foster communication, communions, and community.

As a member of a community of faith:

4. Set up a “Faith and Social Concern” table with articles expressing various points of view on current issues and
5. Set and apply guidelines for civil discussion of both congregational and societal issues.

Within families:

6. Examine family dynamics (particularly around authority and power) and how issues are handled, being mindful of mutual empathy and respect;
7. Dialogue with children and youth about respectful conversation, and practice listening to each other; and
8. Address difficult issues in the home in a family forum, where different opinions are heard and family members work together to solve problems.

There being no delegates registered to speak, a vote was taken by uplifted ballot and the motion was adopted.

71. Paul Martin, committee member, brought the statement on “Envisioning Our Churches in the 21st Century:”

**ABCUSA Statement of Concern
ENVISIONING OUR CHURCHES IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

The 21st century has come with a flood of new challenges that, for the local church, call into question the effectiveness of a traditional approach to ecclesiology, evangelism and mission. These challenges include the following:

- declining attendance and income for church budgets,
- changing societal norms and needs,
- the struggle to be relevant to younger generations,
- waning denominational participation and loyalty,
- the inability to recognize and respond to new opportunities for ministry or to identify indicators that signal the appropriate ending of existing ministries and
- concern regarding the stewardship of church facilities, including their environmental impact.

Many of our churches are wrestling with worries regarding their survival beyond current generations.

In particular, the gap between the generations is evident in the use of technology and in the perception of the church as a spiritual resource. A decade ago, Leonard Sweet, among others, noted that “postmoderns are skeptical of institutions and are getting spiritual help from videos, books, radio, newsletters, and a host of do-it-yourself sources.”¹ A decade later, we can update that to include Web-based media, such as social networking sites that serve as community builders for millions. The local church can no longer rely on standard practices and programs to reach, teach and preach to the church of tomorrow.

Some of our churches have adapted by intentionally following the models of “seeker” and “missional” churches, or by joining the Emerging Church Movement. Some have lessened their emphasis on denominational relationships. However, what is effective in one situation is no guarantee of success in another; therefore, many congregations find themselves experimenting with various programs and worship styles hoping to increase participation in their church, while maintaining enough of their traditional past to satisfy current members. The difficult reality for many of our churches is that they are uncertain about the future and are fighting reluctance to change current practices.

As American Baptists, the challenges we face must not discourage us from our commitment to the mandate of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Our challenges are no more daunting than those of the earliest believers. On Pentecost, they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel in a way that was adaptable to the immediate audience, the members of which miraculously heard the message in their own language and context. This example illustrates the manner in which the church goes about its ministry—by meeting others in their own context and “language” and interpreting the message of Jesus Christ through word and deed. This ministry dynamic progresses into the future, adapting to a new audience and another set of needs. The example of the early church can inspire American Baptists to continually adapt our mission and ministry for a changing world by exploring new styles and venues for worship, learning to use emerging technologies as media for new ministries and by responding to concerns, interests and economic realities of younger generations.

Therefore, we invite American Baptists to address present challenges positively by examining ways to adapt for the future of the church.

Questions of Concern

1. What are the challenges facing your local church? Where is the church today, and where does it need to be in the future?
2. What concerns about the church are raised by youth and young adults today?
3. What are the current needs and trends in society that call for new approaches for ministry?
4. How do cultural and generational differences provide an opportunity to revitalize the ministries in our churches?
5. How do we recognize signs that a ministry is approaching its end so that we can conclude it in a healthy way?
6. How can facilities be made more energy efficient and become examples of the best practices in stewardship of resources?

7. How can churches adapt to cultural and religious pluralism in positive ways, in which we engage other faith communities cooperatively and respectfully, yet remain reflective of our own faith and heritage?

Suggested Actions

1. Send a delegation to visit growing churches in your community for a dialogue with their leaders and membership about what has made their ministries effective.
2. Ask your church's youth and young adults to bring some friends to a focus group interview and ask them about their thoughts on religion and church participation.
3. Partner with other churches in your area to consult a technology expert for insight and advice on connecting electronically. Then build the most effective Web site your budget allows, and consider social networking sites and blogs as an outreach ministry.
4. Explore other worship and music styles, either in the main worship on Sunday or at other times.

There being no delegates registered to speak, a vote was taken by uplifted ballot and the motion was adopted.

72. Walter Clarke, committee member, brought the statement on "Immigration Reform."

ABCUSA Statement of Concern

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Immigration reform is a complex issue that requires careful consideration and prayerful thought by American Baptists. This issue is not new to us, but it has re-emerged in the midst of economic recession and under threats of terrorism. In many areas of the country, undocumented immigrants, in particular, have been blamed for job losses, for adding to the burden for social services, schools, housing and health care facilities and for increases in lawlessness in our communities. Unregulated entry into the country has become a critical concern, especially along the border with Mexico. Yet, current and proposed reforms within the border states have raised the additional specter of racial profiling and unjust suspicion of Hispanics.

In 2007, the General Board policy statement on immigration addressed many of these concerns:

[A]s Christians, we are faced again with the dilemma of respecting the importance of civil law, while recognizing that the laws in this case are unevenly and unfairly applied and may well be unjust. We also recognize the hypocrisy of a U.S. economy that benefits from, and even relies on, the easily exploitable labor of workers who are here illegally.

And finally, we know that many immigrants of legal and illegal status alike are our neighbors, doing work, raising families, in many cases paying taxes, worshipping, and contributing to our economy, our society, and our culture. In the face of an upsurge of anti-immigrant sentiment, our federal government is currently struggling to find a solution that protects the legitimate interests of many parties, including the native-born work force, employers, immigrants who followed legally mandated immigration procedures, and those who did not. We applaud these efforts. We do so as children of Pentecost, in which we learned to hear the speech of alien tongues with understanding; we do so hoping to learn to be, like the Good Samaritan, worthy neighbors.

[0053.41:6/07, Declaration on an Issue of Importance on Immigration Reform]

This statement speaks well to our historic approach toward immigration, capturing the spirit expressed by The Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1919 that had "the goal of changing fear and hostility toward strangers into understanding and friendship." Throughout the last century, immigrants have profoundly shaped the makeup of our denomination, as American Baptists have established new churches among immigrant populations. As a result, in 2011 no one racial or ethnic group holds majority membership in American Baptist Churches USA. God has woven us into a coat of many colors. Consequently, in congregation after congregation, immigrants, both documented and undocumented, worship with us as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our moral grounding has always been rooted in Scripture. As the nation of Israel was formed, God spoke often about welcoming and providing not only for the orphan and widow but also for the alien: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:34, cf. Deuteronomy 24:18-22). In the New Testament, Jesus' concern for the alien and stranger was expressed in the parable of the sheep and goats: "And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, 'Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25: 38-40).

However, with these and other texts in hand, the concern over illegal immigration is not easily resolved. Understanding the complexities of current laws, motivations for and problems related to undocumented status must be taken into consideration as well. Illegal immigration is a perplexing issue since Americans live under laws that are meant to be applied with wisdom, fairness and equal justice for all.

At the Biennial meeting in June 2011, we will engage in a debate about immigration reform. The value of this discussion will be evident as we listen to varying perspectives on immigration that, hopefully, provide some clarity and insight to the matters that concern us. To that end, this conversation will not be designed to champion one side or the other, but rather to allow for an exchange of ideas by those of similar and divergent viewpoints. In preparation, we encourage American Baptists to address this issue within their churches, wrestling with the questions presented below.

Questions of Concern

1. In what ways have you or those in your community or church been impacted by immigration?
2. What factors contribute to illegal immigration in this country?
3. What should our response be to undocumented immigrants in our communities? In our congregations?
4. What can the church do to support or advocate for immigration reform that recognizes the interests of both documented and undocumented people?
5. What biblical verses and values speak to you when forming your thoughts about the issues of immigration and illegal immigration?
6. What have you heard from others that differs from your own views? How has that influenced your own perspective on the issues?
7. In what ways, if any, have you been engaged in the public debate on the issues?

Suggested Actions

1. Create a forum in your church or association to discuss the impact of immigration policies on church members, community, nation and world.
2. Assist those who seek help to navigate the immigration process.
3. Read a variety of opinions about the issues.
4. Attend citizen forums sponsored by your representatives to Congress, and prepare to speak to your own views.
5. Be open-minded and civil in your dialogue with others when discussing immigration.
6. Be supportive of those who hold differing opinions, listening carefully and granting them adequate time to express their views.
7. Pray unceasingly for peace and for the immigrants, government officials and decision-makers during this crucial time.
8. **Envision the world without borders. How would it be different? What would be the benefits or liabilities?**

There being no delegates registered to speak, a vote was taken by uplifted ballot and the motion was adopted.

73. Paul Hayes, committee chair, brought the statement on “The Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq:”

ABCUSA Statement of Concern THE WARS IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

For nearly a century, American Baptists have voiced their moral concern regarding the specter and reality of war. As far back as 1922, the Northern Baptist Convention recorded its “conviction that war as a method of settling international disputes is barbarous, wasteful and manifestly contrary to every Christian ideal and teaching.”¹ Many policy

¹ *American Baptist Resolution on the Abolition of War*, adopted by the Northern Baptist Convention (1922) and modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board (1998).

statements and resolutions have followed, citing an overarching desire for peace² and an end to specific conflicts, while additionally addressing concerns over increased military spending³, human rights⁴, the arms race⁵, terrorism⁶ and other matters directly or indirectly related to an active or potential U.S. involvement in international wars.

As we gather for the 2011 Biennial meeting in Puerto Rico, this legacy takes on heightened relevance as the present conflict in Afghanistan serves as the longest sustained war in U.S. history (116 months), even while the hostilities in Iraq are abating. U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan is slated to decrease with troop withdrawals beginning in July, although the Obama administration has maintained flexibility in its timeline as conditions warrant. Among many factors, the relative strength of the Taliban and the discovery of trillions of dollars worth of mineral deposits have made any projected withdrawal more complicated—if even dubious—given the vulnerable state of the Afghan government and economy.

From their beginnings, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been controversial in the American public's view, both in their original objectives and subsequent prosecution. Questions about policy and wartime strategy have been legitimately raised and contentiously debated in the halls of Congress, in the public square and in our churches. American Baptists, likewise, are not of one mind regarding the purpose and value of fighting these two wars. Nevertheless, common values have emerged, including concern for the safety of civilians in conflict zones, for military families and soldiers deployed, for the welfare of refugees and for the well-being of returning veterans haunted by post-traumatic stress disorder and those wounded in battle. As citizens, we have been impacted either through direct military service or in the heavy economic, political and social costs these wars have exacted upon the nation.

As American Baptists, we are called to draw upon the resources of our faith to address the moral complexities of these wars. Despite our past denominational pronouncements, meaningful values generate differing positions on the issues we face today, such as the use of force through military action, response to terrorism, human rights and economic justice. Therefore, we invite American Baptists to engage in an ongoing dialogue on these important matters.

Questions of Concern

8. In what ways have you or those in your community or church been impacted by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
9. What aspects and episodes of these wars have been of greatest concern to you?

² American Baptist *Policy Statement on Peace* (adopted 1985; affirmed and modified, 1996, 2001, 2007); *American Baptist Resolution on Peacekeeping and Peacemaking* (adopted 1967; affirmed and modified, 1985, 1989, 1998, 2002, 2007)

³ *American Baptist Resolution on Military Spending* (adopted 1981, modified, 1995, 1999)

⁴ *American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights* (adopted 1976, modified, 1992)

⁵ *American Baptist Resolution on International Arms Race* (adopted 1983, modified 1985); *American Baptist Resolution on National Missile Defense System* (adopted, 1987, modified, 1989, 1990, 1995, 2000)

⁶ *American Baptist Resolution on International Terrorism* (adopted 1986, modified, 1996, 2005)

10. In your best understanding, how have the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and neighboring countries benefited or suffered from the prosecution of these wars? How have the people of the United States benefited or suffered politically, economically and spiritually?
11. What, if anything, justifies the use of military force by the United States or any other nation?
12. What issues should be considered before military action is undertaken? What alternatives to military action are available?
13. What do you think must be taken into account or done before military troops can be withdrawn from Afghanistan or any theater of war?
14. What biblical verses and values speak to you when forming your thoughts about the purpose and objectives of war?
15. What values or verses in the Bible contradict your beliefs about war?
16. What have you heard from others that differs from your own views? How has that influenced your own perspective on the wars?
17. In what ways can individuals advocate for peaceful resolution of conflicts during times of war?
18. In what ways, if any, have you been engaged in the public debate on the wars?
19. In what ways do you or your church assist those who have been directly impacted by these wars?

Suggested Actions

1. Create a forum in your church or association to discuss the impact of the wars on your church members, community, nation and world.
2. Assist local military families during times of deployment or when veterans return.
3. Read a variety of opinions about the wars and the use of military action, including international publications available in your local library, newsstand or on the Internet.
4. Attend citizen forums sponsored by your representatives to Congress, and prepare to speak to your own views.
5. Be open-minded and civil in your dialogue with others when discussing the wars.
6. Be supportive of those who hold differing opinions, listening carefully and granting them adequate time to express their views.
7. Read books on the ethics of war and the history of beliefs throughout church history and across faith traditions.
8. Become aware of and learn methods of conflict transformation, where conflicts, interpersonally and internationally, can be addressed in respectful, dialogical and nonviolent ways.
9. Pray unceasingly for peace and for the combatants, victims and decision-makers during a time of war.
10. Envision the world without war. How would it be different?

Kent Harrop, First Baptist Church, McMinnville, OR, spoke in favor of the statement, noting that every war has two losers. The cost of war for U.S. military and their families is enormous. There being no delegates registered to speak, a vote was taken by uplifted ballot and the motion was adopted.

74. Patti Stratton led in the closing prayer.

SUNDAY EVENING SESSION, JUNE 26, 2011
WORSHIP - Session in English with Spanish translation
7:00 – 9:00pm

75. Gathering music was provided by the West Virginians.

76. Youth from the Youth Camp shared of their experiences at the camp with singing and with drumming and rhythm instruments led by Rev. José Ortiz. One of the youth shared a report and testimony of the impact of the weekend.

77. The Biennial Band, led by John Polite, led in singing *Lord You Are Good*, and *Friend of God*.

78. Molly Marshall, Marvin McMickle, José Irizarry and Jerry Cain, representing some of our seminaries and colleges, led in a litany of praise.

79. Alex Roro of Providence, RI, a Regional Youth Representative, led in prayer.

80. The Band led in the singing of *Celebrate Jesus*.

81. The Puerto Rican Children's Choir shared their gift of music.

82. Following by a video presentation about IMMERSE, Peg Nowling, Karen Yee and Antonio Lombardi shared some of the plans for IMMERSE in the summer of 2012. Then John Polite interviewed Alex Vickery-Holland of Salem, OR, and Holden Rolf of Stillwell, KS, about the IMMERSE experience.

83. Roy Medley introduced Suzan Johnson Cook, newly installed U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and presented her with an engraved crystal cross as he promised our prayers for her in her new position.

84. Suzan Johnson Cook shared a few words of appreciation for the Baptist tradition of religious freedom and for the prayerful support of the denomination as she embarks upon this new task.

85. Eddie Cruz called for the offering for the Seminary Scholarship Fund.

86. Aracelis led the offertory music, followed by John Polite and the Biennial Band.

87. The Coral Juvenil Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico, led by Julio González-Paniagua, presented a musical selection.

88. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, introduced the Rev. Dr. Alyn Waller, pastor of Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia as keynote speaker for the evening and read the scripture passage from Isaiah 35.
89. The Coral Juvenil Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico sang another selection.
90. Dr. Alyn Waller brought the message on the theme “Celebrate God’s Way.” Dr. Waller shared his theology of the hands. God’s way can best be understood by our use of our hands. First, we must put our hands out. Our relationship with God causes us to think about the needs of others. Secondly, we must put our hands on. Thinking about the needs of others is not enough; we must do something about those needs. Jesus will not ask us what we thought, but what we did. We as Christians have an invitation to participate in the work of God in our world, and we must accept that invitation. Finally, we must put our hands up. None of our work makes any difference if we do not acknowledge the awesome power of our God and worship God with our whole beings. Dr. Waller ended by singing the song, *This Must Be the Place*.
91. Roy Medley, Reid Trulson and Virginia Holmstrom led in a service of communion with music by Daryl Waller.
92. Leo Thorne thanked the many who made the Biennial a success.
93. Brian Henderson shared the plans for the New Baptist Covenant II, November 17-19, 2011, followed by a video invitation to participate.
94. John Williams, Executive Minister of ABC of the Central Region, shared an invitation to Overland Park, KS for the 2013 Biennial.
95. Frank Christine announced the new officers elected this afternoon: Ruth Clark, President, Don Ng, Vice President and Jim Ratliff, Budget Review Officer. Roy Medley led in a prayer of dedication.
96. Roy Medley presented Frank Christine and Patti Stratton with gifts in appreciation for their service.
97. Frank announced that, with the benediction, the meeting will stand adjourned.
98. Ruth Clark led in the benediction.
99. A closing montage of photos from the Biennial was shown.
100. The Coral Juvenil Igleseas Bautistas de Puerto Rico said, “Thank you for coming to Puerto Rico!”

101. Closing music was provided by the Biennial Band, led by Julio González-Paniagua as the congregation exited.
