

Pastoring a Vibrant and Diverse ABCUSA Spiritual Family

First Year Ministry Update for the Board of General Ministries and Executive Committee

Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, General Secretary
June 1, 2018

This has been a very productive first year of ministry for the Office of the General Secretary. Operating under our new “pastoral” vision that clearly defines OGS’ place within the denominational family and its five ministry priorities,ⁱ we have made significant progress in offering new services, reorganizing key aspects of our work, partnering with new organizations, collaborating with national and regional partners and preparing for future biennial mission summits.

Reorganization of the Office of the General Secretary

It has been my joy and honor to get to know and work alongside a fine ministry staff. The most significant personnel changes in year one were:

- 1) *Forming the Core Pastoral and Leadership Team:* On January 1, 2018 we welcomed Marsha Scipio and Kevin Walden to the team, and Pat Hernandez, Tina Turner (United Mission Coordinator) and Bridget Lipin (Mission Communications Team Leader) began serving in their new leadership capacities. They, along with Jeff Woods, Alan Musoke, Annie Marcucci and Ken Marsenburg, have all achieved significant successes in their assigned portfolios, as will be outlined in this report.
- 2) *Streamlining the OGS Team Structure:* With the institution of our “5 Star” plan, OGS has been reorganized internally into five working groups that support one another: Pastoral Mission, Mission Communication (which will include IT), Conference Planning, Development and Administration/Finance.
- 3) *Creating a New and Stronger Information Technology Group:* The closing of the Computer Center (scheduled for June 30, 2018) has given OGS the opportunity to grow its information technology capabilities. Donna Molinaro and Charlie Dunn will be joining with Bob Lovas and Geri Blier to provide the info tech support ABCUSA’s national mission requires.
- 4) *Adding to Conference and Travel Planning:* In May 2018, Sharese Shedrick joined the team, which collaborates with ABCUSA partners in planning 100 events each year. Annie will be transitioning to part-time status this summer.

The reorganization of the OGS team is reaping positive benefits. Noteworthy initiatives which have flowed from the reorganization include (key leaders listed in parentheses):

- 1) *ABC CORE* (Geri Blier, Bob Lovas, Charlie Dunn, Donna Molinaro, with assistance from Bridget Lipin, Tina Turner, Alan Musoke and the Associate General Secretaries and General Secretary): The team has developed an exciting vision for bringing ABCIS

(American Baptist Churches Information System) into the 21st century! *ABC CORE* will be a web-based online community where churches and professional church leaders can update their information, and be in more direct and user-friendly communication with one another, their regions and ABCUSA/OGS. In development as we speak, *ABC CORE* will be beta tested in the second half of 2018 and hopefully launched in early 2019.

- 2) *ABC-USA.ORG Website Refresh* (Bridget Lipin, Tina Turner): Similarly, our website needs refreshing. We are working on a new “look” for the site, and adding additional capabilities and content areas.
- 3) *United Mission Promotion* (Tina Turner, the Associate General Secretaries and General Secretary): *United Mission* continues to receive our attention, as we restructure and indeed, resurrect, how we promote this offering. Tina has done an excellent job in creating new materials, including beautiful new table tri-fold displays, which we now deploy at all events OGS staff attends, banners highlighting OGS’s mission priorities, and United Mission inserts that are both region-specific and general. Feedback has been very positive, and United Mission giving in the first 4 months of 2018 is only down about 1%. As we go forward, our goal is to see United Mission giving increase!
- 4) *Clergy Ordination Statistics* (Kevin Walden, with assistance from Geri Blier): Kevin has have been mining data on *ABC Clergy Ordination* status, and he presented to the NLC reports for the denomination as a whole, and for each region in particular. We believe this will be helpful to regions and partners, as we seek to support and provide continuing education to those serving our churches.
- 5) *OGS Personnel Manual and the Salary Grid* (Laura Miraz, Lee Spitzer): We have been working on updating the *OGS Personnel Manual*, creating a simplified *OGS Salary Grid* that accurately reflects current staffing practices and ministry priorities, and laying the ground work for policies covering staff professional development, family leave benefits, and health insurance alternatives.

In my first year of leadership, I have sought to encourage a positive and friendly work environment for OGS staff. On June 1, 2018, the entire staff was invited to enjoy a luncheon in their honor. We recognized service milestones (5, 15 and 30 year) and gave gift cards to all attendees in appreciation for their dedication to our mission. It was a wonderful celebration!

Launching New ABCUSA/OGS Pastoral Initiatives

The OGS pastoral team is serving our American Baptist family in creative new ways! The addition of new associate general secretaries has enabled the pastoral team to engage in several significant ministry initiatives. These include:

- 1) *Partnerships and Collaborative Initiatives* (Marsha Scipio, Kevin Walden, Lee Spitzer):
 - a. ABCUSA’s partnership with the *National Institute for Civil Discourse* is progressing nicely. NICD’s national director, Dr. Carolyn Luckensmeyer, spoke to the NLC in April via GotoMeeting. Following that, she co-presented in person with Lee and Marsha at the ABC Michigan Pastors Retreat in April 2018. Discussions are underway for a weekend event in Central Region for early 2019.

- b. The partnership with ABCUSA's Creation Justice Network, *ecoAmerica* and *Blessed Tomorrow* has brought ecological concern to a new level of intensity during the past year. The Creation Justice Network is launching a Green Church initiative, ABCUSA's web site will add an ecology-focused section, and my pastoral letter on environmental concern was published on Earth Day (April 22, 2018). *Blessed Tomorrow* is working with us produce a video and will work on curriculum for the youth track at the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit.
 - c. Fifty clergy from 8 regions attended the *Fresh Expressions* national gathering in Reston, VA, in March 2018. Several regions are at various stages of collaborative work with the leaders of this movement.
 - d. The US Holocaust Memorial Center, AB Historical Society, DC Baptist Convention and OGS are collaborating on a clergy education event, *Local Churches and Global Moral Issues: Resources for ABC Pastoral Leaders*. It will be held on September 10-12, 2018 in Washington DC. The program will include a 2-day workshop at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, led by the Museum's Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust, and on day 3, a half-day wisdom gathering dialogue with DC Baptist Convention leaders. Participation will be limited to 24 ABC pastoral leaders, in order to facilitate in depth conversation. The cohort will explore how our churches can become bold witnesses that communicate Jesus' command to love our neighbors.
- 2) *Ministry alongside ABCUSA National Partners (Pat Hernandez, Kevin Walden, Marsha Scipio, Lee Spitzer):*
- a. *Women in Ministry 2020 Conference:* Pat has convened a planning group representing the entire ABCUSA family, as we plan for the *Women in Ministry 2020 40th anniversary celebration* and conference in Green Lake Conference Center (June 17-20, 2020). The theme is *Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready.*
 - b. *ABCUSA Sacred Safe Spaces:* In response to the heightened sensitivity to *sexual harassment*, I have brought together a working group to address this issue. Pat has agreed to take the lead on behalf of OGS, and AB Women Ministries have been involved since the conversation began in December 2017. Marsha is also representing OGS. I am pleased to share that Ministers Council and AB Men have agreed to be a part of this effort, which concerns us all.
 - c. *Puerto Rico Sister Church Initiative:* OGS, in partnership with the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico and ABHMS, has launched the *Sister Church* project. See <http://www.abc-usa.org/2018/02/22/iglesias-bautistas-de-puerto-rico-abcusa-sister-churches-initiative-announced/>. Kevin is taking leadership responsibility for this, and is coordinating the matching of churches. Thirty-one Puerto Rican churches and 60 mainland churches are involved thus far.
 - d. *Burma Task Force:* OGS, ABHMS and IM are collaborating with Burmese leaders from across the regions in order to address ongoing issues related to Burmese immigrants in Asian camps and within the United States, as well as the military conflict affecting Christian and Muslim populations within Myanmar. On May 16, 2018, we hosted the Burmese Ambassador to the United States at the Mission

Center, to discuss these important issues. We are planning meetings with the State Department and seeking a meeting with Sam Brownback, United States Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom.

- 3) *Ministry Alongside Baptists and Ecumenical Partners* (Jeff Woods, Marsha Scipio, Iris Cobb, Lee Spitzer):
 - a. The Third *Baptist-Muslim Dialogue* took place at Green Lake on April 16-19, 2018. Coordinated and by Jeff, Baptist clergy from several Baptist denominations were paired with Muslim leaders in order to facilitate relationships and positive community relations. In May, I appointed a representative for two new inter-religious conversations - with Hindu and Buddhist leaders.
 - b. OGS organized and led the ABCUSA participation in the *ACT 50th anniversary commemoration of Martin Luther King's assassination* in Washington DC (April 3-5, 2018), hosted by the National Council of Churches. OGS supplied a bus for ABC national mission partners to travel together to the rally, and worked with Executive Ministers Cheryl Dudley (Metro NY) and Elmo Familiaran (ABCNJ) to invite all Executive Ministers to encourage their membership to attend. Executive ministers, lay people and clergy from at least 10 regions participated. Marsha coordinated our ABCUSA booth on the Mall, which attracted significant attention from rally attendees.
 - c. *Baptist World Alliance*: Marsha, Kevin and I had an excellent lunch meeting with the new *Baptist World Alliance* General Secretary, Elijah Brown, just weeks after he began his service in January 2018. I will be attending the BWA meetings in Zurich in July 2018.

Unifying the ABC Family – Ministry to and Alongside National and Regional Partners

OGS, in partnership with members our ABCUSA family, has been involved in several initiatives, including:

- 1) As General Secretary, I convene the *National Executive Council*. When I arrived in June 2017, the group was dispirited, unsure of why they should meet, and weary of focusing on selling the Mission Center. I am, however, encouraged about the progress we have made since then. We are seeking to refocus on strategic issues and cooperation in ministry. Our last two meetings have been at Eastern University/Palmer Seminary (December 2017) and Yale Divinity School/Andover Newton Seminary (May 2018). These visits are strengthening the ties to our academic institutions. MMBB will host the NEC in June 2018, and IM will do so in August 2018. I hope that ABHMS will host in the fall or winter 2018. Most significantly, our meeting on February 27 generated excellent creativity on how to organize the April 2018 National Leadership Council meeting.
- 2) Jeff Woods has worked closely with me and the rest of the Leadership team on reconstructing the agenda of the *National Leadership Council* meeting in Green Lake (April 2018). Based on the input from NEC and REMC, we provided significant new space for Executive Ministers to contribute to the meeting (rather than passively listening to reports from national partners) and for the initiation of the much-needed strategic

discussion on the future of United Mission. Our ABCIS staff person, Geri Blier, was most helpful in providing long-term trend charts to help frame the discussions.

- 3) I have worked very hard in my first year to establish positive and close relationships with the *Regional Executive Ministers Council (REMC)* and its Executive Committee. I write period updates to the REMC, participated in an excellent online conversation with 20 Executive Ministers on December 5, 2017, and attended the REMC meeting at Green Lake in April 2018. Most importantly, I have sought to include the REMC in the formulation, editing and promotion of my pastoral letters. Their collective input has been most helpful, and the Executive Ministers appreciate having the opportunity to speak into my pastoral letters and to know ahead of time what I am going to say to the whole American Baptist family.
- 4) *Regional Consultations*: Jeff Woods works closely with the regions as a consultant, especially in regards to Executive Minister searches. In the past 12 months, Jeff has worked 10 regional search committees.
- 5) *ABC-Related Seminaries and Universities*: In January 2018, I met with Baptist-related university presidents in Florida. There is a clear desire on the part of many to have closer working relationships with ABCUSA/OGS. In February 2018, I had the privilege of being hosted by Duke Divinity School and its Baptist House, led by Baptist scholar Curtis Freeman. I was asked to speak about *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*. ABC Vermont/ New Hampshire and TABCOM co-hosted an ABC Clergy Luncheon for me at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (November 2017), and I have received an invitation to preach at the seminary's chapel in September 2018. In April 2018, I was the speaker for Northern Seminary's Holocaust Remembrance Day, and have been invited to be the Founders Day speaker at Judson University (October 2018).

Celebrations for the Family - Planning for the 2019 and 2021 Biennial Mission Summits

Specific news about the next biennial could not be announced in Portland. During the past year, we have not only caught up on planning for the 2019 Biennial in Virginia Beach, but have also made a commitment to hold the 2021 Biennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Special credit must be given to Annie Marcucci, who has worked diligently to vet both sites and negotiate favorable contracts. Regarding plans for the 2019 Biennial, major developments include:

- 1) Full inclusion of the Regions as a partner in the plenary sessions: Each plenary will be "hosted" by a partner: ABHMS on Friday evening, IM on Saturday evening (which will feature our ties with the BWA), MMBB, ABWM and OGS on Sunday morning, and the REMC on Sunday evening, when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the American Baptist Churches of the South.
- 2) Introducing the *ABCUSA Academy*: Saturday will feature a plethora of in depth learning tracks, based on themes. All of the national partners have committed to hosting a track, and several Executive Ministers have also agreed to coordinate specific tracks.
- 3) *New! - Ministry to Youth*: We will be offering specialized learning experiences for elementary, middle and high school students. This will be marketed to youth groups.

- 4) *OTABL* will be fully integrated into the Biennial experience, and will also feature an online component both before and after the Biennial.

Pastoring the ABC Family – Pastoral Visits, Preaching and Teaching

As General Secretary, it is my joy and privilege to pastor the amazing ABCUSA spiritual family. In each pastoral visit, I seek to encourage and strengthen pastors, leaders and lay people, and to lift up the value of being a part of the American Baptist family. Other team members (Jeff, Kevin, Marsha, Pat and Ken) also represent OGS at regional events and activities.

- 1) In 2017, I visited and spoke in the following regions: ABCOFLASH (July), Puerto Rico (September), New Jersey (September), Mission Northwest (September), Great Rivers Region (September), ABC Central Region (October), West Virginia Baptist Convention (October), ABCOFLASH (November), Chicago (November), Haitian National Alliance Convention in ABC VT/NH and TABCOM (November), and Pennsylvania (December).
- 2) Thus far, in 2018, I have visited: Puerto Rico (January), Connecticut (February), ABC Vermont/New Hampshire and Wisconsin (March), Michigan, Nebraska and the 4 region Prairie Conference (April), TABCOM (May), Central Region and ABC Indiana and Kentucky (June).
- 3) Through the end of 2018, I am scheduled to visit: West Virginia Baptist Convention (July), ABC Dakotas, ABC Rocky Mountains (September), Ohio, ABCOFLASH, ABCOPAD, Wisconsin and Arizona (October), and Northwest (December). I have also accepted invitations to the Holy Spirit Renewal Conference in Green Lake (June), the Jewish Believers International Congress in Dallas (August), AB Men's National Retreat in Green Lake (September) and the Rhythms of the Spirit Retreat (October).
- 4) For 2018, I have scheduled two international trips: BWA meetings in Zurich (July) and the Philippines, to represent ABCUSA at the 75th anniversary commemoration of the Hopevale missionaries' martyrdom (December).

Throughout the past year, I have composed and published a series of pastoral letters that address important issues that impact our American Baptist family's life and witness. All can be accessed through the ABCUSA website. These are:

- 1) Pastoral Letter on Racism and Violence (June 16, 2017)
- 2) Signs of Growth, Heralds of Hope (September 3, 2017)
- 3) In Between Hurricanes – An Update on the Hurricane in Puerto Rico (September 20, 2017)
- 4) Responding to Violence in Our Society – American Baptists Express Love and Not Fear (November 6, 2017)
- 5) A Higher Way: American Baptists and Our Neighbors, in English and Spanish (February 1, 2018)
- 6) Journeying Toward the Summit by the Sea (a letter on Environmental Justice and Care), in English and Spanish (Earth Day, April 22, 2018)

In February 2018, and in collaboration with other Baptist organizations, I encouraged our members to act on behalf of Dreamers. I signed Supreme Court Amicus briefs on immigration related cases, and joint ecumenical statements on Burma, health care, the ADA Education and Reform Act and immigration issues, on behalf of ABCUSA. Most recently, I added my name to “Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis,” but I have not received confirmation that my name has been added to an authorized copy of the document. With over 1,000 other faith leaders, I recently signed on to the American Jewish Committee’s petition for the State Department to appoint a new U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and other ABC leaders joined me by adding their names to the petition.

A New Home for ABCUSA/OGS

In March 2018, the Board of General Ministries voted to purchase a building in the King of Prussia area that is well suited for our ministry, and should serve us well in the years to come. The contract is being finalized. Current plans call for us to relocate in the new building at the end of 2018 or in early 2019, depending on interior design needs. The sale and disposal of the current mission center and property should be consummated sometime in 2019.

Year Two Dreams and Initiatives

As we begin the second year of my ministry on behalf of ABCUSA, there are several exciting potential areas of ministry growth that we shall be pursuing, in addition to the ministries and projects already described. These include:

- 1) Resourcing a denomination-wide commitment to the spiritual well-being of our clergy, especially women in ministry, bi-vocational leaders and pastoral leaders from immigrant populations. OGS has submitted a grant proposal to the Lilly Foundation in the amount of one million dollars (to be utilized over five years) to fund this initiative. Kevin Walden has spearheaded the writing of this grant. This is a highly competitive grant application process, but if you don’t ask, you won’t receive! Please keep this in your prayers!
- 2) Undertaking a denomination-wide survey of our family’s demographics. To be honest, we do not know how many members we really have, and our statistics regarding the rich ethnic, racial, cultural, socio-economic, generational, and theological diversity need updating. Jeff Woods and I are in conversation with Ryan Burge and others on how we might address this need.
- 3) The formation of a volunteer corps of ministry consultants that can come alongside our current staff, extending our reach and impact, and adding a new layer of diversity in voice and wisdom. Throughout this past year, I have been dialoguing with amazing people across the country, and will soon be able to announce the first class of volunteer ministry consultants.
- 4) Lifting up the historical Baptist appreciation for *testimony*, as the primary means of sharing one’s faith in the transformational power of Jesus Christ, and thus engaging in relationally positive witness, evangelism and church growth.

- 5) The creation of a select writing team, based on the November 2017 BGM and April 2018 NLC United Mission discussions, to offer a concise identity case statement and set of United Mission strategy options, so that we might be better able to increase ABC mission support.

Thank you for the privilege of serving ABCUSA, OGS, and the BGM board!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee B. Spitzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, ABCUSA General Secretary

ⁱ 1) Unify our Family based on Core Convictions and Joyful Mission, 2) Strengthen our Regions as the serve our churches and clergy; 3) Promote the mission of our national agencies and mission partners, 4) Lead our family into new church growth, evangelism and creative service; 5) Encourage creative partnerships.