

ABHMS REPORT

Submitted by Jim Wolfe

The American Baptist Home Mission Societies met at the Marriott Hotel, Bethesda Maryland April 6-8, 2016. ABHMS' Board of Directors focused on a 2016 visioning conversation that seeks to establish a missional strategy framework for moving forward. Executive Director, Dr. Jeff Haggray asked members to consider how best the organization can cast and frame its work for the future.

Renewing ABHMS' historic vision for connecting partners, developing leaders, equipping disciples and healing communities was the starting point of the conversation. Haggray said ABHMS seeks to encourage partnerships among American Baptist-related ministry organizations to develop common initiatives. This will require a collaborative model for working together.

The Rev. Brianna Parker, pastor of Assimilation at Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, joined the meeting to share results of her research into black millennials and faith, conducted as part of her doctor of ministry program at Virginia Union University.

A millennial herself, Parker said churches are often made up of "Stepford Christians": Christians who "look alike and sound alike." Rather than giving millennials what the church thinks they need, Parker said congregations need to ask millennials what they want from the church.

Parker's research has shown that millennials like to affiliate with churches that are active in the community; millennials believe churches should address justice, outreach and family dynamics. "We have to stop saying young people and youth are the church of tomorrow," she said. "They are the church of today. That's the way we have to look at it."

Board members unanimously affirmed the visioning conversation, which will continue throughout 2016.

Board members received a preview of the new ABHMS website which go online later this year.

The meeting concluded on Friday evening with a powerful worship service conducted in the historic Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Dr. Clifford Johnson, president of the Board of Directors of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), commissioned a new executive director to lead the historic American Baptist ministry: "The organization was in need of a strong leader," Johnson said. "In response to our prayers, God sent us Dr. Jeffrey Haggray." Addressing Haggray, Johnson continued, "Since 1824, ABHMS has advanced The Great Commission and The Great Commandment. In answering the call, your leadership represents the dawn of a new day for many."

The Rev. Lauren Ng—a member of ABHMS' Board of Directors and former associate pastor of San Francisco's First Chinese Baptist Church—was the featured preacher at the worship service that celebrated the Home Mission Societies and its ministries.

In her message, Ng reminded those gathered that Christians “are called to participate in the saving of this world. It is in Jesus’ name,” she said, “that we speak up for transformation.”

The worship service culminated the two-day gathering of ABHMS’ Board of Directors that focused on a 2016 visioning conversation that seeks to establish a missional strategy framework for moving forward.