

**Report of General Secretary  
June 2015**

Dear Friends:

It is a privilege to report to you on our work and life since the November board meetings.

Let me begin with a number of thank you's to staff.

We begin by commending Kenneth Marsenburg and Evon Moody through whose efforts we received the pledge of a gift of \$150,000 for ABCUSA.

I also want to thank Leo Thorne for the excellent work he has done with President Ng in moving forward the recommendation of the UM Adaptive Challenge team that we look at ways of shoring up UM in the near future. With input from the REMC, we have put together a team composed of President Ng, Tom Wiles (executive minister of RI), Steve Bils (executive minister of Central Pacific Coast), Marie Onwubuariri (executive minister of WI), Ashley Whitaker, Tasha Wilson, Bridget Lipin (nee Holmstrom), and Leo Thorne as staff. They are developing a pilot UM emphasis which will be implemented this fall in three regions – Central Pacific Coast, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. After assessment of effectiveness, next steps will be planned.

And commendations are due Bridget Lipin who has produced an interpretive document about our ministries entitled, "Connecting." Each of you will receive a copy. Bridget was also recently elected as the president of the ABC Computer Center board.

Jeff Woods is to be applauded for the work he has put into planning the Mission Summit conversation here in Kansas City and the upcoming Mission Table in the fall. This is in addition to his ongoing work with regions. In the last year he has staffed executive search committees with Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Metro New York, and the South. He is now also working with searches for Great Rivers and Ohio. I am pleased to note that through his efforts in diversifying our pool of candidates that two additional women have been called as Executive Ministers.

Alan Musoke in addition to his work of managing our treasury functions continues to play key roles in the several different negotiations and plans related to the building. This includes: tenant leases, the tax controversy with the township and school board, and the recent request from selected contractors/developers for statements of interest in our property and development options. You will be asked to approve as well the action to dissolve 588 Associates, LLC as the owner of the property. Ownership will devolve back to the national partners in the same percentage they held under 588. This action will clarify the tax exemption we enjoy for the building portions we do not lease out to for-profits.

Johnson Eapen has staffed a number of executive searches for IM as well as the GS Search Committee. This is in addition to managing our health benefits plan, counseling executives and employees and making sure we are in compliance with relevant laws.

Annie Marcucci and Travel & Conference staff, Traffic Services, and all our administrative assistants have been hard at work with the details related to the biennial. This includes registration, housing, meals and transportation as well as the special dinners we sponsor and the exhibits in the Hall of Ministries. In addition they have also handled the preparation for this board meeting and the joint dinner meeting of the boards. All of these matters require incredible attention to detail, long hours dealing with vendors and our ABC boards, institutions, churches

and registrants. They need not only the patience of Job but the determination of Nehemiah, the dedication of Ruth and the resourcefulness of Esther.

Now for more topical items:

*Burma* – In January and February I led an ABC team that included Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the NCC, to Thailand and Burma. This trip was quite productive including our presence in the Kachin State where military action was still quite pronounced. We were also concerned about the refugee situations in Thailand and Malaysia. You have received earlier extensive reports and recommendations from the team and also a set from myself so I shall not repeat what you have already read. Following the trip we have held briefings with a number of high placed officials in the US government and UN. These include Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy; Shawn Casey, U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs; David Saperstein, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom; and Vijay Nambiar, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General on Myanmar. Each was given a copy of our team's report. In June I spoke at the gathering of the Chin Baptist Churches USA and in July I shall speak at the Burmese Christian Association of North America.

*International Partners* – In early January, Johnson Eapen and I accompanied Ben Chan to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Christianity arriving among the Kuki people of Northeast India through ABC missionaries. Johnson did an incredible job speaking the last night of the conference. While there, Ben and I made contact with not only the leaders of the Kuki Convention but also the new general secretary of the Council of Baptist Churches of Northeast India, the president of the Mizoram Baptist Convention and Dr. Pau of the Myanmar Baptist Convention.

In April, ABCUSA co-sponsored a peace conference in Nazareth with the Baptist Churches of Israel and the European Baptist Federation. This was the first such conference they have held, but they hope this will be a biennial event. Dr. David Coffey, the past president of the BWA, and I were invited as outside speakers. However, the most moving presentations were from Israeli Baptist Palestinians about their struggles for peace in a region dominated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the growth of ISIS and other forms of radical Islam.

This meeting was the beginning point for a 10-day Peace Pilgrimage cosponsored by ABCUSA and Church of the Brethren. The pilgrimage was coordinated by June Totten and led by the Telos group which has the capacity to introduce participants to the wide range of perspectives about the conflict and potential resolution of it. I was again impressed by the efforts of the churches of the area for reconciliation. It is a sacrificial role demanding the utmost of Christian love to accomplish. In addition June and Ernest Jones of our board went into Jordan afterwards where we met Hanna Massad in Amman. Hanna, who had to flee as pastor of the Baptist Church of Gaza City, now serves refugees from the turmoil in Syria and Iraq. The stories of loss were heartrending.

*Immigration* – An Immigration Taskforce was called together by ABCUSA including Warren Stewart of 1<sup>st</sup> Institutional Baptist Church of Phoenix, Ray Schellinger and Jose Norat of IM, Salvador Orellana of ABHMS, Sandra Hasenauer of ABWM and myself. In April and May a study resource on immigration, "Pastoral, Prophetic, Practical and Personal" was produced first in English and then in Spanish. In February, I led the NCC Executive Committee in a cross-border learning experience in El Paso, TX and then in March the ABCUSA Executive Committee had a similar experience in San Diego and Tijuana led by Ray and Adalia

Schellinger. The Taskforce will lead a workshop on Sunday afternoon at the Biennial Mission Summit.

*Transformed by the Spirit* – As noted earlier, Jeff Woods has designed the conversation and feedback sessions for Kansas City Biennial Mission Summit (BMS). This year we will introduce a more sophisticated online tool to sustain the conversations post-BMS that David Cushman and Jeff have worked to identify and modify for our purposes. Whereas in the past four years we have developed *Transformed by the Spirit* through controlled experiments in Adaptive Challenge and Moving Back into the Neighborhood, at this biennial we will launch them as open to all. We have created and through experience refined written guides. We have worked with participating regions to identify and train coaches to assist congregations that will enter the initiative. We will also be introducing a resource as well on working cross-culturally. We also owe a debt of gratitude to our friends and guides in launching TBYS, Craig Van Gelder and Alan Roxburgh. The Journey Team, chaired by the Rev. Nikita McCallister, is now the primary guidance for the ongoing development of the emphasis. We also express our thanks to the Rev. Dr. Dwight Stinnett who chaired the Journey Team during the first four years of *Transformed by the Spirit*.

*Rhythms of the Spirit* – Brad Berglund has led this effort and his report was recently posted. In many ways this is the “heart” of being *Transformed by the Spirit*. I urge the adoption of this as an ongoing emphasis of ABCUSA.

NCC – The Annual Christian Unity Gathering sponsored by the NCC met in May with a focus on interfaith understanding and cooperation for peace, one of the two priorities of the NCC. ABC was well represented in the work of the various Convening Tables. The four tables are settings for denominational staff and members to collaborate on common concerns. ABC participants included: **Intergenerational Think Tank** - June Totten, **Theological Study and Dialogue and Matters of Faith and Order** – Loida Martell-Otero, Christian Collins Winn, **Christian Education, Formation and Leadership Development** -Laura Alden, **Joint Action for Justice and Peace** - Fela Barrueto, Pat Hernandez, **Inter-religious Relations and Dialogue** - Ernest Jones, Cheryl Wade. Medley preached the closing session.

A longstanding ministry of the NCC is the Uniform Series, an ecumenical Christian Education curriculum. I was invited to attend and address the commission that oversees its development and production.

*Baptist World Alliance* – The Baptist World Congress will be held in Durban, South Africa in July. It is the first congress to be held on the African continent. American Baptists will be serving on the working committees and commissions for the upcoming quinquennium. We do not have a full list as yet from the BWA, but we have suggested names for each of the groups. The BWA has formed a new commission for the next quinquennium on interfaith relations and I have been asked to serve as its first chair.

In addition the BWA has requested that I represent the world Baptist communion at the 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October. With the concurrence of President Ng, I have accepted this appointment.

*Other* – We remember with thanksgiving the life and ministry of our dear friend and colleague, Dr. G. Daniel Jones, whose homegoing service was held on Monday, June 8. Dr. Jones was a beloved leader in ABC life serving in many capacities including on this board when it was the General Board and later as its chaplain. Most recently he was chair of the Black Caucus. Dr.

Jones so loved ABC that he had embroidered on the lining of the lid of his casket, the ABC logo. In many ways, he was "Mr. ABC."

*Personal* – Don Ng and I both celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in ordained ministry this year. The Executive Committee duly noted this milestone for each of us at its March meeting. I also marked 40 years of marriage in May. Just before our board meetings, I was in San Francisco to help honor Don as he retires from full-time Christian service. We give thanks for his extraordinary and gifted leadership over these years.

#### Other Meetings/Preaching Engagements

Community Church of Tellico Village, TN  
Calvary Baptist Church, Newark, DE  
FBC, Ballston Spa  
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Utica NY  
FBC, New Hartford, NY  
BWA Executive Committee  
NCC Executive Committee and Board Meetings  
Dr. Robert Cochran's installation as executive minister of the DC Baptist Convention  
Commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide  
Pilgrim Place ABC Retirees Gathering  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary Commencement Speaker  
Chin Baptist Churches USA speaker  
Orientation for Leslie Turley as IM director for SE Asia  
ABHMS Search Committee  
Dr. G. Daniel Jones' Homegoing Service  
Participation in Middle East dialogue