

**Report of the General Secretary  
to the Board of General Ministries  
Overland Park, KS  
June 2013**

The last several months have been weeks filled with exciting mission encounters, growth in program outreach, and a focus on planning.

Given that we have only 3 executive programmatic staff persons in addition to the General Secretary – the list of program initiatives in the ABCUSA staff reports is impressive. When you add to that the many services we provide internally through accounting, personnel, travel and conference, building management and now development, with only another 4 executive staff, it is even more impressive. This is made possible not only because of the dedication and skills of this excellent management team but also because of the talented and committed support staff.

As we are about to enter this Mission Summit/Biennial, I want to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work that Reg Mills, Brad Berglund, Leo Thorne, Annie Marcucci, Kathy Young, Stephanie Heflin, Jeff Woods, Alan Musoke, Cathy Brubaker, Marilyn Tyson, Lori Smith, Bridget Holmstrom, Iris Cobb, Joyce Lake and Beth Fogg have put into planning for these board meetings and Mission Summit/Biennial. It is a herculean effort by a small group of people. This year has been especially challenging as we initiated a new registration procedure and prepared for the Mission Summit conversations. We are excited about the three significant anniversaries we will be celebrating during the Mission Summit/Biennial.

**Transformed by the Spirit**

*Transformed by the Spirit*, is a seed that is beginning to sprout and grow roots and branches across the ABC. We are entering two transitional phases in its life. One is a shift from a limited and controlled experiment to a viral and widespread experiment. For two years now we have worked with our regions with small groups to name the adaptive challenges we face as the church in North America and to encourage initial experiments by these groups to address them. In BGM we have had two such teams at work, and we will be hearing from them about suggested experiments for us. This has been a learning time for us as we have tested assumptions and sometimes presumptions and as we have refined questions and processes to address the adaptive challenges we encounter.

This week we will sow this seed more widely among our churches with the hope that the seed widely dispersed will lead to a viral movement of experimentation in ministry and mission. Jeff Woods has put together a conversation process for attendees that focuses on the 16 adaptive challenges we have identified in the past two years. Those attending will be given information on how to engage in the *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative when they return home.

The Mission Summit/Biennial marks a transition in *Transformed by the Spirit* as we shift from high dependency upon our consultants. We are preparing for this second phase which will carry us through the next two years. We continue to fund raise for this initiative as I have traveled and met with potential donors. The Great Rivers Region has submitted a request for \$25,000 from the Palmer Grant to fund the cost of continuing the Journey Team. We have also received a second grant of \$10,000 from the FBC, Phoenix Foundation. I am pleased to announce that Sumner Grant has agreed to serve in continued leadership as a volunteer in his retirement.

At this meeting, we will experience the results of the BGM ACT/ALT on American Baptist Identity as we visit local ABC ministry sites, including Judson Baptist Church where Ruth's husband John is the pastor, Bethel Christian Center which serves a growing refugee community from Burma among others, and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. In November, our board meeting will include an experience based on the work of the ACT/ALT focused on Becoming the Beloved Community.

The work is branching out into other parts of our denomination as well. Next year, the meeting of the American Baptist Association of Seminary Administrators will focus on the adaptive challenges we face in preparing leaders for Christ's church. The American Baptist Association of Colleges and Universities whose meeting will take place on Thursday has invited us to talk about how *Transformed by the Spirit* might impact them as well.

### **Mission Table**

A small team consisting of Judy Allbee, Perry Hopper, Dwight Stinnett and Marilyn Turner met with Jeff Woods recently to begin planning for the Mission Table in November, 2013. Jeff had outlined three possible process scenarios to get the group started, and out of that they have created a first draft of a process to engage the 106 participants in the Table.

### **Burma**

On February 8, a delegation from the ABC Taskforce on Refugees from Burma met with the US State Department to advise them on the continued human rights and religious liberty violations in Burma. Our delegation included leaders of the Baptist community from Burma in the US who spoke of their first-hand experience with these issues. What was to have been a 60 minute briefing turned into 90 minutes as State Department staff wanted to know more. As a result, the State Department did include religious liberty issues in their latest conversation with Burmese officials. We continue to work on advocacy concerning the human rights/religious liberty issues in Burma. In May we hosted three representatives of the Kachin people - Mr. La Awng, Kachin Independence Organization Central Committee Member; Mr. Gum San, Kachin Alliance Spokesperson; and Miss Ja Seng Mai, Kachin Alliance Campaign Manager - who described the ongoing conflict with the Burmese military and peacemaking efforts with the government. Representatives from IM and ABHMS were also present.

### **Baptist-Muslim dialogue**

Our second national Baptist-Muslim dialogue in November was highlighted by the participation of Ambassadors Suzan Johnson-Cook and Rashad Hussein for a public forum that was well attended. We will publish the works of this second dialogue once again in the *American Baptist Quarterly*. In the second half of January, I led a mission team of ABWM leaders and others to experience Baptist-Muslim relations in Lebanon and the Republic of Georgia.

On March 4, Dr. Syeed of ISNA and I met with State Department officials, including Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, in response to an invitation to discuss our efforts to ease Muslim-Christian tensions. We were able to speak about our efforts here, the work in Lebanon and the Republic of Georgia, and the recent BWA initiative in Nigeria that involved ABC through Dan Buttry. They wish to invite us back at a later date for further consultation.

The Saturday following the attack on the Boston Marathon, Central Seminary with our support, hosted a regional Baptist-Muslim dialogue. These face-to-face meetings are key to our efforts to undergird the quest for peace between Christians and Muslims. While none of us will probably

ever understand fully how the Tsarnaev brothers were radicalized, their attack and the recent brutal attack on a British soldier in London, should only spur our efforts to work together with Muslims who oppose violence in the name of Islam. I would like to highlight that I received an invitation to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> international gathering of Christians, Muslims and Jews that is sponsored in Qatar by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue. The invitation came in recognition of the work that we have led in Baptist-Muslim dialogue. Because of a prior commitment to be at the annual meeting of the American Baptist Churches of CT, I was not able to attend. But I want you to know the high esteem in which this effort is held internationally.

### **Congregational Life**

As part of *Transformed by the Spirit*, we continue to work on developing a Bible reading resource for our congregations. Our Response Group on Congregational Life is pursuing this.

### **Conference on Statelessness**

In February, ABCUSA with a grant from the World Relief Committee cosponsored with the World Council of Churches a Conference on Statelessness in DC. This was the first international gathering of church leaders from around the world with representatives from the UNHCR and the US State Department to address this issue. Those attending, including Baptist leaders from Burma and Bangladesh, represented churches from across the world impacted by the issue of statelessness. ABC is involved in this issue on the ground through our mission work with the Roma in Europe and people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, as well as through our advocacy with the State Department about religious liberty issues in Burma. This conference helped set directions for a partnership between the churches, the UNHCR and governmental organizations to address this issue.

### **Professional Ministry**

The experiment we began in Puerto Rico in hosting a gathering of ABC theologians and pastor/theologians is blossoming. When we began I said I would be happy if 30 showed up and we had about 60. Now this year's event has attracted over 100 and *ABQ* has just published the papers from the Puerto Rico gathering. Much thanks go to Dr. Jennifer Davidson of American Baptist Seminary of the West and her team who have worked creatively in developing these two events. Their theme, "Baptists and the Spirit: Living Into God's Future" was chosen specifically to contribute to the *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative.

With the Rhythms of the Spirit Conference we are testing the waters again. On August 5-8, 2013, we will co-sponsor this conference on spirituality and spiritual practices with ABA. Jeff Savage, our chaplain, will be a major contributor along with Betty Wright-Riggins, Renee Colson-Hudson and Brad Berglund. We know there is a growing number of American Baptists who are training as spiritual directors and many others who are exploring historic forms of Christian spirituality in their desire to grow in faith and practice. My hope is that a two-year experiment might evolve from this which would see us sponsoring events such as this in different locales, offer a youth/young adult experience at Taizé, engage people in pilgrimage, and produce one or two new resources for spiritual growth and worship.

As you can see, *Transformed by the Spirit* is becoming a platform for enriching and strengthening the life of faith of our people and our congregations through an expansion of experiences and resources. It is important that BGM continue to explore and promote a strong devotional life that is centered in Christ as we explore new opportunities for us to be expressions of his hands and feet in the world. Without spiritual power, our kingdom efforts fail. Without kingdom effort, our spirituality is sterile.

## **Development**

David Gnirk, Dee Dee Turlington, Debra Schill, Leo Thorne, Johnson Eapen and I, with John McLaverty as consultant, served as the search committee. After two sets of interviews, we were pleased to extend a call to this position to Ken Marsenburg. Ken is a member of St. John's Baptist Church in Springfield, OH and has a strong commitment to ABC life that is rooted in his work with Alive in Mission as a staff member of Community Counseling Services. Ken eventually became the director of CSS, one of the foremost fund-raising services in the non-profit world. Ken began work on June 1 and on June 11, Evon Moody transferred from serving as the administrative assistant for HR to serving as administrative assistant with Development.

## **Communication**

It may sound like a tautology, but the challenge of being general is that we are general. Our ministry of leadership and program is more diffuse than that of other parts of the family except for perhaps our regions. Our challenge as BGM is to adequately interpret our ministry in ways that vibrantly connect it to the vitality of the communal and the missional dimensions of being church. "Serving as the Hands and Feet of Christ" is a wonderful crystallization of our ethos as ABC.

Our task as BGM is to succinctly and graphically depict our diverse work. We will be expanding *ABCUSA Connections* to four editions a year. Leo and Bridget have been hard at work enhancing our efforts in telling the ABCUSA story to our people as a way of binding us together and encouraging our life as a denomination. We have secured the services of Rich Schramm who has a long record of ministry with us to assist in this effort. Rich's gifts as a journalist will augment Bridget's efforts to tell the stories of congregations and American Baptists that will inspire our people all the while strengthening the ABC identity.

## **Stewardship**

When Soozi Ford became the executive minister of ABC/Indiana-Kentucky we lost a capable consultant in stewardship. Leo Thorne has brought together a team which is committed to continuing her work in providing practical resources for pastors and congregations while building a culture of generosity because we serve a God that you cannot outgive!

## **Ecumenical**

ABCUSA was asked through our NCC membership to be one of 5 North American denominations who would attend a pan-American summit on immigration hosted by the Council of Churches of Latin America. Rev. Amaury Tañón-Santos, president of the ABC Intercaucus will represent us.

The ABCUSA Staff Leadership Team met with the core staff of CBF in February as a way of exploring common interests and mission. There is warmth of relationship and a desire for fellowship there that we need to cultivate. We have already worked closely with CBF on disaster relief in New Orleans, and in the co-appointment of the James family in Haiti and the Binkley's in the US. We are sharing pastors back and forth as well, so there are common interests that we have. I shall be attending their annual meeting in July as they install Suzii Paynter as their new Executive Coordinator.

Please refer to the submitted report on CCU/IR which details our most recent work and accomplishments in this area.

## Seminaries

It has been a delight to pair with Andover Newton Theological School in our national dialogue with Muslims and with The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University, Central Baptist Theological Seminary and American Baptist Seminary of the West in regional dialogues. The same can be said of our growing partnership with Central Baptist Theological Seminary in service to the diaspora from Burma.

We continue to explore partnership with other ABC-related schools. Recent conversations with faculty and administration with Palmer has raised some interesting possibilities for collaboration. One is in the arena of spirituality. We have mutual interest in how we might pair in a possible two-year experiment around Rhythms of the Spirit, which I mentioned earlier in this report. Likewise, I have been approached by Paul Alexander of the school who is the author of *Christ at the Checkpoint* about ways we might work together in Christian-Muslim peacemaking.

## Post November BGM Meeting Activities:

- Retreat with REMC officers, Nov. 28-29
- 2<sup>nd</sup> National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue, Nov. 30-Dec. 2
- ABC-COB Delegation to Middle-East, Dec. 9-18
- Donor Call, Dec. 21
- American Bible Society, Jan. 4
- ABW Guided Visit to Lebanon and the Republic of Georgia
- MMBB Pastor's Colloquium, Jan. 29-30
- MMBB Search Committee, Jan. 30-Feb 1
- Visiting Retirees in Florida, Feb. 2-3
- Church of the Beatitudes, Feb. 3
- NEC Retreat, Feb. 16-17
- NCC Executive Committee, Feb. 24-26
- WCC/ABC Conference on Statelessness, Feb. 27-28
- State Department re: Burma, Mar. 4
- Donor visits, Mar. 4
- BWA Executive Committee, Mar. 5-6
- TbyS Partners' Meeting, Mar. 12-13
- BGM Executive Committee, Mar. 14
- Visit with Tim Brown the new GHC executive minister, Tim Brown, Mar. 16
- Meeting with ABC/Central Pacific Coast, Mar. 16
- Preached at Katie ChoyWong's church, the church where Karen Yi is associate, and brought greetings to a predominantly Indonesian ABC congregation which was celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Mar. 17
- 1<sup>st</sup> Interviews for Director of Development, Mar. 21-22
- Spiritual Retreat, Mar. 25-27
- National Leadership Council, April 2-5
- ABCUSA Staff Retreat, April 5-6
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interviews, Director of Development, April 8-9
- ABASA at CRCDS, April 12
- Donor visits- St. Louis, April 20
- Antioch Baptist Church, St. Louis, April 21
- WCC Assembly Orientation, Chicago, April 22
- Donor Calls, Michigan, April 23

- ABCCONN Ministers Council, April 25
- ABCCONN Annual Meeting, April 26-27
- FBC, Stratford, CT, April 28
- CRCDS Polity Class via Skype, May 6
- Meeting with GS, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, May 7
- Health Care Coalition re: End of Life Care – Washington DC, May 8
- Meeting with GS of Church of Brethren, and GS Emeritus, PNBC, May 8
- New Jersey Council of Churches, keynote, May 9
- MMBB Board, May 15
- Staff Recognition Day, May 16
- Retirement Celebration for G. Daniel Jones, May 17
- NCC Governing Board, May 20-21
- NCC Development Committee, May 29
- Conference Call – New Baptist Covenant, May 31
- ABCUSA Development Advisory Team, June 3
- *TbyS* Planning Group, June 6

Post –Biennial

- a. ABC Holy Spirit Renewal Ministries conference, June 24-25
- b. CBF Annual Meeting, June 28
- c. BWA, June 30-July 6
- d. American Bible Society, Aug. 2
- e. Rhythms of the Spirit, Aug. 5-8
- f. Commemoration of “I Have a Dream Speech”, Aug. 25
- g. ISNA Annual Meeting, Aug. 30-31