

**Report of the General Secretary  
To  
The Board of General Ministries  
November, 2014**

Friends and Colleagues,

I believe with all my heart that ABC has a bright future before us as a vibrant community of faith committed to glorifying God as followers of God's beloved Son, Jesus.

Let me outline for you some of the progress since we last met.

Transformed by the Spirit

You will be hearing from Jeff Woods about the solid steps taken in our experiment with "Moving into the Neighborhood." I wish to highlight that we are working diligently to ensure a seamless and productive shift from Alan Roxburgh's leadership of this initiative to that of Jeff Woods'. This will become a major part and an expansion of Jeff's work with regions and congregational life. Earlier in the year, Jeff spent several days with Alan working on the leadership transition, and at the last Journey Team meeting we spent considerable time talking about the tasks Alan has been doing and how we would work that transition. Jeff and Alan continue to consult regularly. Jeff has the capacity as thought leader and manager for this process.

Burma

In February, I shall be leading a delegation to Thailand and Burma as we reassess the situation with the refugee camps in Thailand and visit the Kachin State where there is continuing violence and a large population of internally displaced persons. We will be meeting with church leaders, UN and US embassy personnel in both countries, and the Myanmar Council of Churches.

In July, I spoke at the annual meeting of the Karen Baptist Churches USA. In August, I had considerable conversations with leaders from Burma about the situation in the Kachin State and the issues regarding Kachin churches in the US. There is concern over a growing rift between two segments.

On October 31, Ken Marsenberg spent 4 hours coaching the executive director of the Chin Foundation on a Grant request he is preparing. Ken was able to point him toward some excellent foundation prospects.

On November 5 we sent a letter to President Obama outlining our continuing concerns about Burma as he prepares to visit there as part of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Conference.

Baptist-Muslim Dialogue

This effort is growing, sending shoots in many directions. In the summer, Pat Hernandez and Virginia Holmstrom led a team of Baptist women, lay and clergy, from ABC to meet Baptist and Muslim women in the Republic of Georgia to continue the dialogue begun two years ago. They also applied for and received a Palmer Grant to enable planning that will bring Muslim and Baptist women to the US for dialogue.

In early June I participated with an interfaith and ecumenical group of 8 who were invited to Iran for dialogue with the Christian and Shiite leaders there. The theme was "A World Without Violence and Extremism." We explored that theme and how our communities could cooperate in working for such a world. We met with a number of political leaders as well exploring issues of religious liberty. While there we made requests for the release of US citizens being held there.

A week after returning, I was asked to meet the Sudanese Ambassador with another group to plead for the life of Mariam Ibrahim, the Christian woman sentenced to death. This then led to a meeting with the Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs. We shared the joy of her family and the world and of the Christian community when she was released.

Following up on an invitation by CCU&IR, the Rev. Alan Newton, executive minister of ABC/Rochester-Genesee has agreed to coordinate grassroots efforts for connecting ABC congregations with Mosques for dialogue and joint-action for the common good. Rochester, where he lives, has one of the strongest such efforts. This will feed into the plans for a third national dialogue.

The concept for the third national Baptist-Muslim dialogue has been confirmed. This dialogue will build upon the previous two scholarly dialogues, but it will differ in style and content. This dialogue will bring together 200 US Baptist and Muslim religious leaders under the age of 40. Like Noah, we shall bring them two by two - a Muslim and a Baptist leader from the same community. In their 4 days together in a retreat setting, they will learn more about each other, and the others' religious tradition and strategize for their efforts back home in working for peace.

This past month a delegation from Egypt met with a number of us to begin conversations about the situation in Egypt. I helped arrange a meeting with them and Melissa Rogers of the White House staff.

A second ABC-Church of the Brethren trip to the Middle East is being planned for April. It will begin with a peace conference in Nazareth planned by the Baptists there and will, we hope, include a visit to Jordan and refugee camps. We are hoping to be joined by Progressive National Baptists in this venture. June Totten is the coordinator.

#### New Ways of being Denomination

Denominations do not have enough staff or funds to have staff-driven and staff-led programs, except in a few areas. This is forcing denominations to explore augmenting the programs they have by building networks that serve the multiple forms of mission and ministry that are called for by the churches and the world. It is a response to an adaptive challenge. ABCUSA/BGM are engaged in the following experiments:

1. Through Alan Newton, creating a network of local ABC congregations connecting with their Muslim Neighbors.
2. Working with three ABC pastors - Tom Carr, Ian Mevorach and Chuck Redfern to create the ABC Creation Justice Network.
3. Working through Brad Berglund, Jeff Savage, Betty Wright-Riggins, and Renee Colson Hudson to create a network of ABC spiritual directors.

#### Inspired, Transformed

Leo Thorne and Bridget Holmstrom have worked hard to produce "Inspired, Transformed...American Baptist Churches." This video features Baptist leaders from without and within ABC reflecting on how ABC has inspired and transformed them and the world. It is an excellent piece.

### Witness of the Prayer Vigil

In October ABCUSA sponsored a prayer vigil for unaccompanied minors fleeing into the US to escape violence, drug cartels, and death. The prayer vigil was supported by IM and ABHMS, each of which made major contributions to the event. From that event we have formed a joint immigration taskforce that includes ABCUSA, IM, ABHMS, and ABWM.

### Building

We continue to respond to system breakdowns in our aging facility, the latest due to a squirrel that caused our transformer to blow. Our electrical panel in the building is so old that they no longer make fuses to fit it.

The building and leaseholds is one of your largest fiduciary responsibilities. We are making progress in our plans regarding the sale of the building given the rise in construction in our immediate area. We remain committed to relocating so as to retain as many current employees as possible. And we anticipate the earliest relocation being no sooner than 2017.

This spring we shall circulate among developers a request for expressions of interest which will invite them to tell us how they would develop the property and what they are willing to pay. It will also allow us to explore several options: an outright sale and move, a co-location so that we would occupy some portion of a building or some space on site in our own building, etcetera.

We are also working to identify the square footage we need so we can begin to estimate costs for leading, buying, or building.

### Fundraising

Ken is busy making calls on donors. Much of his work is in "friend-raising" for ABCUSA. I have spent enough time with him in such settings to know that he connects well with others and is fearless in asking for support. He is creative, but not as creative as a recent dream of mine in which he had congregations panning for gold for ABCUSA. I think the dream was influenced by the fact that I was in northern CA.

### Staffing

We have welcomed two new employees- Rhoda Johnson in Travel and Conference and Tina Turner in Mission Support.

Johnson also led successful efforts to package ABCUSA and IM in a joint proposal for health care, saving both of us money. We have switched to Aetna which offers nationwide coverage which means we don't have to have separate insurance plans for those living outside PA. Thanks, Johnson, for a job well done!

We also completed the move of our staff into the section vacated by Baptist Children's Services. All of our offices save Johnson's are now situated in one section. We now have a more adequate conference room and a nice seating area for guests or staff functions. Alan, Anita and Bob were those who worked to refit the space for our needs and to coordinate the move. Again, an excellent job. I will now leave office from the same physical space where I took office. In a round building you can come full circle!

Engagements since the June Board Meeting:

6/26, NCC  
7/2-12, BWA

7/21-24, IM Mission Conference  
7/25-27, Karen Baptist Churches USA annual meeting  
7/28-8/1, Rhythms of the Spirit  
8/3-12, Association of Argentine Baptist Churches Biennial  
8/24-26, NCC  
8/26-28, Fundraising Southern CA  
8/28, Prayer Vigil at the border  
9/11-14, BGM Executive Committee  
9/15-17, Jury Duty  
9/19-20, FBC Norwich, NY  
9/25-27, ABC/Rocky Mountains Annual Meeting  
9/28, FBC Grand Junction, CO  
9/29-30, Fundraising CO  
10/5, People's Baptist Church, Boston and installation of president of Andover Newton Theological a School  
10/6, Meeting to launch ABC Creation Justice Network  
10/7-9, Transformed by the Spirit  
10/10-12, Rochester/Genesee, FBC Rochester, Greece Baptist Church  
10/19-21, Egyptian Delegation  
10/22-23, ABC Real Estate Council  
10/27-28, Biennial Mission Summit Planning Team  
10/29, Fundraising Kansas  
10/31, Chin Foundation  
11/2, Lake Ave Baptist Church, Oakland, CA  
11/3-6, Rhythms of the Spirit  
11/2, The Baptist Church of Warren, RI  
11/3, TABCOM