

The Church and the World
An Update for the BGM Executive Committee
June-September 2018
From Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, General Secretary

A pastoral vision of ministry necessarily and inevitably leads to a complex conversation between disciples who follow Christ and their culture and its historical unfolding. This theme has been very real to me as General Secretary throughout this summer.

Pastoral/Prophetic Responses to Political and Cultural Developments

- 1) *Letter to Attorney General Jeff Sessions:* The closing conversation of the Board of General Ministries included a powerful discussion precipitated by the Trump Administration's policy to separate children from their families on our southern border. In response to the board's unanimous desire for the General Secretary to articulate its views to the administration, I penned a letter to Attorney General Sessions and sent it (via web and then paper) to him. The letter was translated into Spanish by an IM missionary within hours, spread rapidly via social media, and was republished by several Baptist news outlets. Although it received endorsements from many ABCUSA leaders, Executive Ministers, clergy and laypeople throughout the American Baptist community, I should acknowledge that I also received a half dozen negative responses from clergy that either supported the administration's policies or did not like the fact that I wrote on behalf of the ABCUSA family without consulting every church (an unrealistic notion). I attempted to respond to these communications with openness and grace. A supportive resolution passed by the ABCUSA Asian Alliance can be found in Addendum 1.
- 2) *Letter to the Nicaraguan Government:* Similarly, I was asked by our Baptist colleagues in Nicaragua and to compose a protest letter to the Nicaraguan Government concerning its unjust use of violent force against its own people. IM personnel and missionaries provided suggestions and edits to the letter, and I am grateful for the collaboration. Hundreds have been killed or wounded as the government has sought to suppress protests. This letter was also posted online and received a good deal of positive response. It is interesting to note that although I used similar language in speaking on behalf of ABCUSA, I received no negative feedback from our constituency concerning this letter.
- 3) *Violence and Oppression in Myanmar:* As a follow-up the meeting ABCUSA hosted with Myanmar's Ambassador to the United States in May, I was part of a 4-person delegation that met with State Department officials in Washington DC in July. Our aim was to highlight American Baptist solidarity with Karen, Chin and Kachin Baptists who have been victimized by government military campaigns. We also expressed concern and support for Rohingya refugees who are still being persecuted. In like manner, the Burma Task Force is planning a meeting with Sam Brownback, US Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom (scheduled for late September).
- 4) *Baptist World Alliance Board Meetings:* Along with about a dozen other ABCUSA leaders and representatives, I attended the BWA Board meetings in Zurich in July. Under the able leadership of the new BWA General Secretary, Elijah Brown, the meetings were positive and productive. ABCUSA was recognized as one of the Founders of the BWA, which began in 1905 (see photo). We heard several reports on Christians in North Korea, and passed resolutions on sexual harassment and immigration justice.
- 5) *Holocaust Seminar:* As I write today, unfortunately we will most likely have to cancel and then reschedule this event due to my illness.

Ecumenical Relationships

- 1) *NCCC Conversations with Buddhist and Hindu Leaders*: I appointed Dr. Shane Kinnison (FBC Pasadena, ABCOFLASH) to represent ABCUSA at two new inter-faith dialogues with the Buddhist and Hindu communities. His report has been sent to the CCUIR and will be provided to the full board in November.
- 2) *Churches for Middle East Peace*: Roy Medley has resigned from CMEP's Board, and their director has asked me for a nomination for a new ABCUSA representative. I have forwarded the name of Rev. James Menninger from ABC-Ohio, to CMEP for consideration.
- 3) *Progressive National Baptist Convention Annual Meeting*: It was a privilege to bring greeting from ABCUSA at the PNBC annual meeting in Philadelphia. Marsha also represented OGS.
- 4) *New Baptist Covenant*: Marsha and I had an excellent lunch conversation with McMahon, executive director of the New Baptist Covenant. She decided to participate in the Holocaust Seminar in Washington DC.
- 5) *First International Conference of Jewish Disciples of Jesus Christ*: As I compose this report, I am attending this by invitation only global conversation in Dallas of approximately 70 Jewish scholars and ecclesiastical leaders, representing Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Messianic fellowships. After the meetings have concluded, if warranted, I will add an addendum to this report to summarize the results and significance of this meeting.

ABCUSA Family Unity and Common Ministry

- 1) *2019 Biennial Mission Summit in Virginia Beach*: Planning for the various plenary sessions, events, youth ministry and Academy tracks have continued throughout the summer. An up to date progress report will be distributed at the meeting.
- 2) *National Leadership Committee*: The NLC met via GotoMeeting in July and in person in August. The latter meeting was hosted by IM at their new offices. Following that meeting, IM hosted a luncheon for NLC, and also to provide an opportunity for me as General Secretary to share my support of IM's ministries and to bless their new facilities, since I cannot attend their open house (which conflicts with our meetings). The November NLC meeting will be hosted by ABHMS at its new building.
- 3) *American Baptist Foundation*: ABF is embarking on a significant discussion about its mission and relationship to the ABCUSA family. As a board member, I hope to strengthen OGS' ties to the foundation. Accordingly, Perkin Simpson and I will be meeting in early September.
- 4) *United Mission*: I am in the process of finalizing the task force to work on creative proposals that articulated our united mission as American Baptists and future options for United Mission, the offering. Leaders who have agreed to participate in this brainstorming process include Frank Frischkorn (ABCOPAD Executive Minister and incoming REMC President), Aidsand Wright-Riggins (retired Executive Director of ABHMS), Lisa Rothenberger (OGHS director), ... OGS staff support will be provided by Jeff Woods and Tina Turner.
- 5) *Green Lake Conference Center*: Following the BGM meetings in June, I attended my first GLCC Board Meeting as OGS representative. The board is a strong one, and though they face significant challenges, I believe they and Ben Mott, GLCC Director, are doing great work in upgrading old facilities such as Roger Williams Inn.

Office of the General Secretary

- 1) *1015 Building Purchase and Move:* The due diligence period for inspecting the building has been completed, and as expected, the main issues we will face are replacing the roof and air conditioning units on the roof. Both issues are due to the age of the building, and will afford us an opportunity to modernize and create a more energy efficient facility. We are currently assessing the interior layout in order to determine how much construction will be needed. The good news is that the architect believes we can utilize much of the existing interior wall design. The contract calls for us to take possession no later than November 30, 2018. Our goal is to move to the new building in the first quarter of 2019.
- 2) *Information Technology for Mission Communication:* Beginning on July 1, OGS absorbed the two remaining Computer Center staff. We now have a 4 person IT team that is dedicated to enhancing OGS's ability to communicate our mission and to serve our family in new ways, such as ABC CORE, which should be up and running in early 2019. We are working on an exciting update of our website, and the design template we have chosen is modern, clean and easy to navigate.
- 3) *ABCUSA/OGS Internship:* OGS received a grant from the Baugh family to support an internship for a woman in ministry. The original grant description, which preceded my call, was unrealistic, and we have revised it. Further, the call for intern applications ran into difficulties, and delayed the calling of an intern for a year. This summer, we have sent out a call for applications to ABC-related seminaries and colleges throughout the country.
- 4) *HR Issues:* The Executive Committee shall receive copies of the final draft of the revised Personnel Manual, which if approved by the Board in November, will replace the current version from 2001. I would also like the Executive Committee to review the new (6) Bands proposal, which greatly simplifies the (24) Steps that currently describe the pay scale hierarchy for employees (see Addendum 2). Now that I have been serving for more than a year as General Secretary, I would appreciate having a candid conversation with the Executive Committee about staff issues.

Pastoral Ministry to the ABCUSA Family

- 1) *Regional Visits:* The entire OGS ministry team is focused on visiting as many regions, churches and pastoral gatherings as we can. At the November BGM meeting, we will provide a full year summary of our outreach in this regard. This summer, a highlight for me personally was traveling to West Virginia to help install Mike Sisson, the new Executive Minister of the West Virginia Baptist Convention. Looking to the fall, my schedule features pastoral visits to regions almost every week.
- 2) *Holy Spirit Renewal Movement Conference:* Both Kevin Walden and I had the opportunity to speak at the conference, which took place at the end of June in Green Lake. HSRM has made a concerted effort to be a positive resource for spiritual growth, and has been invited by a number of regions to provide workshops, seminars and retreats.

Associate General Secretary Updates

- 1) *Jeff Woods:* Since the Board of General Ministries Meeting in mid-June, I have held 7 on-site meetings with 5 different regional executive minister search committees, helping 4 of these search committees (New Jersey, Central, Mid-America, and Rochester) draw their work toward a conclusion by recommending a full-consensus candidate. Some of these recommendations require only a regional board vote, while others require a regional delegates meeting, but all should come to a final vote sometime this fall. Summer on-site visits in other regions included a

training event in Cleveland, a meeting with the Ohio interim, and a 3 day continuing education event with 25 region staff from 10 different regions in August. I also consulted with several potential interviewees and helped several regions work through some delicate issues with pastors and congregations that included numerous emails, calls, and conference calls. It has been an extremely busy but rewarding summer working with our regional executive ministers, boards, and committees. Regarding work beyond our regions, I was also very happy to finalize a clergy bibliography for the Professional Ministries Team and to provide assistance in drafting an upcoming longitudinal survey for the Faith Communities Today (FACT) group that distributes and analyzes the largest survey of congregations in the U.S.

I look forward to fulfilling several more regional on-site consultation requests this fall including the leading of a region board training event in TABCOM, facilitating a regional envisioning retreat for ABCORI, speaking at the Ministers Council event and assisting with the executive minister installation service for ABC Mid-America, providing a leadership workshop for ABCRGR, speaking at an ABCOPAD association annual meeting, and conducting an orientation for the recently elected executive minister in ABC of Puerto Rico. I will also facilitate a meeting of the Professional Ministries Team and I hope to schedule additional on-site orientations for other newly elected executive ministers. It is an honor and a joy to serve this American Baptist family.

- 2) *Marsha Scipio*: Lee and I drafted a video script for Blessed Tomorrow and the ABC Creation Justice Network, which will highlight First Baptist Church of Hightstown, NJ because of their ongoing commitment to climate mitigation. We will shoot the video this fall and are reaching out to regional executive ministers for baptism and creation care images. We have also launched a Creation Justice portal on our website. Marsha serves on the Steering Committee for the ABC Creation Justice Network. They will meet in September in Flint, Michigan to develop a strategic plan, to plan for the Creation Justice Track at the Biennial, and to co-host a Creation Justice Ministries Retreat for pastors and community leaders who have been working on the Flint Water Crisis. Marsha applied for a Palmer Grant to continue the work of ABCCJN.

In conjunction with NICD, we have been meeting with the leadership team from the Central Region to plan their civil discourse conference scheduled for February, 2019.

In July I delivered the keynote address for the general assembly and facilitated a workshop for the 65+ youth at the Kachin American Baptist Association Annual Meeting in Colorado. The leadership of KABA has now raised questions in regard to their status with ABC. There have been attempts at unifying this group with the AMO, Kachin Baptist Churches USA, in the past. We are in conversations with KABA and persons at ABHMS who have been involved with these groups to determine the best course of action.

In July I participated in ABHMS' Rebuilding, Restoring, Renewing hurricane relief effort. The team worked at one of the ABC Churches painting and scraping. In October Marsha will return to Puerto Rico as the Guest Preacher for the Anniversary week for Primeria Iglesia Bautista de Carolina. She will preach for several services during that week and provide a workshop for the pastors.

I also represented ABCUSA at the Hampton Minister's Conference and the Progressive National Baptist Conference.

- 3) *Kevin Walden*: The Sister Church Initiative is growing daily as 102 churches in 22 ABC regions interact with each other in friendship. Fresh Expressions is still growing as several regions are now hosting "vision days" and determining who might be "pioneers" (leaders of a Fresh Expression) and "mission entrepreneurs" (supporters). A project has been underway to

encourage and network our 14 regional schools of ministry in cooperation with Jeff Woods and the Professional Ministries Team - a news article is forthcoming. Orientation to American Baptist Life for new pastors and seminarians at the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit is underway in cooperation with our mission partners.

The fall is filling up with invitations to speak as well as attend regional meetings. Mission Northwest has asked me to come and do a workshop on Clergy Ethics at their leadership Tune-Up in September. This comes in light of the multiple news stories of high profile misconduct from Willow Creek in Chicago to the 300 priests and over 1000 victims highlighted by a Pennsylvania Grand Jury and Attorney General - all in the summer of 2018.

- 4) *Pat Hernandez:* Pat is coordinating **Sacred Safe Space ABCUSA**, our response to the sexual harassment cases that are so prominent in the news. The **Core Leadership** team carrying out this initiative is: Rev. Tamara Jackson, former ABCNJ Sacred Safe Spaces Coordinator, Rev. Dr. Shane Kinnison, Board of Governors, Ministers Council Kenna S. "Lucky" Ray, Executive Director, AB Men, Bob Slechta, President AB Men, Rev. Gina Jacobs Strain, Executive Director AB Women's Ministries, and Rev. Dr. Marsha Scipio, Associate General Secretary, Missional Initiatives and Partnerships. this emerging new denomination-wide initiative will educate, empower and equip pastors, church leaders and laity to respond appropriately to acts of violence, abuse and exploitation, and to implement policies and procedures to ensure that our sacred spaces are also safe spaces. It will enable congregations to become safe and sacred spaces where everyone is treated with love, respect and dignity, no one is dismissed, disparaged, or dehumanized, abusive behavior is not only *not* tolerated, it is recognized, challenged, and addressed. This initiative will give voice to victims and survivors, strengthen policies on misconduct and increase awareness of healthy boundaries, creating safe and sacred communities of justice and love.

Addendum 1: Asian Alliance 2018 Convocation in Chicago, IL on June 28, 2018

RESOLUTION REGARDING IMMIGRATION AND CHILDREN

Whereas, we as the Alliance of Asian American Baptist Churches are a group of American Baptist clergy and lay leaders representing Asian American Baptists of the American Baptist Churches/USA including churches and individuals throughout the USA and Puerto Rico;

Whereas, the American Baptist family has a long and distinguished record of service in welcoming immigrants and refugees to communities in the US, and many in our alliance are immigrants and descendants of immigrants, including refugees and asylees who have fled difficult (and often violent) circumstances in their home countries.

Whereas, the Alliance of Asian American Baptist Churches would like to express our concern over any unjust policies recently taking place at our borders, in particular, the separation of children from their parents and family members

Therefore, we affirm the words of our General Secretary, Lee Spitzer, who said, "As a fellowship of Christ-followers who recall the trials of the child Jesus and his parents who fled from persecution in their homeland to another country (Matthew 2:13-18), we adamantly oppose separating children from their relatives. A just society can fulfill its fidelity to its own laws and border security without resorting to such unwise and harmful practices; instead, we urge that compassion, fairness and family-affirming policies characterize our response to the plight of families on our borders."

Accordingly, we urge immediate reunification of separated children and compassionate and just immigration policies for our nation.

Addendum 2: Recommendation shift to 6 Bands for Office of the General Secretary

Recommended BAND	Current Level	Salary Ranges*	Position	Comments
6	20-22	140,000 to 200,000	General Secretary	Board appointment
5	17-19	85,000 to 145,000	Associate GSs/Director	Master's Degree and Strong Experience in Field
4	13-16	65,000 to 90,000	Team Leader/ Manager	Bachelor's degree and Strong Experience in Field
3	10-12	45,000 to 70,000	Associate/Coordinator/Exec Admin	Some College, Certification, Strong Experience in Field
2	6-9	35,000 to 50,000	Admin/Special Skills	HS, Some College, Vocation School
1	1-5	PA Minimum Wage to 45,000	Hourly, Per Diem	Qualifications may vary as this is position-based (ex. Over-skilled person wanting simpler job)

*New hire should start at 80% of mid-point of salary of exiting/colleague. If new position, existing comparable position should be reviewed to ensure internal equity. Complexity of task, supervisory responsibilities, education and experience should be compensable factors when determining position salary. HR consultation is essential to properly benchmark new position.

Salary ranges are adjusted annually to account for inflation/cost of living adjustments. CPI and MMBB data in addition to nonprofit salary scales are factors to be considered.