

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES, USA
Racism and Race Based Violence Taskforce

Status Report for BGM EC
March 10, 2016

During the 2015 Biennial Mission Summit held in Overland, Kansas, then General Secretary Roy Medley, shared the following words during his address:

*Like any deadly virus, racism depends on a host in which it can live, grow and multiply. Racism depends on good people not speaking up. Racism depends on good people looking the other way. Racism depends on good people doing nothing. We can't afford to be good people. I want to stir up within you tonight moral indignation about how racism is indulged and tolerated and allowed to grow. I want to stir up within you tonight compassion and solidarity with those who are wounded everyday not just by guns but by attitudes, fears and stereotypes. Jesus and the prophets teach us that love expresses itself in justice and mercy, doing the right thing by someone else. American Baptists, God calls us to do the right thing by our neighbor. When we leave here I shall be appointing an **ABC Taskforce on Racism and Race-Based Violence** to report back to us how we as American Baptists can more effectively confront and eradicate this scourge from our lives and our country.*

The following ABC Members were asked to serve on this Taskforce:

Linda Calloway (KS)	G. Travis Norvell (MN)
Deborah Svec-Carstens (IA)	Marie Onwubuariri (WI)
Ernest Flores (PA)	Jacqueline A. Thompson (CA-Co-Chair)
Larry Greenfield (IL-Co-Chair)	Justin Thornburg (IN)
Zina Jacque (IA)	J. Alfred Smith, Sr. (CA-Advisor)
Paul Martin (CA)	Michael Ware (NY)

WORK COMPLETED TO DATE

The taskforce members held its initial meeting December 7-8, 2015 at the Doubletree Airport Hilton in Philadelphia. Members not able to attend: Paul Martin; J. Alfred Smith Sr.

Adetokunbo Adelekan, Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Palmer (Eastern Baptist Seminary) also joined us on behalf of Progressive National Baptist Convention. Interim General Secretary Susan Gilles attended a portion of the meeting as well.

The Meeting consisted of five critical conversations: CONVERSATION

- ***One - Identifying Ourselves, Experiences, Issues and Beliefs***

- *Two – Addressing Issues of Race and Race based Violence (How do you see the problem of race where you are situated?)*
- *Three – How does the Gospel speak to these issues? What is the good news? Is there a theology of racism? Is God Racist?*
- *Four – Where do We Stand today as American Baptists on these issues? What has defined us as ABC historically as it relates to this issue? Is there an ABC distinctive in perspective? What are the problems/barriers to ABC being able to effectively address this issue? How does an ABC understanding of the gospel speak to this issue?*
 - *What is your opinion of race relations within ABC today?*
- *Five – Active Engagement – How can ABC engage nationally, regionally and locally around these issues?*

The Taskforce reached a consensus around three areas:

1. Racism is a part of the fabric of the United States and as such has permeated every societal institution including the church. As such while taskforce was formed in response to several recent public events of race-based violence and has a short term goal of providing recommendations to the Executive Committee, the hope is for the work of the taskforce to become a part of the fabric and corporate identity of ABC Life. – ***It was suggested that a Commission be formed around this area so that the work can continue.***
2. The recommendations coming from the taskforce will seek to address more than just behavior. How do we prompt a systematic change in the denomination with the goal of helping to realize the Beloved Community? Recognizing our denominational diversity and difference in perspectives around issues of race, racism and race based violence, ***the taskforce will recommend strategies that seek to increase awareness; uncover attitudes that lead to behavior; provide training and tools for active civic and social engagement nationally, regionally and locally and examples of activities that facilitate cross-cultural, cross-racial conversation and partnership.***
3. Acknowledging the need to engage the denomination around addressing the systemic institutional presence of racism that results in racial violence as exhibited by the actions of the police department. But also the racial violence that is not physical but psychological, social, economic and political and equally if not more harmful in its impact. (Increasing wealth gap, poverty, economic injustice, discrimination in housing, effects of gentrification, low quality housing, political disenfranchisement, mass incarceration.

The initial Taskforce meeting closed with the formation of workgroups and the decision to meet via conference call at the end of January and February.

TASKFORCE WORKGROUPS

ABC Stories – The purpose of this group is to explore tools and mechanism for the ABC family to share their personal stories and experiences around Race, Racism and Race Based Violence. The goal is to provide a sense of humanity and personhood to the issue and hopefully help soften pre-existing resistance to conversations about this critical issue

ABC Clergy Response – The purpose of this group is to develop a Clergy Response protocol to issues of race that emerge in their immediate area or in a larger context. We also discussed a mechanism for Clergy to share their stories and a recommendation of training modules of engagement for clergy.

ABC National and Regional Survey – Assess state of the denomination on the issue and in local contexts

ABC Theological/Biblical Position Statement – Developed to answer the question – What does scripture have to say to the issues of racism and race based violence; What is the good news; What is the theological basis that would inform ABC's prophetic position on the issue?

ABC Self Awareness Tool

****ABC Biennial** – We learned that planning for the Biennial has begun. We discussed the possibility of making this issue a theme for the Biennial or of significant focus. Some Taskforce members already included in these discussions agreed to introduce the possibility.*

There were some ideas that emerged that may not fall into the scope of a specific workgroup. They include:

- Providing a bibliography and other resources
- Developing a denominational racial justice network (the idea being we don't know what other churches and regions are doing in this area. If a church, pastor or region needed assistance with building their capacity to address the issue, there should be a central access point denominationally)
 - Curriculum/Video discussion guide
 - Engaging ABC Seminaries and Colleges around issues of race
- Adding another award category to highlight ministries who are doing and making efforts to do racial justice work
- A list of potential partners that the national, regional and local body can connect with (e.g. PICO, Proctor Conference, The Whiteness Project)

The Taskforce met again via conference call January 28, 2015. Workgroups provided updates on the status of their work. Specific Recommendations will be provided for action in the June 2016 status update report.

*Prepared and Submitted by
Jacqueline A. Thompson – Co-Chair*

