

Mission Summit Conversation Evaluation, July 2017

On Saturday, July 1, 2017, a Mission Summit Conversations (MSC) event was offered to attendees at the American Baptist Biennial/Mission Summit. The Mission Summit Conversations were held as an experiment for the first time in 2013 and were brought back for 2015 as a result of the initial experiment receiving high marks.

Mission Summit Conversation Topics

Following the 2015 Biennial/Mission Summit that included 21 topics of conversation, a Mission Table event was held for the purpose of transforming the current set of Mission Summit Conversation Topics into a smaller set of ABC priorities. The Mission Table event, held in the fall of 2015 successfully identified seven ABC priorities. In addition, small group work produced a case statement for each of the priorities. The 2017 Mission Summit Conversations focused on these seven priorities. Each MSC occurred in a separate space dedicated to that conversation. A summary of the seven priorities as viewed through the lens of a local church is shown below with the priorities shown in boldface type...

“By most standards and typologies, one of the marks of a healthy church is how much the local congregation is involved in their communities. Several of our identified Mission Table priorities encourage community involvement and engagement as identified in the case statements of these priorities. Issues of “**poverty**” and “**violence**” draw us out into our neighborhoods. Our commitment to “**discipleship**” and “**sharing the Gospel in a rapidly changing society**” compel us to act. Yet, we cannot fully engage these priorities without partnering with a diverse constituency, including “**women in ministry**” and the “**next generation of leaders.**” Finally, our efforts must feature “**innovative models of ministry**” to succeed.”

Showcasing the Priorities

A new “showcasing” dimension was added to the 2017 MSC. During the first twenty to thirty minutes of the ninety minute MSC, participants were able to get a glimpse of some of the ministries currently taking place with respect to each of the seven ABC priorities. Room hosts were recruited for the MSC, each of whom were given assistance in designing their 90 minute experience. In order to assist the room hosts with the showcasing portion of the MSC, mission and ministry stories were collected at the 2016 and 2017 National Leadership Council (NLC) meetings and forwarded to each of the room hosts. A resource document that was distributed to the room hosts is shown in Appendix A. Volunteers were recruited to video record the showcasing portions of each of the seven conversations and post the recordings online.

In addition to the showcasing assistance, formats outlining three different means of hosting the conversation portion, one emphasizing table discussion, one emphasizing the case statements, and one emphasizing a lectio divina format were distributed to the room hosts. These samples are shown in Appendix B.

Mission Summit participants were asked to sign up for a MSC in advance so that appropriately-sized rooms could be reserved accordingly.

The seven ABC priorities and room hosts are listed below:

1. Next Generation of Leaders - hosted by Sarah E. Strosahl-Kagi on behalf of ABHMS
2. Anti-violence - hosted by Rev. Fela Barrueto on behalf of ABHMS
3. Discipleship - hosted by Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops, Executive Minister of ABC of Nebraska
4. Ending Poverty - hosted by Curtis Ramsey-Lucas on behalf of ABHMS
5. Gospel in a Rapidly Changing Society - hosted by Rev. Dr. Marcia Patton, Executive Minister of the Evergreen Baptist Association
6. Women in Ministry - hosted by Rev. Nikita McCalister, Associate Executive Minister of Administration, American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island
7. Innovative Models of Pastoral Ministry - hosted by Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles, Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island

Facebook Pages for Each Conversation

One of the more difficult phases of the Mission Summit Conversations has been to encourage the MSC participants to engage in online conversation both prior to and following the face to face conversations that occur at the Mission Summit. Previous attempts to encourage these online conversations have used private discussion tools and public message boards. This time, ABC Assistant Director of Communications Bridget Lipin designed a distinct Facebook Page for each of the seven Mission Summit Conversations. Facebook Moderators were also recruited and trained to monitor each page.

The Facebook format has proved to be much more successful than previous attempts at online conversation. Prior to the MSC event on July 1, over 500 followers had registered to participate in these pages and at the writing of this document, the pages have 612 followers, with new participants and new threads of conversation being added each week.

The job description for the online moderators includes:

1. Regularly (at least twice a week) review the activity related to the Facebook page that you are moderating.
2. Remove any posting that is vulgar, inflammatory or unsuitable for the website. Also consider blocking someone who is not respecting the established guidelines for the FB page or group. {The Facebook Guidelines are shown in Appendix C}.
3. Post (or recruit a friend or two) to post a comment or question at least once a week to generate activity on the site and encourage others to do so.
4. Alert Bridget Lipin (Communication) or Jeff Woods (MSC coordinator), or your MSC host of any concerns.

The results of an online evaluative survey revealed that:

39% of the respondents read and contributed to the Facebook conversations prior to the event
31% of the respondents read but did not contribute to the Facebook conversations prior to the event
7% of the respondents were aware of but did not read the Facebook conversations prior to the event
23% of the respondents were not aware of the Facebook conversations prior to the event

These numbers indicate a marked improvement from 2015, when only 19% of the respondents indicated that they read and contributed to the online conversations prior to the MSC event.

The conversation topics were listed in the Biennial Program Book along with details pertaining to the conversations. The information included a FAQ which is shown in Appendix D.

The Power of Conversation

Baptists have believed in the power of conversation for quite some time. Hear these words from Rev. John Clifford, penned in 1893...

“God forces us to face the questions that test us, and attack the problems that try our strength; and thereby bring the sleeping energies of His living words into wakeful and beneficent activity.”

Current news stories also continue to confirm the power of conversation. Recently, a major metropolitan newspaper, The Columbus Dispatch reported that the city is using “Big Table Conversation” to address the rising concerns related to violence in Columbus neighborhoods. Police officers, community officials, and neighborhood residents are invited to several different simultaneous locations periodically for conversation.

One participant of the MSC had this comment, “Excellent concept and learning opportunity. Loved the ability to connect with folks from different regions to share vision, challenges and opportunities. Also good to know that ABHMS had resources to support the work and keep folks connected to the topic and each other once the convening is over.”

Online Survey

An online evaluation link was distributed to the MSC participants via their registration packets and the link to the evaluation was posted on each MSC Facebook page. Results of this online evaluation are detailed below. The set of responses includes persons who attended each of the seven MSC topics.

Summative Results

Respondents were asked to respond to a question asking for their overall impression of the MSC, basically asking, “Was it worth your time to attend?” The responses are shown below.

36% of the respondents indicated that the summit exceeded their expectations.
57% of the respondents indicated that the summit met their expectations.
7% of the respondents indicated that the summit was not helpful to them personally.

Instead of a second round of MSC, this year's Biennial/Mission Summit Planning Team offered workshops coinciding with the seven MSC topics. The survey results revealed that:

27% of the respondents stayed in the same conversation for both the MSC and the workshop

46% of the respondents attended a different MSC and workshop

27% of the respondents were only able to attend a MSC and not a workshop

Benefit of the Conversations

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate three aspects of the MSC on a 1-6 scale with 1 being low and 6 being high. The results of this question are shown below.

Mission Summit Component	Mean	SD
Quality of Discussion	5.01	0.93
Content discussed	4.79	0.94
Importance to your ministry	4.79	1.26
Showcasing the topic	4.14	0.99

It is interesting to note that the respondents indicated that they benefited more from the conversation portion than the showcasing portion of the events.

Another survey question asked the respondents what type of mix of showcasing and conversation that they would prefer for future Biennial/Mission Summits. The results of that question are shown below.

64% would prefer the same mix of showcasing and conversation

7% would prefer all conversation

29% would prefer something else.

Verbal comments from the original MSC in 2013 surfaced five main areas of benefit that can arise from the conversations. These potential benefits were included in the 2017 evaluation survey asking persons to respond on a 1-5 Likert scale. Four of the five potential benefits received an average score above 4.0. The ratings of the specific benefits are shown below.

Specific Benefit	Mean	SD
Helped me realize that I am not alone on this issue	4.36	0.61
Provided helpful insights	4.23	0.58
Gave an opportunity to connect with new people	4.21	0.86
Helped me understand other perspectives on this issue	4.14	0.83
Brought the parking lot conversations into the main hall	3.43	1.12

Number and Type of Conversations

Respondents were asked to indicate how many conversations they would like to have in the future. The results of this question are shown below.

Number of Preferred Future Conversations	Percentage %
More conversation options	23%
About the same # of 7 conversations	69%
Fewer conversation options	8%

Finally, respondents were given three choices in terms of the type of conversations that could be available at the next Mission Summit. The results of this question are shown below.

Preferred Types of Future Conversations	Percentage %
Brand new topic	7%
One of the same 7 ABC priority topics	14%
An opportunity to do both	79%

Formative Results

In order to plan for future MSC events, persons were also asked for ways to improve the Mission Summit Conversations. These suggestions are included in a separate pdf file. Suggested topics for future MSC are also included in a separate pdf file. Both are available upon request.

Summary

Seasons one and two of Mission Summit Conversations were very similar in format and were appreciated by the majority of the participants. Many people who attended the 2017 MSC seemed familiar with the concept of having respectful conversation. 90% of the respondents continue to indicate that the conversations meet or exceed their expectations and people report receiving specific benefits from the conversations, with the # 1 benefit from this year's conversations being that the participants no longer feel alone when dealing with their issue. In an age of "networking" this seems to be a significant outcome.

This year's venue allowed separate conversations to occur for each of our seven ABC priority topics. Assigning rooms did mean that we needed to ask people to sign up in advance for their intended conversation (unlike other years), but participants did not seem to mind doing so.

A strong majority of the respondents would like to be able to discuss these seven topics again and have an opportunity to discuss a new topic.

Recommendations

Focus the MSC on Conversation

I suggest that the showcasing of the ongoing seven ABC priority topics take place in the workshop sessions of the overall Biennial/Mission Summit. Facilitators could serve as room hosts rather than selecting persons for their particular content expertise.

While some persons appreciated the showcasing portion of the MSC, many did not and the conversations received a much higher rating than the showcasing rating. Hopefully, workshop titles and topics can continue to emerge directly out of needs surfaced during the conversations themselves.

Offer A Mix of Conversations

After the first three seasons of Mission Summit Conversations, people seem to have grasped the concept of the conversations. Several persons have commented that these conversations have helped to bring us back to our grassroots DNA as Baptists. I suggest that the conversations be repeated with a mix of new and continuing topics.

If the venue allows for it, I recommend that we once again have a dedicated room for each of the seven ABC priority topics. One way of advancing these seven priorities would be to drill down further on each of the seven priority topics. We could have signs indicating more detailed subtopics at several tables housed in a room that all deal with the same broader theme. For instance, the room that deals with the topic of anti-violence might have separate tables for domestic violence, racial violence, bullying, local church conflicts, etc., as well as some tables dedicated to a general discussion of the topic. The room on innovative models of ministry could have specific sub-topic tables for new church starts, bivocational ministry, aging buildings, etc. The same idea could be repeated in each of the seven rooms. People would be asked to sign up for an overall topic rather than the sub-topics themselves. Survey work could help determine the various sub-topics for each broader topic. If a particular sub-topic has no interest on the day of the conversations, that sub-topic could simply be taken down and perhaps substituted with those wanting a general discussion of the topic or a small group that would like to discuss a nuance of the topic not yet contained in any of the pre-determined sub-topics.

Persons also would like an opportunity to explore brand new topics and we could have a session dedicated to new topics either taking place concurrently with the seven ABC priority conversations or at a separate time perhaps on Sunday afternoon or during the workshop time. One option might be to allow the Baptist Talk session to serve as the venue for discussion of new topics. New topic possibilities could surface from suggestions included in the previous year's MSC evaluation, pre-Biennial survey work, Facebook Page conversations, etc. We could also host a topic that is particular to a certain portion of the country in which the MSC are taking place.

Continue the Facebook Pages

The public Facebook Pages should also be continued. Having a place to share learnings from the conversations has been requested by many in the past and encourages the ABC to become more of a learning community.

APPENDIX A – SHOWCASING IDEAS FOR THE MISSION SUMMIT CONVERSATIONS 2017

A. Reporting

- a. Provide a summary of some of the activity related to this priority
- b. The upcoming NLC meeting will have two rounds of discussion related to the Mission Summit Conversations.

B. Personal stories

- a. Someone might be invited to share their personal story at the event.
- b. The host might share a bit about is happening in his or her life or organization.
- c. Contact ABHMS or IM or one of the AMO's or ABC regions to inquire about people who could share their stories related to this priority.

C. Interviews

- a. A local church pastor or lay person might be interviewed at the event.
- b. A recipient of a ministry might be interviewed to show the impact of the ministry that is taking place.
- c. Contact ABHMS or IM or one of the AMO's or ABC regions to inquire about people who could be interviewed related to this priority.

D. A panel

- a. A group of persons doing ministry related to the priority might be invited to take part in a brief panel discussion.

E. Video

- a. TbyS Videos
 - i. The Transformed by the Spirit initiative holds a video contest every year and receives ministry videos on a variety of topics from local congregations.
 - ii. Videos from 2015 are available and will be arriving soon for 2017.
- b. Your own video clips
 - i. Your own organization might have video clips appropriate to your priority
 - ii. Videos taken with cell phones may also be appropriate
 - iii. Other illustrative videos may also be used
- c. Requested videos
 - i. Invite someone whom you know to send you a video of their ministry

APPENDIX B – CONVERSATION IDEAS FOR THE MISSION SUMMIT CONVERSATIONS 2017

Option # 1 – Table Conversation Outline for the Mission Summit Conversations

(Sample Activity Page # 1)

Purpose: To engage in conversation and surface possible action steps regarding the Mission Summit Conversation Priorities

Beginning Process

1. Select a discussion leader, timekeeper, and recorder for your discussion
2. Remember the three guidelines for behavior:
 - a. Respect one another's views and perspectives
 - b. Share "air" or talk time among the participants
 - c. Seek to understand before responding
3. Practice mutual invitation

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Why did you choose this Mission Summit Conversation to attend?
2. In what ways is this priority urgent for you?
3. Where do you find hope related to this priority?
4. What is God up to regarding this priority?
5. What are you or your church doing to address this priority?
6. Are other churches in your community engaged in this priority in some way? What activity is taking place?
7. What other action steps could local churches take to address this priority?
8. What insights or suggestions do we want to post for others to read as a result of our discussion today?
9. Report out (optional)

Option # 2 – Engaging the Case Statements for the Mission Summit Conversations

(Sample Activity Page # 2)

Purpose: To engage the case statements and surface possible action steps regarding the Mission Summit Conversation Priorities

Beginning Process

1. Distribute copies of the case statement for your priority
2. Select a discussion leader, timekeeper, and recorder for your discussion
3. Remember the three guidelines for behavior:
 - a. Respect one another's views and perspectives
 - b. Share "air" or talk time among the participants
 - c. Seek to understand before responding
4. Practice mutual invitation

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What word or phrase stands out to you in this case statement?
2. Why did that particular portion of the statement catch your attention?
3. What might God be inviting local churches to do in regards to this priority?
4. What other action steps could local churches take to address this priority?
5. What insights or suggestions do we want to post for others to read as a result of our discussion today?
6. Report out (optional)

Option # 3 – Practicing Lectio Divina at the Mission Summit Conversations

(Sample Activity Page # 3)

Purpose: To engage in a lectio divina process and surface possible action steps regarding the Mission Summit Conversation Priorities

Beginning Process

1. Select a suitable Lectio Divina scripture passage for the discussion
2. Select a discussion leader, timekeeper, and recorder for your discussion
3. Remember the three guidelines for behavior:
 - a. Respect one another's views and perspectives
 - b. Share "air" or talk time among the participants
 - c. Seek to understand before responding
4. Practice mutual invitation

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Listen to the scripture read twice
2. What word or phrase stands out to you?
3. Listen to the scripture read again
4. What might God be revealing to your table about this priority?
5. What might God be inviting local churches to do next in regard to this priority?
6. What other action steps could local churches take to address this priority?
7. What insights or suggestions do we want to post for others to read as a result of our discussion today?
8. Report out (optional)

APPENDIX C - FACEBOOK PAGE GUIDELINES

This group was created to give American Baptists interested in [name of denominational priority], one of the seven denominational priorities, a space to have meaningful discussions. The hope is that we can use this group as persons of faith, and especially as we discuss difficult matters, that we will remember we are sisters and brothers who are called to live by love, peace and justice. It is important to remember that we are never alone when we meet but that God is always with us. Therefore, may our conversations be grounded in God through the use of the following guidelines:

1. Acknowledge ambiguity. American Baptists come from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds and possess a diverse set of customs, and speak a plethora of languages. In order to have dialogue, we must acknowledge our differences and recognize that some of these differences will lead to ambiguity in our conversations.
2. Speak honestly and responsibly. Try to use “I” statements and own what you are saying, express your thoughts and feelings, and refer to your own experiences. Avoid the hypothetical.
3. Practice active and empathetic conversation and listening. Listen to others and ask clarification for what you do not understand.
4. Respect one another, especially when disagreeing. It’s okay to disagree. It’s not okay to shame, blame, or attack oneself or others. When disagreements are not allowed, people do not show up as their full selves. Shaming someone treats them as *less than* or *more than*, rather than merely different.
5. Do not challenge what others say.
6. Do not objectify or demonize others using “we/they” language but include comments as if those you are speaking about are taking part in the discussion with you.
7. Be aware of intent and impact. Clarifying intent is important. Recognizing the impact of a well-meaning statement is also important.

We reserve the right to remove from this group any person or comment that does not adhere to the guidelines stated above.

APPENDIX D - Mission Summit Conversations FAQ

Q1: What is a Mission Summit Conversation?

Answer:

A Mission Summit Conversation is an open opportunity for anyone attending the Biennial Mission Summit to engage in meaningful dialogue about a topic of interest by self-selecting into a small group. The Mission Summit Conversations are the heart of the Biennial Mission Summit.

Q2: How were the topics chosen?

Answer:

At the last round of Mission Summit Conversations at the 2015 Biennial Mission Summit, participants engaged in dialogue around twenty-one topics. These topics surfaced from local churches, regional events, national agencies and seminaries, as well as feedback from previous Mission Summit Conversations. An online survey narrowed the wide range of topics to twenty-one and then the Mission Table turned the topics into ABC priorities.

Q3: Who is invited to the Mission Table?

Answer:

The Mission Table will include persons from every region, seminary, and national agency.

Q4: What happens at the Mission Table?

Answer:

Attendees engage in similar conversations, “Seeking to further advance God’s work among our ABC congregations and Mission Summit participants.”

Q5: Has work already started on the priorities?

Answer:

Definitely. Our two national program boards, American Baptist Home Mission Societies and International Ministries are heavily involved in the ABC priorities.

Q6: Has work already started on the priorities?

Answer:

Yes. Local churches and regions are also actively pursuing the priorities.

Q7: How can we hear about what is being done?

Answer:

The first thirty minutes of each Mission Summit Conversation is dedicated to telling mission and ministry stories related to the topics.

Q8: Are all of the conversations in the same room?

Answer:

No, we don’t think that there will be room for that. Each conversation will have its own room with its own host who is responsible for designing the first 30 minutes of showcasing activity.

Q9: Then what happens?

Answer:

Participants, sitting at round tables, will talk about what they have just heard, what they hope for, and what is being done in their corner of the world.

Q10: Is there anything that I can do to better prepare for these conversations?

Answer:

That sounds like a great Baptist question to me. The only thing that we Baptists love more than good honest dialogue, is informed dialogue. At the last Mission Table event, Mission Table attendees not only prioritized the topics, they also developed case statements for each of the priorities.

Q11: What is a case statement?

Answer:

While each case statement differs according to the topic being addressed, each contains common elements such as “What is the history of this topic?” “What has been accomplished previously?” “What are our current challenges?” and “Who is already involved or needs to be involved?”

Q12: I also have heard these conversations referred to as “sacred conversations,” is that true?

Answer:

Absolutely. We gather for these conversations not just as individuals, but as ministers seeking God’s guidance in matters relevant to us and to the world.

Q13: What else makes them sacred?

Answer:

The manner in which they are conducted. During the past couple of Biennial Mission Summits, we have learned how to engage in respectful, heartfelt, dialogue around these key topics.

Q14: What if I want to talk about a topic other than the seven Mission Table priorities?

Answer:

We are trying something new at this year’s Mission Summit Conversations called, “Baptist Talk.” A task force is still working on the format for these conversations, but the hope is to be able to surface new topics at this event while still maintaining our sacred conversation feel.

Q15: When will Baptist Talk take place?

Answer:

On Sunday afternoon, from __ to __. And yes, everyone is invited!

Q16: Where do I sign up?

Answer:

I thought you’d never ask! Sign up for Mission Summit Conversation that you would like to attend when you register for the Biennial Mission Summit.