

Report of the General Secretary to the Executive Committee of BGM
September 13-14, 2013
San Francisco, CA

Dear Friends, I am still living off the joy of our Mission Summit in Kansas City this past June. There are so many thank you's required to acknowledge everyone who contributed to what is widely being described as the best Biennial since San Diego in the Seventies. Who would have dreamed that over a 1,000 would choose to participate in the Mission Summit Conversations focusing on the adaptive challenges our congregations have named as their challenges. As I passed by some of the groups who were letting out, I saw one of our regional execs emerging with tears running down his face. My first thought was, "What in the world did they say in that group?" But as he came up to me he said, "Roy, these are tears of joy. This has been the most hope-giving conversation I have been in for a long time." The plenaries were marked by excellent and challenging speakers/preachers; outstanding music – who will ever forget the Chin and Karen choirs and Mark Hayes conducting the mass choir the final evening! Most of all, the Spirit moved among us stirring hearts. I have shared with you the story of the youth representative from Wisconsin who made his commitment to be baptized as a result of his participation in the mission summit. Others were moved to make a commitment to ending mass incarceration; others to work with the refugees from Burma, and still others to engage more fully in turning their church toward the world in mission. It was exciting to see a new hope dawning in ABC!

The theologians gathering, which we launched at the Puerto Rico biennial with 50 in attendance, doubled its number of participants in 2013. I am grateful to Dr. Jennifer Davidson, a professor at American Baptist Seminary of the West, who chaired the planning committee and Central Baptist Seminary who hosted the gathering.

The second highlight of my summer was participating in the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. It was an honor to represent both the ABC and NCC at the Sunday service hosted by Howard University, the Wednesday interfaith service, and the actual observance of the event later that day. Such feelings filled my heart as we honored the courage of so many who risked so much to make our country more just and equitable. Gathered at the footsteps of the Lincoln Memorial I was inspired as Presidents Carter, Clinton and Obama addressed us. Clinton struck a resonant cord in those gathered when he talked about the relentless efforts of the civil rights movement to push open the gates of freedom. President Obama reminded us that the march was populated with ordinary people – seamstresses and steelworkers – who were some of real heroes of the movement. His urging that we not turn on one another but towards one another won loud applause and amens. His call to form anew a coalition of conscience committed to the unfinished agenda of the movement was an altar call.

As I sat there I thought how right and how important our commitment is as a people and as BGM to address the question of how we live more fully as the beloved community. Part of my own musings concerned the killing of Trayvon Martin and the way that incident threw into focus anew the issues of race in our country. In some ways we have come so far and yet in other ways we still remain a divided people, a divided country, and a divided church. Earlier in the summer, the NEC had made a significant mutual pledge to help American Baptists engage the necessary conversation around race and the American experience. To that end, we have invited Katie Choy-Wong to help us start our conversation in BGM in November. Likewise, we have instructed the planners of the Orientation to ABC Life and Ministers Conference to carve out time and space for this conversation at that gathering. ABHMS will be taking a major role in this effort denominationally, but all of us will be called upon to fulfill our roles in leadership around this persistent matter in the life of our country.

Another highlight of the summer was the annual gathering of the Baptist World Alliance General Council. This year's gathering was in Jamaica. We had a strong ABC presence in the various commissions and committees.

In August we initiated an experimental retreat format in cooperation with Green Lake to focus on spiritual practices including contemplation, prayer, and pilgrimage. Brad Berglund led a team that included Jeff Savage, Rene Colson-Hudson and Betty Wright –Riggins. The response was gratifyingly positive. So much so that we have submitted a proposal to the Mission Advancement Fund and North Shore Baptist Church for a two-year experiment to foster spiritual practices among American Baptists and to identify and network American Baptists who are expressing their call to ministry as spiritual directors.

On Thursday, September 6, I spent a half day with Suzii Paynter the newly named coordinator for CBF. We spent a lot of time dealing with questions from her about Baptist and ecumenical life and the challenge the churches face today. We discussed our continued commitment to Baptist-Muslim dialogue. She is very supportive of our work together in this area. When I began to talk about our Rhythms of the Spirit conference this summer, she indicated that she would like to see ABC and CBF work together in identifying, networking and resourcing Baptist spiritual directors and fostering a stronger spiritual life among clergy and laity. So these are two concrete areas that we identified for common effort.

Even before the Mission Summit, we were holding consultative meetings about the next phase of *Transformed by the Spirit*. The Journey Team will hold its first post-biennial meeting next week in Chicago. Our goal is to harness the energy generated by the Mission Summit for a broader engagement of our churches in this process. Sumner Grant has agreed to serve as a volunteer working directly with me and on behalf of ABCUSA to staff the Journey Team, to work with regions just entering the process, and to speak about *Transformed by the Spirit* as requests come from churches and regions. Our fundraising is at 95% of our original goal – quite an achievement giving our zero-based starting point and limited staffing.

That leads me to say that I am delighted to have Ken Marsenburg on board as our Director of Development. He will report later to you about the steps he has taken to organize his office. He and I have several extensive trips planned where I will introduce him to some of the key supporters of *Transformed by the Spirit*.

With Ken coming on board we are beginning to reshape Leo's portfolio to focus more on communications and UM. We have also transferred Evon Moody from HR to the office of development where she is working with Ken. We have also been facing the extended absence of Maureen Morrissey due to medical issues. Maureen is the ABCIS administrator. Through Alan's efforts we have pulled together a team that is covering for Maureen until there is a determination of her ability to return to work. Maureen had major surgery on Monday, September 9, and the early reports are positive. We earnestly request prayers for her healing.

Major events which lie ahead of us are the first-ever Mission Table in November and the Orientation to ABC Life/Ministers Conference event in January. Jeff Woods has pulled together a planning team for the Mission Table that involves national and regional representatives. Jeff will be joining us via telecast to outline our process and President-elect Don Ng will report on plans for the Ministers Conference.

Due to complications with her pregnancy, Kathryn Lohre who is president of the NCC was restricted to bed rest in the hospital until two weeks ago when she delivered her twins. During this period, I have stepped in for her in many aspects of the work of the NCC. We are actively conducting a search for a new General Secretary. I am pleased that several American Baptists have been among those applying for the position. Our goal is to present a candidate to the Governing Board when it meets in November. At that same meeting we shall be presenting a new structure and operational plan to the board for adoption. These two past weeks I have been deeply involved in shaping the NCC response to the crisis in Syria as well as reaching out to the Coptic Church in America during the attacks on Christians after the change in leadership in Egypt.

Finally, I participated in a panel discussion at the annual gathering of the Islamic Society of North America the Saturday before Labor Day.

A. Roy Medley