



## General Secretary A. Roy Medley Reflects on American Baptist Mission and Fellowship

By Rich Schramm, Consulting Editor

**Q** What message about ABCUSA would you most like to leave with each group you visit?

**A** That the denomination is alive and that God is doing some great things through us. When I visit local congregations, I see the vitality of our life together. When I travel overseas and work with mission partners, there is such respect for our churches here and the work that we do. Within ecumenical settings, American Baptists are regarded with much admiration. We are in a new



In December 2012, members of the Study/Reflection trip to Israel and Palestine participate in a washing of the feet ceremony

season in which God will use us in greater ways. The bottom line of the message is that God is blessing us.

**Q** What qualities stand out in churches that are healthy and vital?

**A** As I visit churches that are thriving, I find several common characteristics.

First, they really understand that they are there to be a blessing to the world, that they are called in mission, and that mission involves local communities, states, our nation and the whole world. These churches see ministry as a calling; ministry isn't just what someone else does, but what they do. I see this in churches housing the homeless, adopting a local school, maintaining a food bank, and experiencing firsthand mission work around the world.

Second, vital churches embrace worship that is filled with the presence of God. It's not so much the form, but that those in worship experience a sense that they are in the presence of the living God. They desire



ABCUSA Board of General Ministries members visit Bethel Neighborhood Center in Kansas City prior to the Mission Summit

to grow in that relationship and seek to be shaped in the image of Christ.

Personally, being involved in American Baptist Churches USA over the decades has stretched me, grown me as a disciple of Christ, and introduced me to new areas of service. Although many of our churches are fairly homogeneous racially, when we get together we experience the fullness of the body that is present. From my experiences with different churches, I have learned from others whose experience with Christ is different from mine.

**Q** From your perspective gained from 40 years in American Baptist life: How have the needs of churches and members changed? How has the denomination changed to meet those needs?

**A** The landscape has changed dramatically over 40 years at the local church, regional and national levels. We saw seeds of it 40 years ago: changes in population and peoples' views of the importance of the church. People still love Jesus Christ, but many aren't sure about the local church. A huge challenge is bridging that disconnect—helping people understand that we are motivated by love and want to express that love because we found it in



Pat Hernandez, national director for AB Women In Ministry, lifelong ABC supporter Ronny Lanier, and Medley reconnect at Mission Summit 2013



BGM members prepare to go on three local ministry tours in Kansas City area

**Vital and healthy churches  
“understand that they are  
there to be a blessing...  
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Jesus. We are fighting the stereotypes out there of us being narrow and judgmental. We need them to understand that congregations are places where you can find healing and hope when you are hurting and when your life is fragmented, where you find forgiveness and a purpose for life when you are burdened by guilt. We need them to see that this is the mission and life of every congregation as they reach out to bless the world.

**Q** How do we move into the future while responding effectively to our churches and members?

**A** Because we live in a world that is more and more interconnected, it is important for American Baptist Christians to find ways to build the common good. People of other



Medley joins board members in prayer prior to the Mission Summit



Medley and other ABC leaders focus on ecumenical relations, attending a Holocaust Remembrance Service in the Republic of Georgia, January 2013

faiths are our neighbors, they live in our communities, they are fellow citizens.

We need to find ways of working together for mutual respect, for those things that undergird our commitment to religious liberty. And there are things we can and should do together in spite of our differing faith perspectives. We are deeply committed to Christ and the fullness of God's love, but we also have room to work with and embrace others for peace and justice, both within our own communities and globally.



American Baptist leaders and State Department officials meet in Washington, D.C., concerning Burmese refugees

**Q** How critical is it for American Baptists to be vital partners in ecumenical dialogue and action?

**A** Our life together with other denominations remains critical. The expression of



Second ABCUSA Theologians Conference at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas



At the Baptist/Muslim Dialogue, people of different faiths joined together to discuss common ground

our faith has always been a generous one toward other Christians. What one part of the body does has such an impact on the others. The challenge of peace, displayed so graphically in Syria and the recent Boston bombings, the whole issue of racism—these are among the challenges we are called to face together.

We have gifts to share; we have gifts to receive. This past year we did a joint mission tour with the Church of the Brethren to the West Bank, working together because of our commitment to peace and justice in the Middle East. We found resources that they have as an historic peace church, but they also found in us resources from our work in the Middle East through the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in bridging the gap between Christians and Muslims in that part of the world.

**Q** This year we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of Baptist witness in Burma begun by the Judsons. As general secretary you made it a priority to visit firsthand with Baptists from Burma who are living in refugee camps elsewhere in Asia. Are



The Baptist/Muslim Dialogue at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, December 2012, brought together different groups to learn from each other



Medley and other American Baptist leaders meet with Burmese refugees during a visit to their camp in Thailand

**“Our Baptist brothers and sisters from Burma teach us valuable lessons about what it means to live in Christ, to live in hope, to have a foundation of faith that cannot be destroyed by outward circumstances.”**

there qualities of their faith and character that you feel would serve to encourage and motivate us here in the U.S.?

**A** We have received an unexpected blessing in the diaspora of brothers and sisters from Burma coming to live in the U.S.

I'll never forget being in a worship service in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and experiencing the vitality of the Baptist community—the refugee community—from Burma. I spent three days seeing people whose backs were scarred because they had been beaten and whipped by

the police—just for fleeing to Malaysia. I heard stories of people being deported because they didn't have the money to bribe the guards at the border, of women being forced into brothels and men sent as indentured servants into fishing camps. I was told about the violence they endured back in Burma because of the policies of the military government. And then Sunday, after days of revelations of oppression and pain,

we began worship almost immediately by singing “Count Your Blessings!” Maybe it is because of the trials they have gone through that they understand better than many the power of God's faithfulness. They have such a sense of God's hope, a sense of God's presence.

In one refugee camp we visited, housed high up in the mountains to set them apart from vigilante groups empowered by the government, we saw the impoverishment of about 75 people, living in shacks made of tin and cardboard. But in the middle of their village stood a much nicer building, whose sign proclaimed it to be “Zion Baptist Church.” That is how important their faith is to them. And they bring these qualities to us because of their long-suffering and their ability to see God at work even in the midst of that suffering. Here we are so wedded to living the good life. Our Baptist brothers and sisters from Burma teach us valuable lessons about what it means to live in Christ, to live in hope, to have a foundation of faith that cannot be destroyed by outward circumstances.



ABCUSA staff visited Chin Zion Church in a past trip to a Burmese refugee camp



Karen Women Choir of First Baptist Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, sings at a motivation speaking event (left)  
Karen family pose in their home village (above)  
Children play in their village (below)



The Tha Lai family resettled with help from the Westgate Baptist Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania: (from left) Snow Bell, Htee Bwe, Tha Lai, Keh Paw, Nancy Crookshank (Westgate Refugee Ministry coordinator), Christian Saw



## AMERICAN BAPTISTS UNITED IN MISSION!

As American Baptists, we are proud to be a part of a strong, vital, missional denomination. Being an American Baptist church means supporting ABC. When you give to United Mission, we all become United IN Mission – our ministry is made possible by givers like YOU!

We are beginning a two-year focus on strengthening giving to United Mission among our churches. You will be hearing more in the coming months about it. Please be on the alert for more about UM giving!



# Opening Hearts and Doors to “Welcome the Stranger”

By Rich Schramm, Consulting Editor

In this Judson bicentennial year celebrating mission partnerships with Baptists in Burma, stories of successfully resettled refugees from that country abound.

Although families arriving in the U.S. face abundant challenges as they pursue their dreams in a new land and culture, their strong faith and the outreach of new-found American Baptist friends here have supported them during the transition.

And, as ABC General Secretary A. Roy Medley has shared here (see page 3), those who have sponsored and supported fellow believers from Burma have inevitably been profoundly blessed by their fellowship and strength of faith.

Across the country, the American Baptist connection with those refugees has occurred in churches large and small.

First Baptist Church of St. Paul, Minnesota, a 139-year-old urban faith community led by the Rev. Bill Englund, has been ministering with a vibrant and growing community of Karen Christians since the beginning of the new millennium. Among many components of hospitality to those newly arrived, the church provides welcome baskets of linens, toiletries and

household supplies. First Baptist has witnessed a people not only moving successfully into a new culture, but impacting and enriching the existing one as well, through numerous opportunities for cross-cultural fellowship and the sharing of gifts for ministry.

A commitment to encouraging tradition and providing the setting for meaningful worship experiences has been a priority for all at First Baptist. Meeting needs for

native language worship, Ebenezer Karen Baptist Church, with 340 members, gathers for worship in First Baptist at 12:30 p.m. on Sundays. First Baptist associate pastor Saul Lu serves with the Revs. John Du and Chair Ler to lead the growing Karen congregation. And at 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, the First Burma Christ Church meets, led by the Rev. Mehn Mya Thi.



A Karen choir sings at Mission Summit 2013: An American Baptist Biennial Gathering in Overland Park, Kansas

A smaller-scale but equally important resettlement success story has taken place in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, over the past three years.

Westgate Baptist Church, with a membership of less than 100, took on the formidable challenge of refugee resettlement sponsorship in 2010 as part of

enrollment, and provided transportation for their various necessary appointments, as well as to Sunday worship and Wednesday prayer meeting. The family quickly bonded with other resettled Karen in the Lancaster area, and the family home soon became a site for informal fellowship, which drew in many others sharing the

a five-year vision of mission and ministry. The church committed itself to pray that a good match of family and congregation could be arranged. With limited financial resources, Westgate knew it had to trust that God would somehow provide the means to fulfill its ambition.

Halfway across the world, Tha Lai also sought God's leading. "I prayed every night for a church to sponsor us," he said. Tha Lai, his wife, Keh Paw, and their three children, Htee Bwe, Christian Saw and Snow Bell, had lived as Karen refugees for 17 years at the Mae La Oon Camp in Thailand. Through the coordinating work of Church World Service/Lancaster, the family, upon arrival in the U.S., immediately began an ongoing relationship with Westgate. And, by extension, the newly arrived family also entered into relationship with Calvary Baptist Church in Newark, Delaware, which in answer to Westgate's prayer had provided necessary funding for the sponsorship.

Early on, Westgate volunteers donated furnishings for their apartments, made arrangements for ESL training, offered guidance in the basics of money management, facilitated the process of school

same cultural heritage. Settled comfortably in downtown Lancaster, the Tha Lai family, after only three years, exemplifies the fundamentals of success in a new land: self-sufficiency, regular employment, academic achievement by the children, and maintaining of cultural and spiritual distinctives through ongoing interaction with other Karen. And as members of Westgate, they share in an increasingly multicultural worship and fellowshiping experience.

For Westgate, partnerships have been essential. "No church has to work alone in helping our brothers and sisters from Burma," Nancy Crookshank, Westgate's Refugee Ministry Coordinator, notes. "One church might provide workers; another might only be able to provide funds. The beauty of the whole thing is that we are doing what we are spiritually challenged to do—reaching out with Christ's love."

Integral and joyful relationships with Baptists from Burma are a reality in St. Paul, in Lancaster, in Newark and in many other locations where American Baptists have responded to the biblical injunction to "welcome the stranger."

## Join us at EMERGE, the 2014 Ministers Conference

Every professional church leader needs to maintain the highest level of competency and confidence in ministry. Taking time to acquire such abilities means making our own staff development a high priority. As a senior pastor for the past 15 years, I know that I look forward to such invigorating experiences on a regular basis. As pastors and church leaders who would have just completed celebrating Christmas and welcoming the New Year, join me at EMERGE in Orlando in 2014!

Rev. Dr. Don Ng  
ABCUSA Vice President, President-elect  
Senior Pastor, First Chinese Baptist  
Church, San Francisco, California

### You are Invited!

“**EMERGE: Baptist Witness in the 21st Century**” combines a Ministers Conference and Orientation to American Baptist Life, where conferees will explore emergent themes in Baptist theology of the Holy Spirit, postmodern witness and third millennium mission, in this 200th anniversary year of the historic Judson mission to Burma. The conference meets in Orlando, Florida, January 6-9, 2014. Bible study teachers, worship experiences, workshops and speakers will find their themes in Acts 1:8. The 2014 conference marks the third time that the Orientation conference (for seminarians and new-to-ABC ministers) and the Ministers Conference, sponsored by ABCUSA, will be integrated into one event.

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NRSV)*

### New this year!

In addition to the Ministers Conference, seminarians and ministers new-to-American Baptist Churches USA will be attending this conference for an Orientation to ABC life and mission. The Orientation track and Ministers Conference track will both have more flexibility in 2014 than in the past, with seminarians and new ministers able to elect to attend Ministers Conference workshops



# EMERGE

## BAPTIST WITNESS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Orientation to  
American Baptist Life  
and  
National Ministers  
Conference

JANUARY 6-9, 2014 | ORLANDO, FLORIDA

and ministers able to attend Orientation sessions. Also new in 2014 is the inclusion of Women in Ministry, led by Rev. Patricia Hernandez. Worship will be coordinated by Rev. John Polite, who will invite seminarians to plan and lead worship!

Major Orientation sessions are planned by ABCUSA (General Ministries), American Baptist Home Mission Societies, International Ministries, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board, Regional Executive Ministers Council, and Associated Ministry Organizations. Dr. David Laubach, retiring associate executive director, ABHMS, is coordinator for the Orientation to American Baptist Life conference, and Dr. Donald Ng, senior pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco and Vice President of ABCUSA, is coordinator for the Ministers Conference.

Registration fees will be \$75 for seminarians, \$100 for new-to-ABC ministers, and \$150 for Ministers Conference attendees. Room rates at the Doubletree will be \$99 per night.

EMERGE, the 2014 Ministers Conference, is sponsored by ABCUSA.

# www.abcemerge.com

## American Baptists energized by 50th anniversary of March on Washington to build the “beloved community”

By Yvonne Lamb, Contributing Writer



“American Baptists continue to have a stake in and a responsibility to the struggle for freedom and equality in this country,” ABCUSA General Secretary A. Roy Medley said, reflecting on the recent 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Moving forward, Medley will work to reignite the fire and passion of American Baptists to become “the beloved community” that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. envisioned. Medley and other ABC leaders are making space for intentional conversations that they hope will lead to transformative changes in society.

Medley sat seven rows back from the foot of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 2013, attentive as speaker after speaker, including President Barack Obama and former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, called for rededication to the “great unfinished business” of the past 50 years. During the week-long activities, concerns included economic disparity, quality education, gun violence, the Stand Your Ground laws, the school-to-prison pipeline, the dismantling of the Voting Rights Act and restrictive Voter ID laws.

“At its heart, this is a moral movement for those of us who are Christians,” said Medley, who represented American Baptist Churches USA and the National Council of Churches at official anniversary activities. “This is an expression of our faithfulness to God’s call.”

Michaele Birdsall, acting director of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, was among the more than 100,000 who

came to Washington on August 24, 2013, to be a part of the pre-anniversary march organized by the Rev. Al Sharpton’s National Action Network. It was a personal journey for her, a chance to be on the frontline of a movement committed to bringing about change.

“It was exhilarating and sobering,” recalled Birdsall. “There was a tangible feeling of being a part of something bigger than myself, of knowing that my hopes were connected to the thousands of faces that surrounded me and the thousands who had marched and fought before me.”

Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life came from places near and abroad to the Nation’s Capital to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington at which Dr. King delivered his rousing “I Have a Dream” speech.

Some carried signs calling for justice for Trayvon Martin, the Florida teenager who was killed by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. Martin’s death and Zimmerman’s acquittal renewed passions about injustice and inequality in this country. One African American father held a cardboard sign urging an end to black-on-black crime. Teachers, union workers, church members, and young people joined with celebrities and civic,



political and church leaders throughout the week to press for needed changes.

Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), the youngest person to speak at the political rally 50 years ago, also spoke this year and told the crowd that, while

progress has been made in this country, full equality still eludes too many people. “The lingering ‘scars and stains of racism’ must be eliminated,” he said, citing high unemployment rates among African Americans, chronic hunger, and a need for immigration reform. He also called for congressional action to restore the parts of the Voting Rights Act struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

“We must never, ever give up. We must keep the faith and keep our eyes on the prize,” said Lewis, who was injured as a Freedom Rider in 1961 and beaten by police while protesting for voting rights in Selma, Alabama, on “Bloody Sunday” in 1965.

“We are one people, we are one family,” he said. “And when we finally accept these truths, then we will be able to fulfill Dr. King’s dream to build a beloved community, a nation and a world at peace with itself.”

Fifty years ago, American Baptist leaders were active in the Civil Rights Movement and involved in the 1963 March on Washington. Then General Secretary Edwin Tuller sat on the stage directly behind Dr. King as he gave his iconic speech. That involvement continues today.

While representing ABCUSA and the NCC at the activities organized by members



# Upcoming Events



American Baptist Churches USA  
P. O. Box 851  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Nonprofit Org.  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit 167  
Southeastern, PA

October 20 Chaplains/Pastoral Counselors  
Sunday, National Pastoral Care  
Week begins

October 27 Campus Ministry Sunday

November 3 AB College Sunday

November 4 Baptist Women's Day of Prayer

November 5 Election Day

November 10 Stewardship Sunday

November 17 Asian American Baptist Sunday

November 28 Thanksgiving

December 1 First Sunday of Advent

ABCUSA CONNECTIONS is made possible by your gifts to United Mission. UM is essential to many of our ministries. Together your gifts can make a big difference for the denomination. Be sure that United Mission, the ABCUSA family offering, is included in your church budget. For details about how funds are used or information about how to contribute, please check out the website at [www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org) or contact [beth.fogg@abc-usa.org](mailto:beth.fogg@abc-usa.org).



of the King family, Medley attended a chapel service at Howard University and an interfaith service at Shiloh Baptist Church. "Those worship services were powerful in framing our faith and how our faith moves us to becoming the beloved community," he said.

When Medley went to claim his seat on the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Carroll A. Baltimore, Sr., president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, was in the next seat. "It was a powerful reminder to both of us of our two groups' involvement in the movement," Medley remarked.

It was also a visual representation of one of the primary arenas in which the church can play a role—bringing together everyone's ideas about the beloved community. "We need open dialogue about

what love is for each of us, gaining an understanding from each of us," said Medley. "We need to create intentional openings for conversation."

"In November 2013, the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries will address this issue and how the church lives and acts in light of the challenges facing the country today," Medley said. "Also in January 2014, space will be carved out for people to engage in dialogue at the joint ABCUSA Ministers Conference and Orientation to American Baptist Life in Orlando, Florida."

"We are not doing business as usual. Conversation is important, but there also has to be action," Medley said.

Birdsall, who was moved by the diversity of people and issues at the march, agreed. "Sustained action directed at the realization of the beloved community will flow from changed hearts and minds," she said, "and this change happens when we are able to see and hear elements of our story in the faces and voices of our neighbors."

"The change that is needed to bring about a free and just society requires all of us working together," Medley emphasized. "None of us are free until our brothers and sisters are free."

President Obama said the march teaches us that the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together. "We'll have to reignite the embers of empathy and fellow feeling, the coalition of conscience that found expression in this place 50 years ago," he said. "And I believe that spirit is there, that true force inside each of us."

"The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington spurred many people to deeper thinking, especially younger people who were challenged to pick up the baton and become more engaged in the work of freedom," Medley said. "Maybe some of them will embrace the 'coalition of conscience' that President Obama spoke about."

Medley left the march optimistic. "I went away thinking it rained, but the rain did not quench the fire."