

Transformed by the Spirit Q & A



What is *Transformed by the Spirit*?

Transformed by the Spirit is an initiative that engages local congregations across the denomination in a journey of identifying the significant challenges that face our churches, our regions, and our national bodies in today's culture, and wrestling with the changes that will be required of all American Baptists if we are to seize opportunities to serve as the hands and feet of Christ. *Transformed by the Spirit* was originally launched to help us dream about how we could help congregations and pastors address some of the toughest challenges they face.

How does it work?

Groups related to *Transformed by the Spirit* are meeting across the country and are working on a number of challenges related to mission and ministry in today's world. Through meeting together in teams, pastors, staff members and lay people are having tough conversations about important issues. View an Adaptive Challenge Team Workbook to get started and contact your region for start-up or coaching assistance.

Why is *Transformed by the Spirit* important?

The fact is, every institution is facing unprecedented challenges that come with unrelenting change. American Baptist churches are not immune. But we do have a call and access to resources that secular organizations do not. *Transformed by the Spirit* is not a static program to be completed but a dynamic, disciplined process by which we discern how God's Spirit is already at work and is inviting us to join. *Transformed by the Spirit* invites American Baptists to name and address challenges in changing environments. We need to make "adaptive changes," changes that are in response to a changed environment, changes that unleash our Baptist DNA for innovation. We must make changes that embrace the transformative work of the Spirit in the life of the church.

How did it start?

Transformed by the Spirit was initiated in July 2011 as an expansive effort to discern how God may be at work among the critical challenges that American Baptist congregations face. It was originally launched by the National Executive Council (made up of the executive directors of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, International Ministries, American Baptist Women's Ministries, the Ministers and Missionaries Benefits Board and the General Secretary).

What does *Transformed by the Spirit* have to do with the Mission Summit and Mission Table?

Transformed by the Spirit is the engine behind the ABCUSA Mission Summit, which convened for the first time ever in Overland Park, Kansas, in 2013. There, individual conversations of challenges and concerns became collaborative action. At Mission Summit 2013, over 1,000 people participated in the Mission Summit Conversations, discussing 32 ministry challenges originally identified through a national *Transformed by the Spirit* survey. That list was narrowed down to ten challenges of broad, national concern for discussion at the first ever ABC Mission Table in November 2014, which brought together denominational leaders and representatives from the different ABC regions and associated ministry organizations.

Those ten challenges discussed at the Mission Table included: discipleship, next generation of leaders, pastoral attrition, women in ministry, church planting, congregational transformation through missional outreach, evangelism and missional outreach, violence, alternative models of pastoral leadership, and living

out our multi-cultural/multi-ethnic reality.

At the National Leadership Council meeting in April 2014, American Baptist leaders further discussed those same challenges, and reported on progress and plans we are making on each. There will be a more complete report at the next Mission Summit (2015), and another round challenges identified (that will include new and old topics).

What is the Journey Team?

A "Journey Team" (consisting of seven national, regional, and congregational leaders) was appointed by the National Executive Council to guide us through the process at the early stages of the *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative.

What are the tasks of the Journey Team?

1. Promote participation by inviting ABC congregations and partners to seriously engage challenges and to share what we are learning with one another.
2. Disseminate resources that assist in these conversations. In particular, the Journey Team will continue to "hold," adapt, and distribute the field manuals and other resources that have been developed.
3. Maintain communication by multiple means, continuing to build our nascent network of churches and partners engaged in serious transformation guided by the Holy Spirit.
4. Provide encouragement for this very difficult work.
5. Challenge churches and partners to consider unrecognized barriers to ministry.

What is the next step for *Transformed by the Spirit*?

Beginning in spring 2014, there is a "beta test" that involves local congregations and is intended to help them discern where God is at work in their own neighborhoods and how their church is being called to be present as the Body of Christ in that place. Depending on what we learn from this, we anticipate expanding and opening this up to all ABC churches. The five ABC regions participating in the "beta test" are the ABC of the Central Pacific Coast, the ABC of Connecticut, the ABC Great Rivers Region, The ABC of Nebraska, and the ABC of the Rocky Mountains."