



## Speaking with **Dr. Susan Gillies** Interim General Secretary American Baptist Churches USA

**Q** Why are you an American Baptist (or why are you proud to be an American Baptist)?

**A** I was born into an ABC family and it stuck. As an adult, I lived for a time in three places in the south where it was hard to find an ABC home. I enjoyed participating in other kinds of churches during this time but realized I truly was an American Baptist. Other faith families were good, but they weren't as good a fit for me as ABC. I continue to be ABC because of our history, our present and our potential for the future as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our racial/ethnic diversity and our theological diversity continue to instruct me and stretch me in ways I don't think I could find anywhere else.

**Q** What goals do you hope to accomplish during your time as Interim General Secretary?

**A** I'm here to do what any good interim or transitional pastor would do...remind us of how we came to be and who we are, listen, focus primarily on renewing relationships, and "tend the shop" until a new General Secretary is in place. I'll also continually remind folks it is the joy of the Lord that is our strength.

**Q** How did your time serving as Chair of the Regional Executive Ministers Council (REMC) prepare you for serving as Interim General Secretary?

**A** I learned more, at a deeper level, about the vital role of regions within the ABC family. I knew regions were important but in serving as a region executive and working with the REMC, I found there was so much more than I had understood before. The REMC is a great arena for learning from people who see things differently from the way I see them.

**Q** *Transformed by the Spirit* is a major denominational emphasis (See page 4.) – how will you help move this emphasis forward? What adaptive challenges do you identify as you come into this role as Interim General Secretary?

**A** I want to support the work of the Journey Team as they guide *Transformed by the Spirit*. Part of the role of an interim, in this job or as a pastor, is to assess what can be done to help folks readjust and refocus after the departure of a long time leader. I'm finding adaptive challenges that fit my skills.

*continued on page 2*



**Q** *In your opinion, what is important to you for American Baptist Churches to support its churches and members as we move into the future?*

**A** For us to be most effective in ministry and mission, we must understand that each member, church and organization within the family is invited into relationship with the whole family. It's important to be thinking about what we can do beyond ourselves more than we think of what "they" can do for me.

**Q** *Are there any worship experiences from your years as an American Baptist or specifically serving with the American Baptist Home Mission Societies or the American Baptist Churches of Nebraska that stand out to you?*

**A** Wow! I could write a book. I've lived in eight states and that means I've been a member of a number of churches, each with a unique personality and each a blessing. I grew up going to church camp (Camp Moses Merrill in Nebraska). I clearly remember a worship service around a campfire on a bluff high above the prairie. There was a spectacular sunset that night. In that service I made a special commitment to God that still guides me.

I remember a worship service in the amphitheatre at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. James Dunn of the Baptist Joint Committee was speaker. He looked up at the massive carvings of four Presidents and held his Bible in his hand. He spoke about separation of church and state. People understood who had never understood before. At a peace conference at Calvary Baptist in Washington, D.C., I heard William Sloan Coffin preach. He said, "Hope is born when optimism dies." This lesson was important for me.

**Q** *What verse of scripture speaks to you? How does this apply in your new role as Interim General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA?*

**A** Ephesians 4:11-16. The church lives and breathes in all the places the laity live their everyday lives. The church is at work in the world through them. Therefore, the church's job is to help equip them for this ministry. Our mission work at home and abroad is an extension of what I'm called to do in my neighborhood and at my workplace. We need to see the interrelatedness of these arenas. My role as Interim General Secretary is to continually call us to see the "whole." ■



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# Transformed by the Spirit



## Discerning God's Unfolding Story

The journey of American Baptists is the story of a “called out” people. Jesus Christ is calling American Baptists to discern God’s Spirit, vitally at work in the lives of people in local communities. “*Transformed by the Spirit*,” which began in 2011, is a movement to discern and engage in the story of God’s redeeming presence for new life in the areas of personal faith, congregational mission, cross-congregational resourcing and the American Baptist’s organizational culture. Together, we must hear the story of God moving us out beyond our current circles of association and ways of operation. *Transformed by the Spirit* is a call to deeper dialogue with a widening circle of relationships. Listening is necessary for discerning the leading of God’s Spirit in the midst of our neighborhoods, towns and cities. The practices of the past will not suffice for fulfilling God’s call in the present and the future. We must learn from God’s Spirit and listen to the findings that come from the very ground of pioneering, practicing and prophetic imagination. In *Transformed by the Spirit*, American Baptists are being called to grow as learning



A Mission Table discussion at the November 2015 event

communities that are continually being transformed by God’s grace and truth.

Together, since *Transformed by the Spirit* began, we have been asking: “What challenges are we facing, for which we do not presently have an answer, but which must be addressed if we are to live into the future God has for us?” Through “Adaptive Challenge Teams,” practical ministry questions have been raised and explorations in ministry have begun to address the adaptive challenges of our time. Hope is manifested through sharing and learning

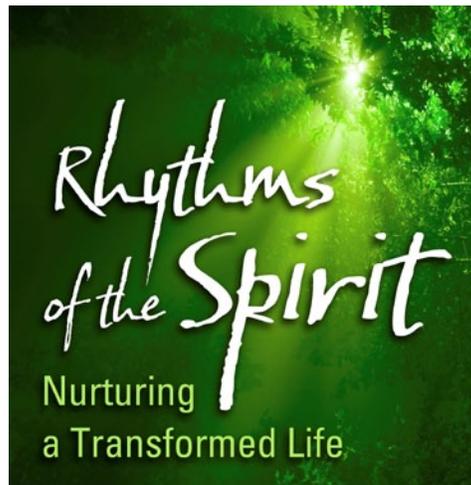
from the ministry stories that are arising in this journey of celebrating the Spirit of God’s transforming love in Christ. Together, God’s Spirit is leading American Baptists to discern and apply new approaches, processes and practices for doing ministry and mission. Through conversations within the local church, at regional gatherings, at national gatherings and at ABC Biennial Mission Summits (2013 and 2015), people are increasingly sharing their stories of being led and transformed by the Spirit.

*Transformed by the Spirit* is developing four dimensions of discernment. Each dimension shall have corresponding resources and forums of training, sharing and support.

## 1 Personal Transformation: Rhythms of the Spirit

*Personal faith renewal and spiritual guidance*

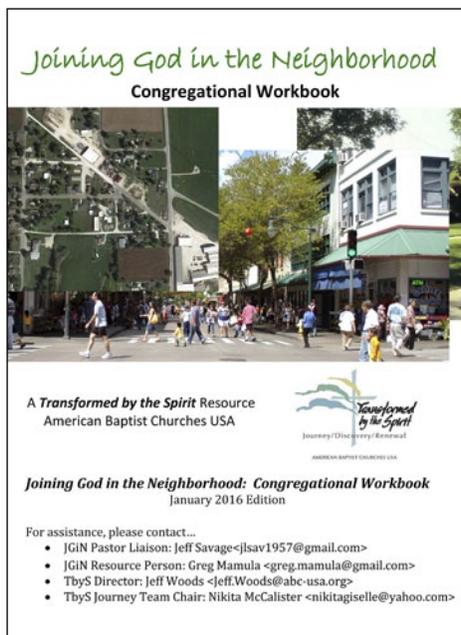
The outward focus of mission is best sustained by a strengthening of discipleship. Vibrant Christian communities engage in personal and corporate spiritual disciplines and practices that deepen the experience of knowing Jesus Christ, being filled and led by the Holy Spirit and worshipping God. Rhythms of the Spirit offers retreats and spiritual direction at ABC camps and conferences. Rhythms of the Spirit is also developing a network of American Baptist Spiritual Directors who are equipped to give guidance and lead people in spiritual formation. Furthermore, the Practice of Pilgrimage is offered for those who desire a ritual journey with a hallowed purpose.



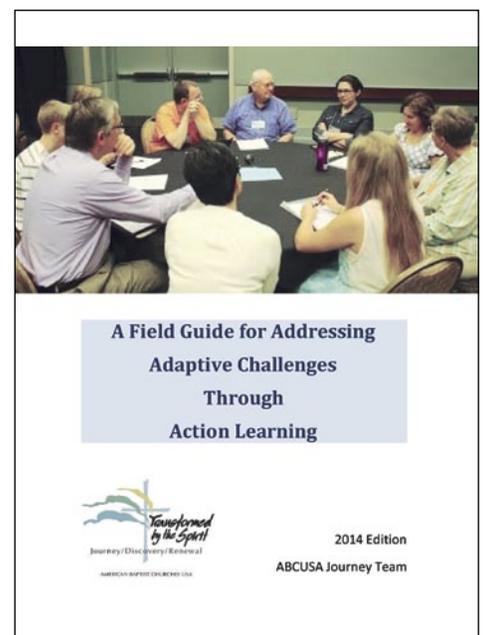
## 2 Community & Congregational Transformation: Joining God in the Neighborhood

*Community Immersion and Church Witness*

*Transformed by the Spirit* celebrates that God is working in our neighborhoods and places of dwelling and activity outside the church. God is calling the local church to rediscover relational ministry and witness



that is not bound to existing buildings, programs or patterns. A new model for supporting the mission of the local church is being tried and tested: “**Joining God in the Neighborhood.**” Resources, training and shared learning are developing to support and nurture a “grass-roots” movement of ministry that empowers the whole people of God. In our neighborhoods and everyday lives, we are called to discern ways that God is moving the church to become embedded in our communities as “salt” and “light” for Christ. The discerning process challenges participants to respond to God’s Spirit with active faith and trust. Small steps and explorations of **Joining**



**God in the Neighborhood** will involve learning by doing, then sharing the story of God’s unfolding, unconditional, transformative love.

## 3 Organizational Transformation: Adaptive Challenge Teams

*Shared Analysis and Organizational Adaptation*

Adaptive Challenge Teams move beyond technical and sometimes simplistic solutions to problems by surfacing the deeper issues preventing an organization from embracing needed change. Diverse teams explore the often conflicting passions of people that are driving an organization





to steady the course or respond to a rapidly changing world. By discerning what God is up to both within and outside of the organization, transformation can finally begin.

#### 4 Relational Transformation: Experiments in Difference

*Learning by Listening and Adapting*

The vitality of *Transformed by the Spirit* is reliant upon the movement of God through believers in local contexts of ministry. The sharing of God’s Story at work in each context will help us all learn from one another and this will be encouraged through building a learning community. Each learning community helps contribute *Transformed by the Spirit* stories and insights for the whole American Baptist family.

The stories and conversations that relate to *Transformed by the Spirit* have been an integral part of gathering and coordinating as American Baptists. Recently, those who came together at the ABC Mission Table in November of 2015 discerned God’s leading as they identified seven areas of priority that we must address if we are to live into the future that God has for us:

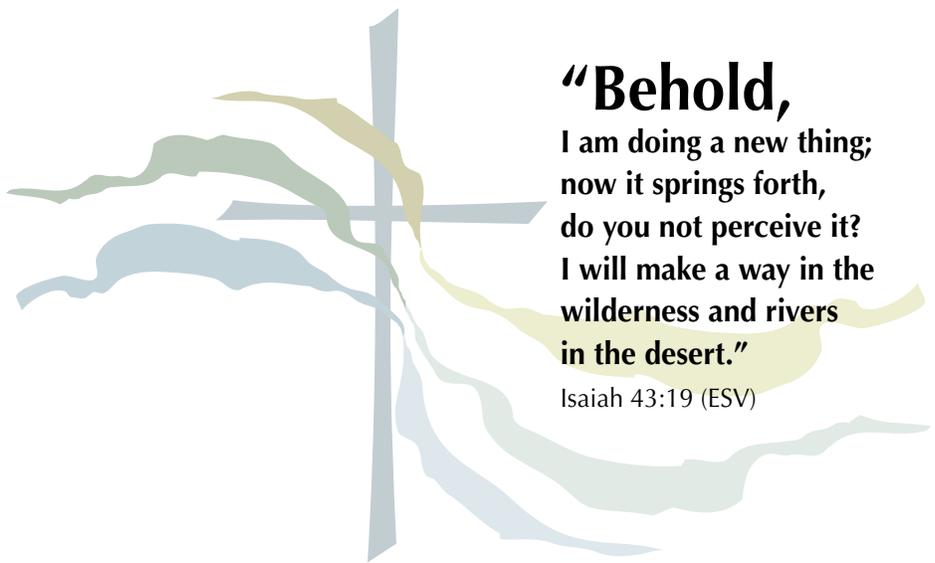
- Next Generation of Leaders
- Violence
- Discipleship
- Poverty
- Gospel in a Rapidly Changing Society
- Women in Ministry
- Innovative Models for Pastoral Ministry

The Mission Table participants identified these seven denominational priorities from a larger list of twenty topics, and used a method of conversation along with discernment in order to select the seven priorities. The conversations tie in well with

*Transformed by the Spirit*; this initiative is widening dialogue that is necessary for discerning the leading of God’s Spirit.

In the journey ahead, God is calling us to rediscover our roots while also calling us to a new chapter in the Story. May we learn from the past while venturing into a new

future of hope, faith and life. The way of life and love through the Holy Spirit of God in Jesus Christ is still constant and true, but the terrain and world we live in is different. May we journey together, trusting the Spirit’s transformative grace and the Word of God to lead us.



**“Behold,  
I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth,  
do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the  
wilderness and rivers  
in the desert.”**

Isaiah 43:19 (ESV)



# save THE DATE:

## You're invited to the 2017 Biennial Mission Summit



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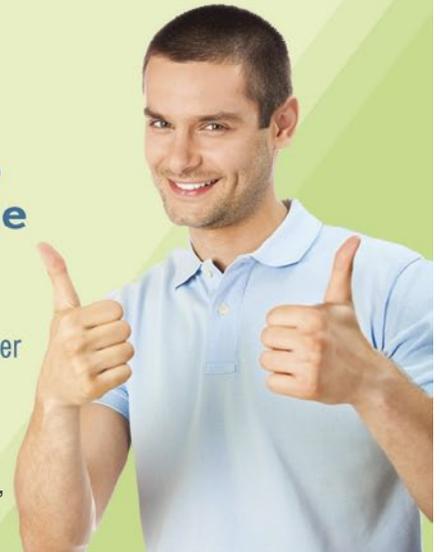
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June 1	One Great Hour of Sharing
June 5	Religious Liberty Sunday
June 12	Children's Day
June 12	Baptist Youth Day of Prayer
June 19	Father's Day
June 26	AB Homes and Hospitals Sunday
July 4	Independence Day

# SAVE THE DATE

June 30 – July 2, 2017  
Portland, Oregon

A special welcome awaits all members of the American Baptist family in Portland as the churches of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast roll out the red carpet for our 2017 Biennial Mission Summit.

Look for other American Baptist family events occurring all week long leading up to the Biennial Mission Summit!

Plan to join the fun in Portland at the Oregon Convention Center, June 30 – July 2, 2017, as our diverse family gathers again for faith-stretching worship, Mission Summit Conversations, preaching and fellowship.