

June 2017 President's Report

So much has transitioned since we last met in November 2016. Then, the thought of a new General Secretary was a hope quickening in our hearts and minds. Now we gather and welcome, Rev. Dr. Lee Spitzer as our General Secretary. At this meeting, we get acquainted as we collectively share our prayerful dreams for ABCUSA's future. We look forward to a collaborative ministry with Lee as we listen to each other, together, finding God's way for us as the Board of General Ministries and Office of the General Secretary.

I am grateful to the Search Committee and to Marilyn Tyson, the staff person who supported the committee these past months. Without her work, the committee's determination to listen by Mutual Invitation, and the assistance of our consultant, we would not have arrived at this point.

Since the November 2016 President's Report, I have been engaged in numerous conference calls. Baptist Talk has convened several times to plan a new workshop for the Biennial Mission Summit that will model how to have challenging conversations while maintaining respect without changing another's view. I have spoken with Susan Gillies and Jeff Woods regarding a request from a local church. Brad Berglund and I have brainstormed ways to keep Rhythms of the Spirit going forward while hoping to lessen its financial draw from OGS. A conference call was held to determine the recipients of the Sparrowk award for this biennium.

One of the greatest privileges I had was meeting Newton Old Crow, one of our amazing Native American pastors from Montana. Newton offered wisdom and grace as we chatted about his conversion, his ministry, and his hopes for native people. He is one of two recipients of the Sparrowk Award.

March 1-4, I traveled to Puerto Rico for their annual meeting. It was an honor to celebrate Josue Gomez's nomination as president for 2018-2019 with his home region and hear him preach! Just prior to the March Executive Committee meeting I was in Washington D.C. with the ABWIM Advisory Council and women clergy from the D.C. area. I'm grateful to Pat Hernandez for her invitations to highlight a female clergy president.

The Executive Committee met in Atlanta, Georgia, March 9-11. Several of the Committee was blessed by Al Brinson's guidance through the King Center and Ebenezer Baptist Church. We were awed as we learned of Al's deep relationship with the King family and his experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. I'm grateful to the Executive Committee! They are group with depth of reflection, wisdom, and honesty as we work together to follow God's lead.

I attended the National Leadership Council (NLC) at the Greenlake Conference Center April 3-6. This is the only time each year when REMC and national leadership from ABHMS, MMBB, ABWM, IM, and OGS are together to share and reflect on the life of our denomination. It is inspiring to witness the faithful leadership of our region executives and national staff. We are in good hands!

Later in April I joined the Women Clergy Colloquium, providing a denominational update. Traveling from that meeting, I flew to Hartford, Connecticut to lead a workshop and preach for the ABCCONN annual meeting. I remained in Hartford to preach Sunday morning.

Amid these travels decisions have been made in preparation for the Biennial Mission Summit. The closer we've come to the Mission Summit, the greater my appreciation for the OGS staff has deepened! As you see them this week, please take a moment to listen to their hearts and offer your thanks for their work. Many of them has worked weekends and holidays so our 2017 Biennial Mission Summit will flow seamlessly.

Lastly, I want to celebrate who we are as American Baptists. Through these many travels and conversations, I've seen Baptists in ministry that seeks first to represent Christ with love and hope in the world. I observed us struggling with decisions and our differing perspectives, yet willing to keep Christ as our center and guide. While there is much to be done as we prepare to move into a new space and as United Mission dollars continue to decline, I have a spirit of hope and trust that God is not finished with American Baptists! We have much to offer in these troubling days of division and increasing struggles as a nation and as a world. As we continue to seek to be in harmony with one another and be Christ's hands, feet, and voice to each other and the world, God will faithfully guide us into a future that gives God glory, does no harm to creation and creatures, and lift up hope.

Walking the journey with you,

Judy Fackenthal, President 2016-2017