

Common Budget Covenant of The American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and Its Related Corporations and Regions

Christians are called to reflect God's values – that is, to view and respond to the world the way God does.¹ Created in God's image, humanity was designed to live in a covenant relationship with God as stewards of God's creation, caring for it and utilizing its resources in ways that were beneficial to all and that glorified God.² Humanity, instead, turned away from God, becoming estranged from our loving Creator, bringing ruin on ourselves and the world.³

Nonetheless, because of the Creator's incomprehensibly great love for us, God became human in Jesus Christ to become the sacrifice for the sins of the world, to conquer death and evil by His resurrection, and to offer pardon, reconciliation with God and eternal life to all who believe.⁴ Christ has commissioned His followers to proclaim to all the people of the world Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Redeemer and King, and to follow His example in ministries of compassion and healing.⁵

As citizens of God's kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, Christians declare their loyalty to the Creator's values – extravagant grace, mercy, kindness, justice, holiness, and love toward all God has made. Recognizing that the earth and all its resources belong to God, they accept their roles as stewards of God, to manage all that the Creator entrusts to them in generous ways that reflect God's character and purposes.⁶

American Baptists came together to participate in this mission Christ has given us. Therefore, in response to the extravagant generosity of God and the commission given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, we, as American Baptists commit ourselves to bring the good news of Christ to all people. In order to accomplish this purpose, we covenant with each other and with God to give to the Lord the first and best of the resources we manage as God's stewards in order to achieve Christ's mission, beginning in our own homeland and reaching to the entire world.⁷

¹ Mark Vincent, *A Christian View of Money*, Herald Press, 1997, p. 31

² Genesis 1:26–31; 2:15–20

³ Genesis 3:1–24; Romans 1:21–25; 3:23; 8:19–23; Ephesians 2:1–3; Galatians 5:19–21; Hebrews 2:6–8.

⁴ John 1:1–14, 29; 3:16; Romans 3:21–26; 6:9–10, 23; 8:1–4; Ephesians 2:4–9; Hebrews 2:9; I Corinthians 15:20–27, 55–57.

⁵ Matthew 28:19–20; 22:37–40; 25:31–46; II Corinthians 5:14–21.

⁶ Psalm 24:1–6; Romans 12:1–2; Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 2:10; 5:1; Titus 3:3–8; I John 2:6; 3:16–18; 4:7–12, 16, 19–21; III John 11.

⁷ I John 3:1–3; Genesis 4:4; Deuteronomy 14:22–23; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; Matthew 6:19–24; Luke 16:10–11; Matthew 25:14–30; Acts 2:42–45; 4:32–35; I Corinthians 16:1–3; II Corinthians 8:1–15; Philippians 4:11–13; I Timothy 6:17–19; Acts 1:8.

Therefore, the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., its Related Corporations and Regions enter into a Common Budget Covenant for the purpose of financially supporting our work as partners in Christ's mission.

We enter into this Covenant, as Baptists have throughout our history, freely and voluntarily. We enter into this Covenant as one means of implementing the statement of purpose of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., its Related Corporations and Regions. We affirm one mission in which we all share – local congregations, Regions and national organizations.

Organizations enter into this Common Budget Covenant as we mutually pledge to support one another and to govern our actions and procedures relating to raising, collecting, distributing, accounting for and reporting the contributions of churches and individuals for carrying out the American Baptist mission beyond the local church.

The purpose of the Common Budget Covenant is to detail the responsibilities necessary for all signatories of the Covenant to function as faithful stewards of the mission of Jesus Christ.

I. Plan Design

As a culturally and generationally diverse denomination, we will develop our mission interpretation, stewardship training, targeted giving, and reporting processes to attract mission commitment and support from all our constituencies.

A. Basic Components

Each region shall choose either the **United Stewardship Plan** or the **Flexible Stewardship Plan**:

1. United Stewardship Plan

The United Stewardship Plan follows the general pattern of the previous Common Budget Covenant with United Mission as the core component and has the following provisions:

- a. Allocation of United Mission* – Regions may retain a maximum of 65% of Net United Mission.* The distribution of the national portion shall be the responsibility of the General Board.
- b. The Institutional Support Process, Specific, Directed and Designated Giving* to American Baptist Mission entities and Regionally Validated Ministries* will be received by the Collecting Agents* and distributed to the respective ministries.
- c. Targeted Giving* will be allowed under the guidelines outlined in the Operating Guidelines Manual. Any ABC related entity seeking Targeted Gifts will notify the relevant Region of its intent, including the date(s) and purpose(s) before the solicitation.

- d. Funding the Office of the General Secretary shall come from the national portion of United Mission.
- e. World Mission Support – Funding of the Mission Support office at the regional level is the responsibility of the Region. The Mission Support office at the national level shall be funded through the national portion of United Mission.
- f. Representative Process costs for representatives from Regions choosing this plan shall come from the national portion of United Mission.
- g. United Stewardship Plan ISP variation – Regions may choose to support ABC institutions in their area through United Mission giving. Regions choosing this option may retain a maximum of 65% of Net United Mission after allocations are made to the respective institutions.

2. Flexible Stewardship Plan

The core component of the Flexible Stewardship Plan is that local churches determine the percentage allocation of their mission dollars and individualize their mission giving.

- a. Regions, National Boards and their Administratively Related Organizations will raise money within Regions only under protocols agreed upon by the National Boards, the respective Regions and the General Secretary and shall be made public to all partners.
- b. The following core American Baptist Mission categories are used by the Regions choosing this plan:
 - i. Respective American Baptist Region
 - ii. American Baptist Educational Ministries
 - iii. American Baptist International Ministries
 - iv. American Baptist National Ministries
 - v. American Baptist United Mission
 - vi. Love Gift
 - vii. Annual Offerings
 - a) America for Christ
 - b) One Great Hour of Sharing
 - c) World Mission Offering
 - d) Retired Ministers and Missionaries
 - e) Region Offering
 - viii. American Baptist commissioned missionaries, projects, institutions and nationally and regionally validated ministries

- c. Funding for the Office of the General Secretary and the Representative Process shall be assessed to each Region choosing the Flexible Stewardship Plan based on the amount contributed through United Mission for the five years prior to adopting this plan. The initial assessment shall be adjusted each year based on the Cost of Living Index in the Valley Forge area. Further, adjustments in the assessments will be made for new responsibilities assigned to the Office of the General Secretary by the General Board of the ABC, only as mutually negotiated with the covenanting partners involved.
- d. World Mission Support – Funding of the Mission Support office at the regional level is the responsibility of the Region. Funding of the Mission Support office at the national level shall be assessed to each Region choosing the Flexible Stewardship Plan based on the amount contributed through United Mission for the five years prior to adopting this plan. The initial assessment shall be adjusted each year based on the Cost of Living Index in the Valley Forge area.
- e. When mutually negotiated with the covenanting partners involved, future services for the benefit of the whole denominational family or the exceptional budgetary relief of one partner, for which assessments are made to Regions, or reductions are made in United Mission retained by Regions in the United Stewardship Plan, will be assessed on the same basis as other Regions. When these assessments are based on a percentage of United Mission giving, assessments for Regions choosing the Flexible Stewardship Plan will be established on the basis of the average United Mission giving for the last five years those Regions used United Mission with adjustments for inflation in accordance with the Consumer Price Index.

B. Offerings

There shall be four national mission offerings and an optional Region Offering:

1. America for Christ

The America for Christ Offering is for homeland ministry and missions in the United States and Puerto Rico. The promotion, collection and distribution of this offering are specified in the Operating Guidelines Manual.

2. One Great Hour of Sharing

The One Great Hour of Sharing Offering is for emergency relief and development. The promotion, collection and distribution of this offering are specified in the Operating Guidelines Manual.

3. World Mission Offering

The World Mission Offering is for international ministry and missions. The promotion, collection and distribution of this offering are specified in the Operating Guidelines Manual.

4. Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering

The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering provides assistance for retired ministers and missionaries. The promotion, collection and distribution of this offering are specified in the Operating Guidelines Manual.

5. Region Offerings

The Region Offerings are for ministry and missions in the Region in which the offering is received. The promotion, collection and distribution of these offerings are specified in the Operating Guidelines Manual.

C. Mission Initiative Fund

The Mission Initiative Fund provides funds for launching new ministries and denomination-wide mission activities that are beyond normal operating budgets. Under the United Stewardship Plan, one percent of gross United Mission dollars or the historical equivalent (based on average United Mission giving for the last five years with adjustments for inflation in accordance with the Consumer Price Index) shall be allocated to this Fund.

D. Love Gift

Love Gift shall continue to be promoted by American Baptist Women's Ministries and shall be included in United Mission. An equivalent of 15% of Love Gift will be allocated for the operation of American Baptist Women's Ministries.

E. Mutual Respect in Fund Raising

Partners to this Covenant recognize that supporting and celebrating the American Baptist mission at regional, national and international levels is the responsibility of all partners and requires all partners to embrace a global perspective of our mission that requires cooperative approaches to raising mission support.

F. Exceptions

Any exceptions to the procedures in this Plan shall be in accordance with the Operating Guidelines Manual.

G. Evaluation

The effectiveness of this Covenant and its provisions shall be evaluated by the General Executive Council two years after the adoption of this Covenant and

every four years thereafter. Evaluation processes shall be developed by the General Executive Council.

II. Operating Guidelines Manual

The Operating Guidelines Manual is the administrative guide to this Common Budget Covenant. The Common Budget Covenant provides the principles by which the Covenanting partners commit to abide. The Operating Guidelines Manual serves to administer these principles with the mutually agreed upon details and procedures important to living out these principles.

III. Amendments and Revisions

- A. The consensus model of negotiating will be the preferred model for handling amendments and revisions to the Common Budget Covenant.
- B. The Common Budget Covenant is Agreement No. 14 of the Statements of Agreement of American Baptist Churches USA. As such, it is part of the Covenant of Relationships of ABCUSA, and will be subject to revision and amendment using the same general process as the amendment to any other Statement of Agreement. However, amendments and revisions to this Common Budget Covenant require that 90% of the Covenanting partners approve the amendment or revision before it becomes effective.
- C. The Operating Guidelines Manual may be amended by a 75% vote of the General Executive Council, and notification to the Covenanting Partners.
- D. The procedures and guidelines outlined in this document will apply to all named organizations and their American Baptist legal and functional successors.

IV. Resolving Differences

- A. Individuals shall seek clarity and understanding from one another as an initial attempt to resolve differences that arise.
- B. A GEC committee will be appointed with the responsibility to meet regularly to review concerns that arise as we live out this Covenant. Unresolved issues will be sent to the GEC for consideration.
- C. Matters referred to the GEC will be considered using a consensus model of negotiation.
- D. Should the consensus model involving all covenanting parties fail to resolve the differences to the satisfaction of the conflicted parties, the established procedure of adjudication for resolving differences under Covenant provisions will be employed.

On authority granted by the Board of

President

Date

Executive Minister/*Executive Director*

On authority granted by the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and its related corporations

President

Date

General Secretary

Appendix i.

Glossary of Terms

- American Baptist Mission Support (ABMS) – Total contributions to all American Baptist Regional, national and international mission programs, objectives, institutions and Administratively Related Organizations that flow through the denomination’s collecting agents.
- Administratively Related Organizations (AROs) – Self-governing American Baptist organizations that are related administratively to a covenanting partner of the ABCUSA.
- Budget Commission – Composed of three members of the General Executive Council and three members of the Budget Review Committee. This commission receives requests for exceptions to the percentage return of petitioning Regions.
- Budget Review Committee – A seven member committee of the General Board that: reviews and presents the ABCUSA budget to the General Board; advises national and Regional boards regarding required financial reports and accounting systems; and reviews financial reports to ascertain how funds have been used by budget participants.
- Collecting Agent – Denominational body (Office of the General Secretary or a Region) charged with receiving, recording and distributing American Baptist Mission Support.
- Covenanting Partners – All Regions, national boards, and ABCUSA which are signatories to the Covenant of Relationships
- Designated Giving – Contributions accompanied by instructions from the church or donor directing that they be used in support of a United Mission partner, project or missionary within the basic operating budget of the receiving organization. Such contributions are “equalized,” that is, they are a part of the recipient’s approved allocation and not over-and-above.
- Direct By Organization Gift – Funding contributed directly from one American Baptist entity to another without passing through a Collecting Agency, and reflected as ABMS giving upon substantiation.
- Directed Giving – Gifts received for specific projects through the promotion of an offering.

- Institutional Support Process (ISP) – Contributions to Nationally Affirmed institutions, such as seminaries, colleges, universities, campus ministries, homes and hospitals, career centers, and the national training center at Green Lake, Wisconsin, through a set of mutual agreements regarding fund raising among ABC cooperating churches.
- Mission Initiative Fund – Funds, amounting to 1% of gross United Mission income, reserved for launching new ministries and denomination-wide mission activities beyond normal operating budgets.
- Nationally Validated Ministries – Generally historic, these ministries including ecumenical partners have been approved by ABCUSA or a National Program Board to receive gifts from local churches through American Baptist Mission Support.
- Pass-throughs – Funds intended for non-ABC missions which flow outside of ABMS. Funds are transferred as a courtesy by the collecting agent.
- Protocols – Agreements between American Baptist mission agencies regarding the processes of requesting and receiving contributions from common donors.
- Regionally Validated Ministries – Ministries which have been approved by the Region to receive credit as American Baptist Mission Support.
- Specific Giving – Contributions accompanied by instructions from the church or donor directing those funds be used by a budget participant, project or missionary, over-and-above other approved allocations. Contributions for Nationally and Regionally Validated Ministries fall in this category.
- Targeted Giving – Gifts received as the result of appeals initiated by a covenanting partner or an ARO to individuals and to churches for support, including support for operating budgets and special programming and projects.
- United Mission includes United Mission Basics, United Mission Designations and Love Gift. It supports every facet of the ABC family.
 - Gross United Mission shall include United Mission Basics, United Mission Designations and Love Gift.
 - Net United Mission shall be Gross United Mission less 1% for the Mission Initiative Fund and less the equivalent of 15% of Love Gift.

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