

**“ABCUSA - Bearing Witness to Christ in a Broken World”**  
General Secretary’s Update for the Board of General Ministries  
By Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, General Secretary  
*July-November 2019*

**Overview**

In the months following the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit in Virginia Beach (July 21-23), ABCUSA and the Office of the General Secretary have been presented with the privilege and responsibility of bearing witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. At the same time, our ministry team and staff have been working diligently to complete our move into the ABCUSA Robert A. Roblee Building, the new home for ABCUSA and OGS, which took place over the last two weeks of October, 2019.

**A Season of Bearing Witness**

Immigration Issues

In response to the ongoing crisis on the southern border of the United States, and to refugee policy in general, I signed on to two significant ecumenical letters. The first letter, composed by the Evangelical Immigration Table of the National Association of Evangelicals, says in part:

“We are deeply troubled by reports of inhumane conditions for children in the custody of the federal government. As evangelical Christians, we believe that all people – regardless of their country of origin or legal status – are made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity and respect. Overcrowded and unsanitary conditions are inappropriate for anyone in detention, but particularly for children, who are uniquely vulnerable. Jesus reserves some of his strongest words of judgment for those who subject children to harm.”

The letter goes on to advocate for six specific recommendations for a more just and humane treatment of people attempting to enter our country. The full text of the letter can be found at: <http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/eit-letter-on-child-detention-conditions-6.27.19.pdf>.

The second letter, composed by Church World Service and addressed to U.S. Government leaders, has not yet been made public. It calls for strengthening the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, in cooperation with religious organizations that have been active in this area for decades (such as ABCUSA).

Anti-Semitism and Intolerance

Shortly after the conclusion of the Biennial, ABCUSA was well represented at the annual Baptist World Alliance meetings, held from July 8-12 in Nassau, Bahamas. Associate General Secretary Pat Hernandez presented on Women in Ministry issues, and it was my privilege to compose the original draft of the BWA *Resolution on Current Manifestations of Religious Intolerance and Religiously-Motivated Violence*. It is the first BWA statement specifically opposing anti-

Semitism in several decades. A *Resolution on Recognizing and Affirming the Calling of Women in the Church* was also passed. Both resolutions have been reprinted at the conclusion of this report.

#### Political and Social Turmoil in Puerto Rico

In response to the participation of the local region in the island's demonstrations against corruption in political leadership, I encouraged other ABCUSA regions to express support for our brothers and sisters, and for the welfare of the island.

#### Opposing Christian Nationalism

On July 30, along with other Baptist and Christian leaders, I endorsed the Baptist Joint Committee's *Christians Against Christian Nationalism* statement. In my endorsement, I stated:

“American Baptists, as a denominational family, have consistently been advocates for religious and civil liberty for all and for the concept of “a Free Church in a Free State” (1986 ABCUSA Policy Statement on Church and State). Key tenets of the divisive ideology of Christian nationalism are incompatible with Baptist theological and social convictions. American Baptists historically have advocated for respect, tolerance, justice and freedom for everyone in our country (and world), while resolutely opposing all manifestations of racism, prejudice, fear and injustice. May we continue this witness in 2019, and into the future.”

Most of these actions were shared with the denomination in my August 5 pastoral letter following the horrific mass shootings in El Paso and Dayton, “*The Collective Conscience of our Country*.”

#### The Plight of Kachin Baptists in Myanmar

In close cooperation with the Burmese Refugee Commission, I corresponded with officials of the United Nations, United States Government and Myanmar's leadership in support of our colleague, Dr. Samson, other leaders, and the Kachin Baptist Convention. On September 4, we issued an appeal to our churches to offer prayers for their safety as Dr. Samson faced a court hearing on September 9. The Declaration of Concern from the Burmese Refugee Commission is reproduced at the end of this report. On September 5, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC) proclaimed its support of ABCUSA's stance. We then received an unprecedented answer to prayer – the court case against Dr. Samson was dropped just a day or so before it was to begin!

The Burma Refugee Commission Meeting was held On October 31, 2019 and hosted by International Ministries. Leaders represented OGS, ABHMS, IM and several AMOs.

#### The Poor in American Society

On August 9, I added my name to the ecumenical *Circle of Protection* campaign, which seeks to encourage all presidential candidates to “produce a three-minute video telling the American people what you would do as president to offer help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in the United States and around the world.”

## **“Dinner Church” on Both Coasts**

Bearing witness can take many forms, including serving the community as the hands and feet of Christ. This is the focus of “Dinner Church,” a very popular aspect of the Fresh Expressions movement (Associate General Secretary Kevin Walden is OGS’s point person for Fresh Expressions). On August 23, Mission Northwest Executive Minister Charles Revis and I visited Junction Church’s Dinner Church Outreach in West Seattle, Washington. The congregation has only a dozen or so active members, but their emerging Dinner Church hosted 53 community residents at the meal we attended! Most of these guests were homeless, poor or struggling with various psychological and physical health issues. It was a powerful witness!

Returning home from Seattle and attending my own church, I was pleased to learn that NextGen Church in West Windsor, New Jersey, in cooperation with First Baptist Church in Trenton, has also initiated a Dinner Church. On its inaugural meal, about 40 people attended from the community!

If you would like to know more about Dinner Church, *Christianity Today* has published a good interview at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2019/october-web-exclusives/these-churches-trade-pews-and-pulpits-for-dinner-tables.html>.

## **Golden Rule 2020: Civil Discourse in a Politically Divided Country**

Through our partner, the National Institute for Civil Discourse, Associate General Secretary Marsha Scipio has been working throughout the summer with Christian leaders from across the theological and political spectrum to launch a creative new initiative: *Golden Rule 2020*. The statement of purpose says:

We are Christians of different theological and political views who have come together to express concern about the polarization and incivility that is tearing our country apart. We are also troubled by the prospect of an angry and hateful political campaign season in 2020 that will further divide us as a nation and make it almost impossible to solve our common problems.

We believe that a way out of our national dilemma can be found in the teachings of Jesus. In particular, we believe that Jesus' command to "treat others as you want to be treated" needs to be taken seriously by Christians who engage in political discussions. We also believe that if enough people follow this principle it will help generate the dignity, respect and civility we need in our country.

Churches have an important role to play in helping to heal America and we hope and pray that local congregations will be active in efforts to increase understanding and bridge divisions. In order to encourage this type of local involvement, we support Christians of different theological and political beliefs coming together on Sunday, November 3, 2019--exactly one year before the 2020 election--to participate in *Golden Rule 2020: A Call for Dignity and Respect in Politics*. It is suggested that churches do two things on that day: 1)

pray for the healing of our country and 2) emphasize the need to apply Jesus' teachings to our current politics.

We also encourage congregations and individual Christians who are interested in healing America to continue to pray for the country and apply Jesus' teachings to political discussions in the days after November 3, 2019 and those leading up to November 3, 2020.

Our announcement in support of Golden Rule 2020 may be found on our website at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2019/october-web-exclusives/these-churches-trade-pews-and-pulpits-for-dinner-tables.html>.

### **Hopevale Martyrdom Commemoration (December 2019)**

The most sacrificial witness a disciple of Jesus Christ can experience is martyrdom. In American Baptist history, the story of the life, ministry and martyrdom of our missionaries at Hopevale in the Philippines is one of the most profoundly moving example of faithful witness in the midst of overwhelming challenge.

In cooperation with the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, International Ministries, the American Baptist Historical Society, and Green Lake Conference Center, OGS is launching the inaugural Hopevale Commemoration in December 2019.

The Hopevale section of the abc-usa.org web site may be found at <https://www.abc-usa.org/hopevale-commemoration/>, and features articles, bulletin inserts, videos and photos related to the Hopevale saga. A mass mailing with a bulletin board poster will go out in November 2019 to announce the commemoration.

### **Regional Pastoral Visits: Representing ABCUSA Across the Country**

Since the Biennial, the Associate General Secretaries and I have been traveling throughout the country and participating in various kinds of regional gatherings and meetings. I believe that meeting with churches, lay leaders and clergy in regional gatherings is the highest of priorities OGS' ministry team seeks to fulfill.

All of the ministry team members have been actively engaged in regional visitation. Marsha Scipio provided the keynote presentation for TABCOM's Mission Works conference and led two workshops (ABC work with refugees in Myanmar & Malaysia & ABC offerings). She brought greetings to ABC Metro NY this past weekend. Pat Hernandez made presentations for ABC Central Region and the DC Baptist Convention, while representing ABCUSA at the Rhythms of the Spirit (ABC Rhode Island) and North American Baptist Fellowship (in Virginia) gatherings. Kevin Walden has participated in the ABC Nebraska Regional Camping Leader Meeting, the TABCOM Fresh Expressions Vision Day, the ABC Ohio Annual Meeting, the ABC Wisconsin Annual Meeting and presented at the Rekindle the Fire Pastor and Lay Leader meeting for ABC Vermont/New Hampshire. In August, he spoke at the 75th Anniversary Green Lake Conference. Pat and Kevin represented ABCUSA/OGS at Dr. Larry Swain's memorial

service in Ohio. Jeff Woods has provided consultation or presentations for the DC Baptist Convention, ABC Michigan, ABC Ohio, ABC Metro Chicago, ABC NY State, ABC Indianapolis, ABC Indiana/Kentucky, and ABC New Jersey.

I spoke at the following events and regional gatherings since June:

- ABC Musicians Conference at Green Lake: Presented 4 plenary session sermons and 6 workshop sessions during the 3 days I was at the conference. It was one of the best conferences at Green Lake that I have ever been to; the music and worship services were tremendous!
- ABC Northwest (Mission Northwest): Following my visit to the West Seattle Dinner Church, I presented a Saturday workshop on “The Prevailing Church” for approximately 35 leaders, mostly clergy.
- ABC of the Rocky Mountains: Plenary speaker and panel discussion participant for the regional annual meeting.
- ABCOFLASH: Plenary speaker, workshop leader (Friendship and Discipleship) and participant in Executive Minister’s installation service.
- ABC Ohio: Plenary speaker and dinner meeting with regional staff and leadership. Although I was unable to attend Larry Swain’s funeral due to my commitment at ABC Rocky Mountains, I spent 45 minutes with Linda Swain in private conversation on the night before the annual session.
- ABC Michigan: I presented a Friday workshop on “The Prevailing Church” for approximately 100 clergy and leaders. During the Annual Meeting, I served as the plenary speaker and gave a report on ABCUSA/OGS at the business meeting.
- Rainbow Acres 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration: I spoke at several sessions of the 3 day celebration, and was the guest speaker at the Legacy Society’s Luncheon Banquet.

### **Moving Forward: Our New Building**

The entire OGS staff has been working together to transition from the current Mission Center to the new American Baptist Churches, USA, Robert A. Roblee Building for the Office of the General Secretary. Our office equipment and files were moved into the new building between October 17-21, and we moved during the week of the 17<sup>th</sup>. Although there is still lots to do (installing the AV system, organizing files in our new space, etc.), we are already back to work, serving the denomination just as we did before the transition. The entire team deserves credit for the successful move! Alan Musoke worked with our architect and contractor to keep the construction on progress. It is a massive task to go through 60 years of accumulated files and materials, to make sure we take what we need to the new building and transfer to the Historical Society records that must be preserved.

At noon on October 16, OGS team members and others gathered in the Mission Center’s lobby for a time of reflection, thanksgiving and prayer. Similarly, we did the same on Tuesday, October 22 at the Roblee building. That afternoon, I led the American Baptist Foundation Board in a dedicatory litany for their new building.

The dedication of the building has been set from Friday, November 8 (during the BGM meetings). We are limited to approximately 100 attendees. Invitations have been extended thus far to BGM, OGS staff, NLC, a few retired staff and to top donors. If space is still available, we will invite additional people. Kathy Jachowski and Rebecca Driscoll are spearheading this process, and Rebecca has taken the lead in organizing the dedication service. Kevin Walden is doing research on the Roblee family, and is corresponding with them. We hope to invite a family member to the dedication.

### **Moving Forward: Personnel Transitions and Team Planning**

#### 2020 Personnel Manual

OGS is currently operating under a Personnel Manual that was composed in 2005, which presupposed all national partners adhering to a standard set of agreed upon practices and policies. This is no longer the case; all of the other partners have developed their own manuals. OGS desperately needs a revised, up to date, Personnel Manual.

I directed former HR consultant Laura Miraz to create the new manual, and she was paid by prior arrangement an extra fee for this project. She presented her project to the Executive Committee in June 2018, and was directed to edit and revise the manual based on that discussion. The final version was never completed. Accordingly, with the assistance of Paul Higgins and Alan Musoke (in conversation with both the Executive Committee and ADP Personnel Services), the document has been thoroughly re-edited to prepare it hopefully for final consideration and approval by the Executive Committee.

#### Personnel Transitions

Annie Marcucci retired, as planned, on June 30, 2019.

Based on the ongoing budget deficits OGS faces, the Director of Development position was terminated effective September 30, 2019. Ken Marsenburg's final day in the office was September 5, and he used up vacation days for the period between then and the end of the month. Evon Moody will continue offering administrative support for Development under Tina Kiernan's supervision, in addition to her HR and BGM portfolios (no change in her position). Moving forward, we need to make decisions regarding the usefulness of DAT and its revitalization, and create a job description for a new fundraiser position (a non-director's position). I have discussed our needs with the American Baptist Foundation, to see if we can cooperate more closely with them to represent us on legacy gifts and other gift opportunities.

Rebecca Driscoll has accepted our offer to extend her WIM internship for a second nine-month period. Since the grant for the internship is for 3 years, we are currently talking about her agreeing to another extension, and in the future to specialize as a Minister for Environmental Justice, with Pat Hernandez and Marsha Scipio serving as her co-supervisors. The proposed job description is included at the end of this report.

Charlie Dunn accepted a new position with a computing firm closer to his home, and thus ended his time with OGS as of October 25.

### Associate General Secretaries Planning for the Future

At our August and October Leadership Team Meetings, each Associate General Secretary reviewed current ministry progress and articulated expectations for initiatives and ministries in 2020, so that the interim period will not unduly hinder OGS' work. Monthly Leadership meetings have been scheduled through December to make the transition a smooth one.

Pat Hernandez is focused on the potentially historic WIM 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference at Green Lake in June, and on the reorganization of Transitional Ministries following the passing away of Dr. Larry Swain. Marsha Scipio will marshal support within ABCUSA for the 2020 BWA Congress and its Youth Track and coordinate our efforts in support of the Golden Rule 2020 campaign initiated by NICD. Kevin Walden will continue to promote Fresh Expressions in coordination with interested regions, strengthen OTABL in anticipation of the 2021 Biennial Mission Summit, and work with IT as well roll out the new *ABCIS Clergy Misconduct History* database (an important response to the *Me Too* movement).

### **NEC and 2020 Mission Table**

At the October National Executive Council meeting, the leaders requested that the proposed 2020 Mission Table not take place in the fall, due to several other conferences. The suggestion was raised to combine the May 2020 National Leaders Committee meetings with Mission Table at Green Lake. This option looks promising and logistical issues are being considered. Jeff Woods will serve as the OGS Staff coordinator for the 2020 Mission Table, with assistance from a team of leaders from each partner.

### **Information and Technology: ABCIS and CORE**

Our IT team has come to the exciting realization that our ABCISA databases, including finances, can be thoroughly integrated into our innovative CORE web initiative. This could lead to an amazing advance in serving national and regional partners, and individual donors too.

### **List of Supporting Documents**

- 1) BWA Resolution on Current Manifestations of Religious Intolerance and Religiously-Motivated Violence
- 2) BWA Resolution on Recognizing and Affirming the Calling of Women in the Church
- 3) A Declaration of Concern for Kachin Baptists
- 4) NCC Deeply Concerned for Two Baptist Clergy in Myanmar
- 5) Golden Rule 2020: A Call for Dignity and Respect in Politics
- 6) Minister for Environmental Justice Job Description
- 7) Current and Pending DEVELOPMENT Activities: Recommended Assignments to OGS Staff
- 8) Letter from Dr. Michael Williams, ABC Michigan

## **BWA Resolution on Current Manifestations of Religious Intolerance and Religiously-Motivated Violence**

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) General Council, meeting in Nassau, Bahamas, July 7-12, 2019:

EXPRESSES its deep concern over recent instances of religious intolerance and religiously-motivated violence around the world since its last meeting in 2018, including but not limited to: the attacks against synagogues in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA; and Poway, California, USA; attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand against two mosques; and the deaths and injuries to hundreds of Christians during a coordinated set of bombings throughout Sri Lanka on Easter morning;

ACKNOWLEDGES that these events remind us that various forms of religious intolerance, both from individuals and as a result of government action or inaction, continue to pose a significant threat to individuals and to societies across the globe;

DECRIES the well-documented rise of anti-Semitism around the world, for instance the marked increase in anti-Semitic crimes in western and central Europe; the increase in Islamophobia across the world, including violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar; the crackdown on religious freedom in China that has led to the detention of more than a million Uighur Muslims and the persecution of Christians and churches in China; and the significant rise in global Christian persecution as evidenced by continued violence in Nigeria, Cameroon, and India, as well as the recently published report commissioned by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which found that approximately 245 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution or worse;

RECALLS that 2019 is the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic resolution passed at the fifth Baptist World Congress in Berlin, Germany, in 1934, against the background of the rise of fascism, which opposed anti-Semitism and all other forms of religious and racial prejudice, stating in part that

*This Congress deplores and condemns as a violation of the law of God the Heavenly Father, all racial animosity, and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward coloured people, or toward subject races in any part of the world.*

*This Congress urges the promotion of Christian teaching concerning respect for human personality regardless of race or religion, and as the surest means of advancing the true brotherhood of all people, urges the active propagation of the Gospel of Christ throughout the world.*

REAFFIRMS that, in the light of the vision of the early Baptist Thomas Helwys who, in 1612, made his famous plea for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to be allowed to worship in freedom and so live at peace together in the same geographical space, we stand in solidarity and sympathy with all people who suffer violence, injury, and harm, regardless of religion, race, gender, culture, or ethnicity; in response to all of the tragedies cited above, we “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15);

ENCOURAGES all Baptists to demonstrate that by living in peace with everyone (Romans 12:18), we reaffirm that prejudice, hate, and violence cannot defeat respect, love, and faith; and

CALLS upon the BWA member bodies to offer the hand of sincere friendship to our neighbors of other faiths, as an expression of biblical teaching that all human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and as a prophetic response of God’s love against all manifestations of terrorism, violence, and religious intolerance (Romans 12:21).



## **Resolution on Recognizing and Affirming the Calling of Women in the Church**

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) General Council, meeting in Nassau, Bahamas, July 7-12, 2019:

CELEBRATES the Baptist International Conference on Theological Education that met in Nassau, Bahamas, July 5-7, 2019, with the theme of “TOGETHER: Re-Imagining, Re-Reading HERstory in the Church,” with significant discussions of women in the church;

REAFFIRMS the resolution of the BWA entitled “Women” adopted in Nassau in 1988, which called for Baptists to “celebrate the multiple gifts and sensitivities women bring to the service of Jesus Christ and the work of the Baptist family around the world” and “commend Biblical and careful attention by our member bodies to the enabling of women and their gifts”; and

CALLS global Baptists to

REPENT from the teachings and practices through which we have prevented women from flourishing as human beings created in the image of God and full members of the body of Christ;

OPEN OURSELVES to the Holy Spirit to bring conviction, inspire discussion, and provoke transformation in individual lives and communities, affirming the God-given call of women for service in the church, so that their stories may take rightful place in the wider story of Christ’s body in the world;

LEARN and then use language that is affirming to both women and men in worship, communications, and publications, including Bible translations; and

WORK intentionally to create equal space for women in all leadership roles in the church, Baptist conventions and unions, and in the Baptist World Alliance.

## **A Declaration of Concern for Kachin Baptists**

**August 30, 2019**

The American Baptist Churches USA expresses our ongoing concern for the safety of the Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, President of the Kachin Baptist Convention of Myanmar who has been summoned to appear in court on September 9, 2019 regarding a lawsuit instigated by Lt. Col. Than Htike of the Northern Command.

The lawsuit appears to be in response to the appearance of Dr. Samson at the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom hosted by United States Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. Dr. Samson was one of those present during President Trump's press conference highlighting those who have endured religious persecution.

The Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, former General Secretary and currently President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, has long been a proponent of religious tolerance and equitable justice for all people of Burma/Myanmar. He has also been a courageous critic of those policies within his country that has led to over 100,000 Kachins being driven from their homes by military conflict, forcing them to become Internally Displaced Persons. He has consistently requested that elements of the military responsible for the destruction of over 200 churches in the Kachin State alone and who have used rape as a weapon of war and terror be brought to justice.

The American Baptist Churches USA urges that the charges be dropped against Dr. Samson and asks the civilian government leaders of Myanmar and the military to support the democratic rights of Dr. Samson and all citizens of Myanmar to the fundamental right of peaceful free speech even when it is critical of the conditions within Myanmar.

The American Baptist Churches USA pledges our on-going prayers for Dr. Samson and our continued vigilance regarding his security.

*Composed by the American Baptist Churches USA Burma Refugee Commission.*



## **NCC Deeply Concerned for Two Baptist Clergy in Myanmar**

(9/5/2019)

The National Council of Churches joins with the American Baptist Churches USA, one of its member communions, in expressing deep concern for the safety of two Baptist pastors from Myanmar, the Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, former General Secretary and currently President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, and Pastor Lanjaw Gam Seng.

Both of these clergy, our brothers in Christ, attended the recent Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom hosted by the U.S. State Department. Rev. Samson now faces legal action brought against him by Lt. Col. Than Htike of the Northern Command. We decry this move meant to intimidate and silence dissent by people of faith across Myanmar. While charges have not been brought against Pastor Seng at this time, there are also concerns about his safety since he attended the meeting with Rev. Samson at the State Department.

We recognize the right to speak against violence as a matter of basic morality and Christian faith. The action taken against Rev. Samson is deeply concerning, and we stand with the American Baptist Churches USA, the Kachin Baptist Convention, and all who strive to live out a faith that seeks justice for all, especially for the most vulnerable.

We urge the government of Myanmar to drop the charges against Rev. Samson and restore these pastors to their rightful place in a democratic society. It is the duty of people of faith to speak out against injustice and to seek the good of all people.

Read the statement online [here](#).

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Serving as a leading voice of witness to the living Christ in the public square since 1950, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) brings together 38 member communions and more than 40 million Christians in a common commitment to God's love and promise of unity.

## **Golden Rule 2020: A Call for Dignity and Respect in Politics**

### **Sunday, November 3, 2019**

On Sunday, November 3, 2019, join Christians from a wide range of theological and political views in supporting *Golden Rule 2020: A Call for Dignity and Respect in Politics*. On this day, exactly one year before the national election, Christians will come together to affirm the need to apply Christian principles to our political discussions in order to heal divisions in our country.

#### **What is the Purpose of Golden Rule 2020?**

The purpose of *Golden Rule 2020* is to get thousands of churches from across the theological and political spectrum to demonstrate their concern about the polarization in our country and emphasize the need for Christians to take specific actions to counteract it. On Sunday, November 3, 2019, congregations will do this by emphasizing that Christian teachings about human dignity and, in particular, Jesus' command to "treat others as we would like to be treated" should apply to our political discussions.

#### **Who is Organizing It?**

*Golden Rule 2020* was created by a wide range of both liberal and conservative Christian leaders at an event hosted by the National Institute for Civil Discourse in May of 2019 (see list of participants on reverse side). Those who created *Golden Rule 2020* represent a diverse group of denominations and organizations including: The American Baptist Churches USA, National Association of Evangelicals, The Episcopal Church, , the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Presbyterian Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mormon Women for Ethical Government, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Churches. Congregations associated with these and many other Christian groups will be participating.

#### **What Will Happen on November 3, 2019?**

Churches all over the country will have a special emphasis during worship services on Christian teachings about dignity, respect and the need for civility in our political discussions. There will be an emphasis on the practical application of the Golden Rule and how politics in 2020 would be different if Christians followed Biblical teachings about how to treat people who disagree with them. Congregations will do this in a wide variety of ways including: Sunday School lessons, special prayers and readings, sermons on the need to treat others with dignity and respect, and specific suggestions about how church members can apply the Golden Rule to political discussions.

#### **Why is Golden Rule 2020 Important?**

A large nationwide activity involving both liberal and conservative Christians will call attention to the fact that how we treat our political opponents is a moral issue and encourage millions of people to do what they can to bridge the divisions in our country. Media coverage of this unique event can help make concerns about civility and respect a more central issue in 2020 and help begin the healing that our country so badly needs.

#### **How to Participate**

Information on how to participate and materials you can use in your congregation can be found at \_\_\_\_\_. You can also call National Institute for Civil Discourse at \_\_\_\_\_ to get added to the mailing list for the event.

**NICD Convening of Faith Leaders in Washington, DC  
May 7-9, 2019**

**Sara Benitez**, Faith in Public Life  
**Galen Cary**, National Association of Evangelicals  
**Curtiss DeYoung**, Minnesota Council of Churches

**Mark Ford**, Love Akron Network  
**Sharlee Mullins Glenn**, Mormon Women for Ethical Government  
**Don Golden**, Red Letter Christians  
**Mark Harrison**, UMC Board of Church and Society  
**Jimmie Hawkins**, Presbyterian Church USA  
**Shapri LoMaglio**, Council of Christian Colleges and Universities  
**Andrew Musgrave**, Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati

**Jill Rauh**, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
**Stephen Reeves**, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
**Amy Reumann**, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
**Margaret Rose**, The Episcopal Church  
**Connie Ryan**, Interfaith Alliance of Iowa

**Emily Schumacher-Novak**, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
**Marsha Scipio**, American Baptist Churches USA  
**Sandy Sorensen**, United Church of Christ  
**Michael Wear**, The AND Campaign  
**Jim Winkler**, National Council of Churches  
**Travis Wussow**, Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission  
**Alan Yarborough**, The Episcopal Church

American Baptist Churches USA  
Minister for Environmental Justice\*

The Minister for Environmental Justice is responsible, in conjunction with the Creation Justice Network, for developing and implementing strategies that will engage American Baptist congregations in a movement toward creation justice. The position will build upon the legacy of American Baptists addressing the matters of creation care, racial and economic justice, and living the Gospel. The position sits at the intersection of faith communities and environmental justice bringing a sound biblical and theological foundation to firmly ground the work of creation care in love and justice for the local congregation and the denomination as a whole.

**Responsibilities:**

- Work closely in collaboration with the Creation Justice Network to implement and maintain environmental justice initiatives and programs on the local, regional, and denominational level acting as a liaison between the Creation Justice Network, local congregations, regions and the denomination as a whole.
- Work closely with the American Baptist family and American Baptist entities (The 33 ABC Regions, Office of the General Secretary, American Baptist Home Mission Societies, International Ministries, American Baptist Women's Ministries, American Baptist Women in Ministry, American Baptist Men, ABC Ministers Council, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board, etc.) to support/strengthen and/or implement personalized environmental justice initiatives and programming.
- Lift up the voices and influential leadership of ABC women in the environmental justice movement as well as encourage other women to participate/lead programming and ministries focused on environmental justice. Create literature/curricula that highlight the unique ways in which environmental degradation disproportionately impacts the health and wellbeing of women around the world, especially women of color.
- Represent the denomination at ecumenical and interfaith events/meetings regarding environmental justice to develop and strengthen relationships with partners and leaders in the field.
- Develop and maintain a digital bimonthly newsletter that includes information on creation care advancements/ministries that local churches are undertaking, updates on the state of the environment, information on how to begin a Creation Justice Congregation program in a local congregation/community and in other ministry/regional setting. This would include one's own commentary as well as inviting others to submit material.
- Create and cultivate a database of current environmental justice material and resources for the community to use (i.e. curricula, bible studies, articles, sermon series ideas, VBS lesson plans, Sunday School activities, webinars, information about advocacy and research). This

would also be the place where users could find information on how they can take action and stand in solidarity with those facing injustice due to environmental degradation.

- Develop and implement webinars and trainings available for local congregational use and in other ministry/regional settings.
- Work with American Baptist and other seminaries on the importance of the educational, theological and biblical training of students in understanding that creation justice is a critical biblical, theological, ethical and spiritual concern for those entering ordained and other forms of ministry.
- Support and enhance the ways in which the denomination recognizes environmental justice initiatives of local congregations working closely with the congregations as they explore and develop their unique call and contributions to creation care.
- Craft and implement ways that environmental justice can continue to be recognized at each Mission Summit Biennial.

\*Based on the United Church of Christ's Minister of Environmental Justice position description.

### Suggested ABCUSA Minister of Environmental Justice Timeline

#### **Three Months:**

- Have introductory meeting with the Creation Justice Network
- Collect creation justice stories from local congregations
- Have introduction conversations with ecumenical/interfaith groups
- Send out introduction letter to the denomination/publish newsletter
- Attend any denominational/regional events (at least 2)
- Have initial visioning meeting with OGS, ABHMS, and IM and other ABC entities regarding how each one can lift up creation care in the work they are already doing
- Visit at least six regions
- Begin to collect a list of resources

#### **Six Months:**

- Publish one newsletter on creation care and environmental justice
- Visit/Conference call with at least six more regions
- Begin conversations about funding denomination's environmental justice and creation care work (grants, congregational based, savings from renewable energy, etc.)

- Record first webinar/hold first training for new congregations to be introduced to environmental justice and creation care
- Set up webpage to begin to collect and list resources (maybe on MinistrElife)
- Attend any ecumenical/interfaith events
- Begin conversations and building relationships as a liaison with congregations that The Creation Justice Network recommends (identify at least 5)
- Begin conversations with seminaries about their role in teaching seminarians how to integrate environmental justice and creation care into their ministry

### **Twelve Months:**

- Provide ABCUSA seminaries with suggestions regarding how to incorporate creation care more fully into their curriculum
- Publish three more newsletters
- Visit/ have conversations with at least six more regions
- Hold two more trainings/webinars
- Identify secure funding sources moving forward
- Help The Creation Justice Network's five identified congregations take intentional tangible action
- Provide either a Lenten or Advent environmental justice/creation care devotional
- Propose sound funding plan for a sustainable environmental justice/creation care ministry for the denomination to support the work of the Creation Justice Network
- Identify one seminary to collaborate with in implementing an environmental justice/creation care priority into the curriculum
- Launch resource webpage and database

### **Eighteen Months:**

- Publish three newsletters
- Visit/have conversations with at least six more regions
- Provide both an Advent and a Lenten environmental justice/creation care themed devotional
- Begin implementing new budget and funding plan
- Visit/have conversations with at least six more regions
- Clearly identify at least one person in each region as the environmental justice/creation care contact for The Creation Justice Network to communicate with
- Attend ecumenical/interfaith events
- Identify all (as many as possible) local congregations and ministries taking intentional action in collaboration with environmental justice/creation care efforts



**Current and Pending DEVELOPMENT Activities  
Recommended Assignments to OGS Staff**

1. Participation in **Generosity Project** (Stewardship) Planning Team - *ongoing*; (**TINA**)
2. Participate in **PBA Annual Gatherings** and select stewardship initiatives - *ongoing*; (**ASGs**)
3. Coordinate **Intern Selection Process**... communications, review, identification, selection – *ongoing*; (**Lee**)
4. Monitor & Provide **Development Database** updates (Net Work For Good) - *ongoing*; (**Evon**)
5. Produce **Sundry Letters** - donor acknowledgements, **yearend**, updates & follow-up - *ongoing*; (**Evon**)
6. Serve as OGS liaison for ABC **McKee Consultation** Planning Team - *ongoing*; (**Marsha**)
7. Develop OGS 2020 Year-end Donor **Annual Appeal** – *ongoing, October*; (**New Fundraiser**)
8. Schedule Orientation & Training on MetaSoft **Foundation Software** – *ongoing*; (**Evon; Tina; Jeff**)
9. Update **foundation research** profiles (including providing profile data for AGS) - *ongoing*; (**New Fundraiser**)
10. Conduct individual & foundation prospect **evaluations** (affinity, ability, access) - *ongoing*; (**New Fundraiser**)
11. Determine **top prospects** based on General unrestricted, Creation Justice – *ongoing*; (**New Fundraiser**)
12. Present timeline and requirements for **select grant application** process - *ongoing*; (**New Fundraiser**)
13. Attend select **Regional Gatherings** – i.e. ABCOTS, ABCONN, PBA, OH - *ongoing*; (**ASGs**)
14. Facilitate **ABCOTS-MSR Feasibility Study** with Planning Action Committee – *November*; (**CONCLUDE**)
15. Continue **ABCOTS & Morehouse fundraising venture** – *December 2019*; (**CONCLUDE**)
16. Reconcile Accounting/ABCIS donor gift data with **timely acknowledgements** - *ongoing*; (**Evon; Tina; IT**)
17. Write for **2021 Biennial Mission Summit Brochure** (sponsors, exhibitors) – *August 2020*; (**New Fundraiser**)
18. Review & Produce **2021 Biennial Mission Summit Prospect List** – *July 2020*; (**New Fundraiser**)
19. Staff **Development Advisory Team** (DAT – recruit members) - *ongoing*; (**BGM; New Fundraiser**)
20. Participation in 2020 **Hampton University Minister's Conference** - *June 2020*; (**Marsha; New Fundraiser**)
21. Participate in sundry OGS & ABC **staff meetings**; (**New Fundraiser**)
22. Grant-making process for **Chestnut Street Baptist Church Endowment** – *ongoing*; (**Marsha; Kevin; Alan**)
23. Support of **ABWIM 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** 2020 Sponsorship Opportunities– *ongoing*; (**Pat; Rebecca; Evon; Tina**)
24. Participate in gathering ethnic-giving research data thru Collective Foundation 2019-2020; (**Evon; IT**)

Transition Timetable

September 30, 2019: Final day of Service for Ken.

October-November 2019: Development of job description for new position

January-March 2020: Search and Hiring of New Fundraiser



October 25, 2019

The Reverend Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, ABCUSA General Secretary  
American Baptist Churches USA  
P.O. Box 851  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Dear Lee:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! I trust you had safe travels home following your weekend with the American Baptist Churches of Michigan family.

As I have reflected on your time with us in Michigan, my heart has been strangely warmed by the ways in which the gift of your time to us challenged, encouraged, and blessed us. In reflecting in all the ways, you blessed us, I recall:

- The Prevailing Church Workshop where you stimulated the thinking of more than one hundred pastors and lay leaders regarding the wide-ranging opportunities we have for Spirit-filled witness in the midst of massive societal change;
- The Tittle/Kingsbury dinner which both couples have shared was such a blessing to them as you all enjoyed a lovely meal together on Friday evening;
- Your message entitled "*A Legacy of Faithful Service*" powerfully contributed to the theme "Celebrating Our Legacy;"
- Your brief report on the work of the Office of the General Secretary, highlighting upcoming opportunities for the ABC-MI family to join the wider ABCUSA family recognizing we are better together than individually;
- Your kind words at the banquet regarding my work with the wider ABCUSA family through REMC and the NLC. I also appreciate you recalling our efforts with the "Fanning the Flame" clergy retreat a few years ago. Several pastors mentioned to me following your recalling this event, how much it meant to them and encouraged them at critical moments in their ministries;
- Our Saturday evening dinner where Tammie and I had the privilege of spending time alone with a choice servant of God and friend. To hear of Josh and his dog, Louey, was incredible. To share updates and simply enjoy being in each other's presence blessed Tammie and me beyond measure.

Suffice it to say, I am deeply grateful for the gift of your time to us! We are better because you came our way and shared your many gifts with us. As we know, these are not easy days for churches and denominational entities as we seek opportunities for Spirit-filled witness in a post-Christian age. In doing life together and by God's matchless grace, we have persevered together for the sake of doing our part in the Kingdom of God. I am convinced we have been stronger together than we could ever be individually. Thank you for the partnership in the Gospel!

Again, thank you!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Williams".

Michael A. Williams  
Executive Minister