

BGM Report June-November 2020

The two primary foci for OGS during the last five months of 2020 has been the continuing impact of COVID-19 and our ABC response to the need for racial justice. Some of the highlights of these and other activities are shown below in this five-month report.

COVID-19 Activities

- Online contacts and conference calls
 - I have continued to hold regular calls with the Executive Ministers and the group continues to engage as a learning community during these calls.
 - Additionally, several executive ministers have invited me to participate in their regular pastoral calls including pastors from the regions of IN-KY, ABCOPAD, Maine, ABC of the South, Central Pacific Coast, and the Ministers Council. These calls have provided rich, two-way learning.
- Surveys
 - A survey regarding the impact of COVID-19 on regional activity was distributed and discussed among the REMC. In addition, two ABC congregational surveys were distributed and analyzed. The analysis of these surveys are included in the BGM documents and includes the following five recommendations:
 - *Connect with the online worship community.* Because so many persons are lacking a sense of community and engagement, encourage congregations to extend their online presence beyond worship, by connecting with the online worshipping community by sharing success stories of those who have been able to do this.
 - *Share stories of neighborhood ministry.* Search for and share stories about how congregations have been involved in delivering supplies to the homebound, persons in need, and the homeless. Develop resources for creative outreach during the global pandemic.
 - *Provide encouragement.* Lift up ways to care for pastors and other congregational leaders as a result of increased feelings of concern, anxiousness, and frustration.
 - *Emphasize opportunities over challenges.* Remind congregations that opportunities can still outweigh challenges. We serve a God who knows how to use disruption to expand the kingdom.
 - *Leave no congregation behind.* Look for ways in which the small percentage of congregations that have been severely impacted by the pandemic can express their concerns and seek assistance.
- Resources
 - We continue to post reflections, insights, resources, and newsletters at www.abc-usa.org/coronavirus.

- The discussion guide for reopening church buildings and the learnings document of Discoveries and Opportunities from COVID-19 have been utilized and appreciated.
- Over 650 persons participated in the “Returning to Your Building” risk management webinar led by Guy Russ, VP for Risk Control for the Sovereign Insurance Group. The newest resources from Sovereign Insurance include a “Sensor Program” (for water detection), and “Ministry Safe” for identifying potential predators.
- ABCUSA has maintained a database and website for ABC spiritual directors as coordinated by Brad Berglund. Due to the demand for pastoral care for pastors, we are seeking to expand this emphasis for ABC pastors.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

- I worked with president Karen Podsiadly to design a “Call to Prayer” event that included over 145 online participants. The commitment of the panelists was evident as one panelist led in prayer from a hospital bed and another prayed from a workroom, the only place that could be found with power following a tornado in the area the day prior. We received nearly forty applications from persons desiring to help with the work of the task force.
- Several of the Executive Minister group calls have addressed racism and have included personal sharing, the identification of regional activity, and presentations from Baptist historians and leaders.
- The National Executive Council also discussed our coordinated efforts on this issue.
- Several individual conversations were also held with members of the REMC and pastoral cluster groups on this issue.

National Insurance Program

- Through our partnership with the Sovereign Insurance Group and Church Mutual as the property and casualty provider, congregations who joined the ABC National Insurance Program have received a total savings of \$824,883 (ytd) as of October 1, 2020.

Staff

- Office Staff
 - We have continued the monthly check-ins with staff; as well as, other departmental staff meetings.
 - The majority of staff have returned to the building on a limited basis, working a couple of days a week with temperature checks prior to entering, social distancing in place, and scheduling that limits that the number of staff in the office at one time.
 - Several staff have been taking online training, including CVent training.

- Kathy Jachowski assembled a perpetual calendar for the current and future ABCUSA presidents.
- Development
 - We received \$3280 in gifts by including a letter and envelope with our recent ABCUSA newsletter. Thank you letters were sent to top UM giving congregations as well as new congregational participants in UM. We also received a significant legacy gift from a donor.
- Creation Justice
 - Rebecca Driscoll worked with the Creation Justice Network to produce a four-session webinar series entitled, “Praying with Creation: Sabbath, Lament, Restoration/Resiliency, and Resurrection.”
- ABCIS update
 - At the beginning of 2020, we engaged the consulting services of Weidenhammer, Inc. to assist us with a needs assessment of regional and national users and propose a software solution for the database needs of the ABC family. They conducted several online focus group meetings in order to establish a set of requirements for new software. We have narrowed the list of potential providers to two and have been conducting reference calls with existing software users. Donna Molinaro, Alan Musoke, and Geri Blier have given excellent service on this project.
 - The Office of the General Secretary has received a grant of \$118,000 from the Mission Initiative Fund to help offset the implementation costs of this project.
- Associate General Secretary for Mission Resource Development
 - A hiring team was assembled for this position, named in our ABCUSA Standing Rules, and funded through United Mission.
 - The primary responsibilities of this position are to promote giving to United Mission on behalf of the denomination and to oversee resource development for the Office of the General Secretary.
 - We received several qualified applications for the position and conducted four interviews that included both males and females and persons from three different ethnic backgrounds.
 - We are delighted to announce that this search resulted in the calling of Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri who is currently serving as the Executive Minister for the ABC of Wisconsin.

Regional Ministry

- Regions:
 - DCBC has called the Rev. Trisha Manarin to serve as their next executive minister. She began her ministry service on August 17, 2020.

- Rev. Doug Harris has begun service as the interim executive minister for ABC of Rhode Island.
- In addition to individual and group calls with executive ministers, over the last five months I have had online video contact with 23 regions. These online connections have involved speaking at annual meetings, leading pastoral trainings and conversations, sending video greetings that coincide with the theme of their annual meeting, and participating in podcast interviews.
- Two retired executive ministers have agreed to assist with resourcing the regions. Tony Pappas is assisting regions with reopening conversations and Marcia Patton is assisting regions with training persons in racial justice issues through the Kaleidoscope Institute.

Biennial Mission Summit

- I am pleased to announce that Tina Kiernan is now serving as the Biennial Program Coordinator.
- The BGM Executive Committee decided that the 2021 Biennial Mission Summit should be held virtually and that the 2023 Biennial Mission Summit would take place in Puerto Rico. Following this decision, several meetings and decisions have taken place including:
 - Re-envisioning meetings with the Biennial Planning Team, the Staff Advisory Group, OTABL, NEC, and the REMC. These meetings have produced a revised schedule, program, list of speakers, registration process, and marketing approach.
 - Re-negotiating contracts with consultants.
 - Exploring the capacity of online and streaming platforms.
 - Seeking to move the existing 2021 Biennial contracts to 2023.
 - Reaffirming the theme of “Imagine” for the 2021 Biennial.

Partnership Work

- Burmese Diaspora. We became aware that several leaders and pastors associated with the Burmese Diaspora were confused over the status and meaning of the Associated Ministry Organizations that many are a part of as well as ordination procedures for clergy. As a result, I drafted a clarification document that the Professional Ministries Team approved and met with the Burma Refugee Commission and REMC to illuminate current practices and explore future adaptations that might benefit all persons involved.
- NEC. Our recent NEC meetings have focused upon the needs of congregations brought about by the global pandemic, working together to serve congregations, and providing a common message of unity to the ABC family.

Attachments:

- COVID-19 Regional Survey Results
- COVID-19 Congregational Survey Results, May and October