

BGMEC Report January to March of 2021

In addition to our many areas of mission, my process goals for 2021 include (1) The empowerment of staff and volunteers, (2) The clarification of identity for the Office of the General Secretary, and (3) the continued strengthening of relationships among national and regional staff. With these three lenses in mind, I am happy to provide some highlights of our missional activity during the first three months of 2021.

Myanmar

On Sunday, January 31, 2021, I became aware of a political uprising in Myanmar in which leaders, democratically elected on November 15, 2020, had been arrested and detained. That evening I participated in a conference call with Roy Medley, Leslie Turley, Florence Li, Ler Htoo, and Zo Tum Hmung to assess the situation. I am grateful for the wisdom of this group that continues to meet regularly and share ideas regarding how to address this situation. Some of the actions taken thus far include:

- Prayer Meetings with the Burma Diaspora on February 1 and March 1, 2021.
- Meetings with the Burma Refugee Commission.
- Letter to President Biden seeking three actions:
 - Calling for the release of the elected detainees.
 - Calling for Myanmar to respect their democratic institutions and outcome of the election.
 - Calling for adherence to the democratic process and the rule of law.
- Letter to the Myanmar Ambassador requesting a meeting of the Ambassador with members of the Burma Refugee Commission
- Letters to key U.S. Senators who serve on influential committees related to this issue.
- Call to Prayer event that includes worship resources, links to trusted information, and sample letters for AB congregations and individuals.

Assault on the Capitol

OGS responded to the shocking events that occurred in Washington DC on January 6, 2021.

- On the afternoon of January 6, 2021, I asked the NLC to join me in prayer for peace, safety, and that no blood would be shed at our nation's capitol.
- That evening I participated in a time of prayer sponsored by a number of Baptist organizations and hosted by the ABC Executive Minister Dr. Trisha Manarin of the DC Baptist Convention.
- President Karen Podsiadly and I then released a statement on the events the following day.
- I have continued to respond to comments and inquiries regarding this issue.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

President Podsiadly and I continue to connect with Anti-Racism co-chairs Dr. Wimberly and Rev. Thornburgh. The task force shared an update in the February newsletter and are continuing to develop resources for individuals, congregations, and institutions. The goal of the task force is to identify resources to help ABCUSA become the most anti-racist denomination in the U.S.

COVID-19 Activities

- The results of a round two survey that was collected in the fall of 2020 assessing the impact of Covid was shared with the National Executive Council and the Regional Executive Ministers Council.
- I accepted an invitation for the American Baptist Churches USA to participate in a study sponsored by Faith Communities Today (FACT) assessing the impact of COVID-19 on congregations. Jessica Williams, an employee at Central Baptist Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. candidate in research methodology at Kansas State, has agreed to serve as our OGS representative for this project.
- Chaks Zadda, one of our representatives to the Baptist World Alliance, is preparing a report regarding our ABCUSA response to the global pandemic based upon our documents.
- I participated in two conference calls with the Biden transition team to discuss issues that the new administration might address. During one of these calls, I offered ways that people of color in particular might be encouraged to take the Covid vaccine.

Staff Activity

Our 2021 emphasis is upon staff development. Activities that have taken place early in 2021 include:

- Training for all staff in facilitating zoom meetings.
- Training in diversity, equity, and inclusion. President Karen Podsiadly has consented to provide this training and is conducting individual conversations with OGS staff to prepare for this training.

Other Staff Activities include:

- We welcomed Marie Onwubuariri to our staff as Associate General Secretary for Mission Resource Development on January 1, 2021. She is a very welcomed addition to our staff. Early on, she has been developing an overall communication strategy, working with the Biennial sponsorship program, giving input on projects, and getting to know other staff.
- Rebecca Driscoll's internship with the Office of the General Secretary will conclude on March 31, 2021. She has worked effectively in developing, expanding, and preparing the Creation Justice Network to continue this emphasis. She also prepared this statement on ecology:
 - American Baptists have long been dedicated to caring for God's creation. The "American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology: An Ecological Situational Analysis" was unanimously adopted by the ABCUSA General Board in June of 1989. The statement affirms that "the threat to the global environment presents American Baptists with a call for prompt and vigorous response." It goes on, "as Christians and faithful stewards, we bear the responsibility to affirm and support programs, legislation, research and organizations that protect and restore the vulnerable and the oppressed . . . this responsibility for a habitable environment is not just for human life, but for all life." It is always very encouraging to see others at the local, regional, and national levels committing to the well-being of God's creation.

American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS) update

We are now in the launching phase for updating ABCIS. With the help of Weidenhammer Consulting, we have chosen NetSuite for our new software platform. This is an enterprise system containing several software components. Through the acquisition of a grant from the Mission Initiative Fund, we will be able to offer the full software component to all regional and national partners during the first year of implementation. After experiencing its full capabilities during this year of implementation, our hope is

that many of our partners will choose to use NetSuite as their primary software provider when it comes time to renew their software licenses. Geri Blier and Bob Lovas are now in the process of migrating 25 years of data into the NetSuite platform. Alan Musoke and Donna Molinaro are also working with the implementation.

Regional Ministry

- Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley is now serving as the president of the Regional Executive Ministers Council.
- The following three regions have now launched their Executive Minister Search Committees:
 - American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island is in the formation stage.
 - American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin is in the data collection phase.
 - American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky is also in the data collection phase.
- I have continued to hold bi-weekly calls with the Executive Ministers and the group continues to engage as a learning community during these calls.

Biennial Mission Summit

Tina Kiernan has been busy preparing for the Biennial Mission Summit. She has been chairing the Staff Advisory Group, developing and administering a budget, working with production, and overseeing other aspects for our first virtual Biennial.

Orientation to American Baptist Life

Zina Jacque and Judy Fackenthal are serving as co-chairs for the Orientation to American Baptist Life event. Their planning committee, that includes national and regional staff, has worked with six organizations to help prepare them for online orientation events leading up to the Biennial. OGS kicked off the series of events with an orientation to the work of OGS on March 4.

Other Activities

- I participated in the inauguration of President Pam Druso of Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
- ABCUSA Officers met to process applications for the Sparrowk Award.
- The ABCUSA Nominating committee met and processed four nominees for service on the Board of General Ministries.
- I joined the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for a virtual hearing about ways the U.S. government can better protect and support individuals fleeing religious persecution through the U.S. refugee resettlement program, the U.S. asylum system, and overseas assistance.
- I wrote a letter to the State Department seeking assistance in the release of Pastor Mulunda, who appears to have been arrested without due process for exercising free speech. He is a respected leader and promotor of peace in the Congo. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins brought the situation to my attention, stating, "My friend and colleague in ministry, Rev, Dèvis Mulunda, of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Springhouse, PA informed me of the arrest of his father in Congo yesterday, MLK Day." The following persons signed onto the letter from OGS:
 - Jim Winkler, President of the National Council of Churches
 - Elijah Brown, General Secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance
 - Amanda Tyler, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

- Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, Executive Director, New Baptist Covenant

Learnings from 2020

I have been asking the following two questions of leaders and staff members and have received a variety of responses as noted below:

- Questions:
 - How was your job affected by the events of 2020?
 - How do you plan to approach 2021 based upon those learnings?
- Responses
 - Learning new ways to be effective and efficient
 - Learning to plan ahead
 - We can reach more people electronically with our programs and events.
 - The blessing of new equipment.
 - Promoting different streams of revenue.
 - Making everything paperless.
 - The importance and joy of family.
 - The importance of collaboration.
 - Seeing that people are facing similar challenges even though in different contexts.
 - Increased practice at learning new things.
 - Learning what burns me out.
 - Recognizing the need for focused work.
 - Learning how to deal with the unknown.
 - Working in an uncertain environment.
 - Stress free commutes to the office.

Attachments:

- OGS Identity Statement
- Biennial Mission Summit 2021 Budget