

BGM Report January to June 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 six months of 2021.

Biennial Mission Summit

- We held a promo event on April 20 that included speakers Zina Jacque and Gina Jacobs-Strain and included very positive feedback. Segments of the promo event are being shared with constituents to assist with their promotion of the Biennial Mission Summit June 24-26.
- Our Biennial Mission Summit speakers include Winterbourne Harrison Jones, Brianna Parker, Susan Sparks, and a video from the NEC. Workshop leaders include Executive Ministers Steve Van Ostran, James Harrison, Doug Avilesbernal, and representatives from MMBB, ABWM, ABHMS, and IM.
- The event includes approximately 16 hours of worship, workshops, information sessions, and conversations, as well as virtual exhibit booths and an On-demand library that will be available for six months following the event. Many of the sessions will be interactive.
- Tina Kiernan is serving as Biennial Program Coordinator, Sharese Shedrick is handling the Cvent registration process, Marie Onwubuariri is serving as MC, and all staff will be involved in some capacity.

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 provided excellent support in working 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 and we received very positive feedback from this session.

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:

- Monthly prayer meetings with the Burma Diaspora.
- Call to Prayer event that includes worship resources, links to trusted information, and sample letters for AB congregations and individuals.
- Regular meetings with the Burma Refugee Commission.
- Letters to President Biden, Vice-President Harris, National Security Advisor Sullivan, Secretary of State Blinken, General Secretary of the UN, U.S. Ambassador to UN consistently calling for:
 - Recognition of the democratically elected leaders and release of the political detainees.
 - U.S. Govt to cooperate with member nations of the United Nations and ask the formation of a UN Security Council resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
 - Launch diplomatic conversations with China and other key countries in the struggle.

- Sanctions in cooperation with other countries focused upon military leaders.
- Protected status to embassy staff members supporting the CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement).
- Recognition and support of CRPH: Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar.
- Humanitarian aid for the people of Myanmar and “Internally Displaced Persons”
- Religious Liberty for the people of Myanmar.
- Letters and meetings with the State Dept, Office of International Freedom, key Senators who serve on influential committees related to this issue, leaders of the CRPH, Chin Advocacy Committee, and several others.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

President Podsiadly and I continue to connect with Anti-Racism co-chairs Dr. Wimberly and Rev. Thornburgh. The task force has shared updates in the OGS newsletters and is developing a proposal for the BGM to help ABCUSA become the most anti-racist denomination in the U.S. I also released statements regarding:

- The verdict in the George Floyd trial
- The Atlanta shootings

COVID-19 Activities

- I accepted an invitation from VP Harris to serve on the *Community Corps* to share ideas, resources, and encouragement for COVID-19 vaccinations. The Corps has received online briefings and zoom calls with Dr. Fauci and Dr. Murthy. Relevant resources are posted on our ABCUSA website.
- I produced a promotional video for the Faith4Vaccines group.
- 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 the *Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC)* study sponsored by Faith Communities Today (FACT). 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.

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.

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 conducted individual conversations with OGS staff to prepare for this training which was well-received by the staff.
- Harassment training. HR consultant Judith Christiansen led this informative and engaging session with the staff.

Staff Changes:

- 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 concluded on March 31, 2021. She is continuing to staff the Creation Justice Network to strengthen the capacity of this network and is working as a Communications Assistant while Bridget Lipin is on maternity leave.
- Senior Accountant Sarah Pingue resigned her position with OGS in April to accept a position with another organization. Current employee James Tran has been promoted to Senior Accountant.
- Geri Blier, ABCIS Coordinator, will be retiring from OGS on September 1, 2021.

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 from Oracle 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 configuring the NetSuite dashboard in order to migrate over 25 years of data into the new 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 finalizing their position announcement.
 - American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin is finalizing their region profile.
 - American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky has opened the process for applicants.
- I have continued to hold bi-monthly calls with the Executive Ministers and the group continues to engage as a learning community during these calls. I have also held pastoral conversations and workshops with ABCOFLASH and CPC regions and other Minister Council groups.

Other Activities

- A Baptist-Muslim Dialogue gathering of previous participants was held on March 22, 2021.
- I participated in the inauguration of President Pam Druso of Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
- ABCUSA Officers met to process applications and named Dr. Al Brinson as the 2021 recipient 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

Respectfully Submitted
Dr. C. Jeff Woods
Interim General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA