

Interim General Secretary Report to BGM

Six-month report

June to November of 2021

Here are some highlights from the General Secretary's Office since our last Board of General Ministries meeting in June of 2021. In addition to this report, I drafted two key documents that were approved by the BGMEC for consideration by the BGM. These two documents are the "Intentional Interim Strategic Plan" and the "Role of the Office of the General Secretary." Each of these documents have received input from a variety of ABC staff and constituents and have been through several iterations.

Biennial Mission Summit

- There were 1,115 registrations and 2,275 log-ins for our first ever virtual Biennial Mission Summit in 2021.
- There were 35 Exhibits with 139 hours of available online content.
- The on-demand library has had over 1,600 interactions.
- 95% of the comments regarding the overall Biennial and the hub experience are positive.
- Participants especially appreciated:
 - Accessibility – have not attended the event in many years
 - Coordination and design of Worship; best services in years
 - Interactive booths
 - Diversity in worship
 - Beginning and ending worship on time
 - The online nature of the event allowed me to participate for the first time
 - Pre-roll segments
 - Ability to watch recordings of sessions missed
 - Participating in Sessions using Q&A and Chat features
 - Robust variety of ways to connect and interact
 - Several persons responded, "I don't think that you could have done a virtual Biennial any better than this."
- Some of my specific involvements included:
 - Efforts to reach our quota of registering 200 different ABC congregations.
 - Participating in a radio show to promote the Biennial.
 - Recruiting participation from Executive Ministers.
 - Recruiting the NEC to participate in a "Silver Linings Video."
 - A communion meditation.

Myanmar

We have continued our efforts to bring improvement to the devastating situation in Myanmar resulting from the military coup that occurred on Sunday, January 31, 2021. We are very pleased to announce that advocacy efforts have resulted in \$55,000,000 of humanitarian aid for Myanmar and the sponsorship of a Burma bill. Noting that one-third of the world's population lives in Myanmar or one of its bordering countries and that COVID-19 is most susceptible to mutations in areas with high infection rates and lack of medicine should cause us all to advocate for education, medicine, and treatments for Myanmar. Some specific activities are listed below:

- Monthly prayer meetings with the Burma Diaspora.
- 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 with increasingly specific requests. VP Harris quoted from one of the letters during her recent trip to Asia.
- Expanding advocacy to all of the ABC regions.
- Providing sample letters for individuals to advocate with their local congresspersons and senators.
- Partnering with 21 Wilberforce and the World Council of Churches to promote grass roots efforts of advocacy.
- Promoting humanitarian aid to address the rise in COVID-19 cases in this area as well as the ongoing needs of “Internally Displaced Persons.”
- Informing the Burma Diaspora of the opportunity for “Temporary Protected Status” through the USCIS.
- Calling for increased sanctions that target military leaders, especially in oil, gas, and arms sectors that are necessary to sustain the 400,000 military troops in Myanmar.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

The anti-racism task force hosted several well-attended sessions during the Biennial Mission Summit with some very positive and helpful feedback. I participated in multiple sessions including serving on a panel for one of these sessions. Marie Onwubuariri has been working with the group as they continue to strengthen their proposal for commission status. The group is planning an anti-racism symposium for October 30, 2021.

National Executive Council

The National Executive Council consisting of Jeffrey Haggray of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), Gina Jacobs-Strain of American Baptist Women’s Ministries (ABWM), Sharon Koh of American Baptist International Ministries (IM), and Louis Barbarin of MMBB Financial Services (MMBB) have met several times and are growing in their relationships with one another. The group has had several healthy discussions related to leadership and conferencing. They are also exploring the idea of producing a Christmas story video together. I have been invited to participate in the MMBB board meeting on November 1 and was asked to co-sign the letter announcing the Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering.

National Leadership Council

We have pursued several activities to follow-up on the National Leadership Council Meeting in May, including:

- Distributing and analyzing an evaluation of the event.
- Meetings with the NEC and REMC Officers to review the meeting.
- Hosting multiple sessions to continue to explore “Cultural Humility.”
- Recruiting a team of leaders to design prayer and biblical reflection sessions for the NLC.

Leadership Team Retreat

We held an off-site leadership team retreat September 27-29, 2021. Components of the retreat included: team building, understanding our personal and team narratives using the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator, establishing operating values, enhancing communication procedures, and identifying the gifts that we bring to the group as well as our needs in order to thrive individually as well as a team.

American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS) update

We have commenced the migration phase of data from ABCIS to NetSuite. Staff continue to find the capacity and capabilities of NetSuite to be superb, and the migration of data to be an enormous undertaking. We said goodbye to our ABCIS Coordinator, Geri Blier on September 30 and called a successor to this role, Feisal Al-Amry with a three-month overlap.

Regional Ministry

- The following three regions are at varying stages in their Executive Minister Search Committees:
 - American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island are in the interviewing phase.
 - American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky are also in the interviewing phase.
 - American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin will be presenting a candidate to their board in November.
- Rev. Dr. Frank Frischkorn has announced his resignation from the American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware effective at the end of 2021. A search committee will be formed in the near future.
- Rev. Paul Gibson has announced his resignation from the American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region effective at the end of 2021. My first meeting with the search committee will take place on November 9, 2021.
- 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.

Everyday ABC Conversations

Due to the popularity of the recent Mission Summit Conversations in which over 650 American Baptists simultaneously participated in dialogue during the Biennial Mission Summit, the American Baptist Churches USA is launching a series of dialogues, entitled, "Everyday ABC Conversations." Each Everyday ABC Conversation will begin with a brief introduction of the topic by leaders associated with the subject area followed by 30-40 minutes of small group conversation in randomly assigned small groups. The entire conversation, including presentation, will last approximately one hour. The first conversation was held on October 13 on the subject of "Supporting Students in Higher Education." The presenters were Karen M. Podsiadly, the current President of American Baptist Churches USA and Dr. Tim Barry. Karen serves as the Director of Community Development at The College at Brockport (State University of New York) and Dr. Barry is the 10th president of Alderson Broaddus University. The next conversation will take place on November 30 with the title, "Soul Care @ Christmas."

Additional Staff Activity

Recent staff activities include:

- The BGMEC approved the establishment of a task force on “Interpreting the Impact of COVID-19 on Congregations.” Executive Minister, Rev. Dr. Frank Frischkorn, has agreed to serve as chair of this task force.
- Judith Christiansen finalized a new telecommuting document for staff and reviewed new staff guidelines during an all staff meeting.
- Pat Hernandez is making adjustments and designing promotion (in conjunction with other staff) for the 2022 “Radical, Redeemed and Ready” conference.
- Tina Kiernan has held four 2021 Biennial review meetings with various clusters of staff and leaders and has met with PR leadership for the 2023 Biennial.
- Alan Musoke is overseeing the staff team working on the NetSuite migration.
- We received our 2021 affirmation letter for 501c3 tax exempt status that includes the subordinates under our umbrella status.
- Marie Onwubuariri has been following up with Biennial donors and sponsors, serving as liaison for the antiracism task force, and overseeing ABCUSA communication.
- The ABCUSA staff are 100% COVID-19 vaccinated.
- I strongly encouraged staff to take some well-deserved vacation time this summer after an extremely busy spring that included a “Call to Prayer for Myanmar,” an OGS Orientation to ABC Life event, a promotional event for the Biennial, our first virtual Biennial, commencement of NetSuite migration, etc.

Other Activities

- I provided greetings for the 60th anniversary event of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and have sent several congratulatory letters to ministers and congregations including a letter honoring former Executive Minister Louise Barger on 35 years of ordained ministry.
- During 2021 ABCUSA has been named in a number of lawsuits. Several of these cases have already been dismissed, a few are in the discovery phase, and we are seeking to tender all to insurance companies.

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