

**PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE  
ANTI-RACISM COMMISSION OF THE ABCUSA  
TO THE BGM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, MAY 2021,  
Revised August 2021 with 2<sup>nd</sup> revision October 2021  
PREPARED BY THE ABCUSA ANTI-RACISM TASK-FORCE**

**I. Summary of the work of the Anti-Racism Task Force**

The Anti-Racism Task Force has begun the very difficult and challenging work of shifting the narrative within the ABCUSA regarding racism and anti-racism. Through monthly newsletter articles, we have invited the denomination to join in this work. We are defining anti-racism, identifying the historic roots of racism, and making visible real world and tested opportunities for dismantling the system as it stands. We seek to rebuild anew with an anti-racist worldview.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (Isaiah 11:6-7 NIV).*

The Anti-Racism Task Force engages continuously with the vision of a reordered world through the lens of Jesus. The Anti-Racism Task Force is supported by three subgroups and several working groups.

- A. The subgroups focus on specific aspects of anti-racism work: individual, congregational, and institutional. The work of the subgroups is on-going and seeks to deepen the transformation of the denomination.
  1. **The Individual Subgroup:** Individual work is some of the most challenging work because it requires the individual to be vulnerable and open to change. This is where anti-racism begins. To end racism we must work individually and collectively to dismantle racist policies at the structural and institutional levels. The individual subgroup is working through "How To Be An Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi. We are also identifying resources to share with the denomination.
  2. **The Congregational Subgroup** distributed a video clip and survey through the Office of the General Secretary starting May 17 through May 31. They are seeking to gauge where we are as congregations within the ABCUSA and then discern how to efficaciously move forward with this work engaging as many people as possible.
  3. **The Institutional Subgroup** has met with eight Executive Ministers and two past presidents of ABC-USA and had conversations with the hope of uncovering the practices, policies, and habits that can be utilized by all parts of the ABC-USA as an organization.
- B. The working groups will shape and curate a symposium and collect and record resources for utilization to the entire ABCUSA denomination.

C. A Three Day Gathering of Prayer and Conversations: During the 2021 ABCUSA Biennial Mission Summit, the Anti-Racism Task Force hosted a three (3) day gathering of prayer and conversations. Fall 2021. The goals of this gathering:

1. Define anti-racism.
2. Ground anti-racism in Scripture, highlighting all humanity as one people created by one God.
3. Highlight the denomination's role and responsibility, at every level, in advancing racial justice.
4. Educate on today's inequalities and existing wealth gap.
5. Offer advocacy opportunities for the denomination to close inequality gaps.
6. Include moments to repent for our denomination's missteps
7. Provide helpful, usable resources.

D. The Symposium: **The Prophetic Rhythm of Anti-Racism**

We have set the date for the Anti-Racism symposium for October 30<sup>th</sup>. The format and momentum for this time together will include a keynote speaker, Q & A, discussion groups, a final session focused on creating and sustaining a momentum of contemplation and action framed in a goal-oriented, change making initiatives.

We realize that providing symposiums and multifaceted resources are essential, and yet the great benefit to these initiatives is the revelation that anti-racism work must be on-going.

The ABCUSA is the most diverse denomination in the United States. We have a role and a responsibility to continue the work of anti-racism if we are to live into what we believe when we make that claim. We seek to become the most anti-racist denomination in the world. The Anti-Racism Task Force requests the commitment and support of the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries to make this prophetic vision a reality.

## **II. Rationale for the Extension of the Anti-Racism Task Force—The Establishment of a Commission**

"Anti-racism is the **active process** of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably." - NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity

In every era of history, those who have sought to exclude sisters and brothers from the family have used the word of God—the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Christian church—to support their aims. The Bible and other sacred stories have been twisted and distorted to make it seem that God is in favor of racism and supports other forms of oppression. Opposing racism and other forms of injustice is deemed to be political, and, consequently, not something Christians are supposed to get involved in. When this happens, the truth is being stolen and made into a lie; the Bible is being turned upside down. If we are going to be equipped to work for the

elimination of racism, we need to turn the Bible right side up again. We need to take back stolen stories to bring healing and wholeness to a broken world.

### **Historical Context and Rationale**

Historically, diversity has been challenging within the context of religious structures and ideologies. The enslavement of human beings is one example. When the enslavement of human beings reached a peak in 1845 when the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society determined that it could not appoint any candidate for service who enslaved human beings and when the American Baptist Home Mission Society decided separate northern and southern conventions were necessary. As a result, in 1972 in the midst of reorganization that in part reemphasized the congregation-centered mission of the denomination, its name was changed again to American Baptist Churches USA. in the midst of reorganization that in part reemphasized the congregation-centered mission of the denomination, its name was changed again to American Baptist Churches USA.

Throughout our history American Baptists have been led by the Gospel mandate to be directly active in the institutions of society to promote holistic and healing change. The tradition of social outreach and ministry extends back to the enfranchisement and education of freedmen following the Civil War, through frontline advocacy of the Civil Rights Movement, the empowerment of women in church and society, ecological responsibility and the many contemporary issues of justice.

Because of the longstanding commitment to outreach to and fellowship with all persons, American Baptist Churches USA today is the most racially inclusive body within Protestantism and will within the next few years be comprised of no racial/ethnic majority group and yet the mandate to promote holistic and healing change through the Gospel directly and actively remains unfulfilled. The American Baptist Churches USA continues to struggle with what to do in and with the gifts of the variations of God's image in a denomination.

The subtleties of racism has many layers and remains a powerful tool to create and maintain invisible lines of demarcation of power and privilege even within a racially diverse denomination. Oppression and dominance can maintain diversity and inclusion, but they cannot support holistic healing for all people. The very nature of oppression is to place severe restrictions on an individual group and to subordinated one group while another is privileged. For American Baptists, this must become an intolerable notion especially in the context of such a diverse body.

The written history of ABCUSA creates a nice and neat version of events that some experienced as painful and hard. We hear of the heroic move of Northern Baptist against slavery and yet we do not hear about how power and privilege dominated their printing press (Judson) determining who became a published author and who did not. This established a specific group of "experts, scholars, and well-known leaders based on their status as published. We do not hear of the rationale for why caucuses were born and why they still **need** to exist. In many ways, this resembles the "separate but equal" law mandated in these United States. We do not speak of the way in which ABCUSA divides itself up in to neatly arranged partnerships that each have their own governance and mission. We continue to uplift the veil that hides the long-standing issues of oppression and white supremacy whose threads are weaved within and without all of our denomination. In 2021, we now have an opportunity to courageously engage a new paradigm of

spiritual wisdom and action in a gospel made in God's own image, bringing all the gifts and graces of the Body of Christ to life and to living.

Anti-racism gives our denomination a rubric to reflect, measure, and transform the vision and reality of a hurting world into God's vision of the Body of Christ vibrant and alive on earth for such a time as this.

Remember God's call to Ezekiel, to the valley filled with dry bones. Only God knew the possibilities and the realities that lay among what had been discarded and unnecessary to the human eye and mind. The Lord instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, telling them that God *"will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin"* (Ezekiel 37:5-6 NIV).

ABCUSA prophecy!

The work of anti-racism is redemptive, transformative, and conciliatory. It is sacred work. It is life giving and life abundance. As a people of prayer, purpose, and passion, creating a community of faith where people of every race, nationality, and culture gather as one in worship, service and work, we take up this mantle as co-creators of God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

The initial meeting of the Anti-Racism Task Force was held on November 10, 2020 and yielded an unprecedented commitment and dedication to this work by Task Force members. Through prayer, discernment, and honest reflection we have begun to identify and surface the historical and present experiences and stories of peoples affected by racism. Racial hatred, bias, systemic racism, white supremacy, and inequitable opportunity are deeply rooted in our systems of education, health care, economics, government, and faith traditions, permeating all aspects of individual, community, and corporate life. As a denomination, we must be willing to respond appropriately.

In 2019, research studies indicated a 100 percent increase in hate crimes and blatant acts of racial violence ([www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov)). These incidents continue to rise and signal the need for anti-racism work within the church and in our world. It is not enough for us to conclude our response to suffering, oppression, and dehumanization solely with prayer. Prayer is an initial act of faith that moves us to action. It moves us to work. Accordingly, the work of anti-racism is the active dismantling of systems, privileges, and everyday practices that reinforce and normalize the contemporary dimensions of white dominance (Crenshaw, 2020).

In Mark 12:30-32, Jesus gives us two great commands that empower us in this world. Jesus teaches us to: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." We lean toward the teachings of Jesus in this love mandate and see it as a compass for our individual and denominational future movement.

### **III. Proposed Goals and Activities**

***The specific vision, mission, goals and objectives with quantifiable outcomes will be developed by the Anti-Racism Commission in collaboration with ABCUSA organizations and partner organizations.***

Working from a paradigm reflective of the historical relationships of racial and ethnic groups and racial oppression within the denomination and the world and from the power and faith in God through Jesus the Christ, we propose the following initial goals and activities for the commission in collaboration with ABCUSA:

- A. Develop a common framework and language for the work of Anti-Racism - See Section I: Rationale for a working definition of anti-racism. Anti-racism work intentionally keeps black and brown lives up front.
  - 1. Explore our uses of and the intention and impact of terms such as intercultural, multicultural, multi-racial, intergenerational, etc., recognizing that “multicultural” has often resulted in excluding and/or marginalizing black voices.
  - 2. Articulate implicit and explicit beliefs about race, biology, and cultures, and educate and foster a biblical understanding of one human race while celebrating the unique gifts of our cultures and our identities.
  - 3. Develop an agreed-upon understanding of what an anti-racist denomination, organization or “table” will look like versus our current understanding of concepts such as diversity, representation, and inclusion.
- B. Address issues and questions that are core to the work of anti-racism in the ABC, such as:
  - 1. Reviewing how our history hindered and helped us in our work to become anti-racist (For example, existing racial justice policy and the formation of caucuses).
  - 2. Identifying the need and opportunities for repentance, unlearning, and relearning.
  - 3. Identifying hindrances for all necessary ABC stakeholders to participate in this commission and strategies for overcoming these things toward authentic collaboration.
  - 4. Naming and collating a list of existing anti-racism work across our denomination and denominational partners and key leaders among us.
- C. Denominational Assessment and Transformation: Develop a strategy and plan for an anti-racist assessment of every aspect of the denomination, reclaiming our continuing call to be a leader in anti-racist work in all levels of the denomination and in society, including but not limited to:
  - 1. Search & call, hiring, including the ABCUSA General Secretary
  - 2. Economic practices (investments, salaries)
  - 3. Governance (structure, policies, documents)
  - 4. Formal and informal structures, policies, procedures, systems, patterns, etc.
  - 5. Polity, missiology, and impact and implementation of core values
  - 6. Identify and bring together all ABCUSA organizations and partner organizations actively involved in anti-racism work within the denomination to work collaboratively.

D. Explore and amplify topics of advocacy that can be expressions of ABC's commitment to anti-racist work, including:

1. Effective reparations, which are one remedy that can bring us closer to equality in this country in our lifetimes. This also means having a deep and honest look not just at our nation's sins, but looking at ABC's history and then naming, repenting, and issuing reparations for and to those communities for whom we have benefited without fair and adequate restitution.

Reparations refer to the act or process of making amends for a wrong. Reparations are intended to promote justice by redressing gross violations of human rights. The UN proposes five forms of reparations: 1)restitution; 2)rehabilitation: psychological and physical support; 3)compensation; 4)satisfaction: acknowledgement of guilt, apology, burials, construction of memorials, etc.; and 5) guarantees of non-repetition: reformation of laws and civil and political structures that led to or fueled violence (United Nations, 2020).

2. Discernment around existing work that can be more deeply engaged, implemented, and/or financially supported and how to engage national voices to advocate for the outcomes of the discernment.
3. Exploring new topics as they arise.

E. Develop a capacity-building strategy for the work of anti-racism in the denomination that would minimally include:

1. Staffing Commitment, such as the creation of an Associate General Secretary for Anti-Racism work and dedicated staff support.
2. Funding strategy for the continued work and support of the Anti-Racism Commission, related staff positions, and the work as a whole.

#### **IV. Composition and Convening of the Commission and the Establishment Period**

We envision this commission bringing together all partners within the denomination into an agreed upon place and space of accountability. Partners include, but are not limited to, influential representatives from the Board of General Ministries, the Office of General Secretary, ABC Caucuses, ABHMS, AB Historical Society, IM, MMBB, Regional Executive Ministers Council, Ministers Council, Colleges/Universities and Seminaries, and others. Given the envisioned collaborative make-up of the commission, we also envision the commission will be regarded as a valued and necessary partner in key decision-making junctures of the denomination.

We also recognize the need for leadership specifically designated for the work of the commission. The particular skills, gifts, and perspectives of leadership will be crucial to the effectiveness and success of the commission. **A ministry (job) description is included for an Associate General Secretary of Anti-Racism and a proposed budget are included in the Appendix.** We are proposing a major commitment from the Office of General Secretary and from ABCUSA as a whole. As a denomination, we must be willing to commit in word and deed to living the gospel and acknowledging our part in the oppressive systems that deny the

humanity of many while holding sacred the humanity of some. The Anti-Racism Task Force calls for commitment.

The work of anti-racism is not for the faint of heart. It is the work of a denomination willing to invest both time and resources. The identification of **Associate General Secretary of Anti-Racism** is a beginning. This position **cannot** be a shared position or an add on to a current ABCUSA staff member's work responsibilities. The Associate General Secretary of Anti-Racism must be someone whose job is dedicated to articulating and facilitating the rubric for the larger whole. This must be a position or positions identified, supported, and acknowledged for this crucial work.

### **ESTABLISHMENT PHASE: THE COMMITMENT**

According to the ABCUSA Office of the General Secretary Board of General Ministries, the establishment phase can take up to 12 months. The establishment phase must also include an opportunity to intentionally provide continuity for the anti-racism work begun by the Anti-Racism Task Force. It is imperative that all stakeholders (transition team, new commission members, staff of OGS including General Secretary, and at least the Executive Team of BGM) engage and commit to a two-year plan of formal anti-racism training from an experienced, skilled, anti-racism professional(s). This two-year commitment will give the commission a solid foundation in its actions and interactions with individuals and the larger denomination. If we truly wish to see change, this work is imperative.

During the establishment phase, short-term goals and measurement plans will be established, as well as, a plan for commission membership. The parameters of convening and decision-making, funding needs and strategies and the details concerning other items considered core to the purpose and impact of the commission. Quarterly reports during the establishment phase will be submitted to the Executive Committee.

Anti-racist work starts with each of us—each one of us accountable and committed to working together to fight against racism. The individual and interpersonal levels of interaction are easily available and in need of critical awareness. Anti-racism means committing to identifying how racism manifests in social and cultural norms and how to address racism at the individual and structural levels. In other words, “You have to learn to unlearn some of the things that you understand about a racialized society and your role in it.” (Sith-Maddox, 2021.)

## **V. Current Capacity for the Establishment of a Commission**

List of individuals who are interested in taking leadership during the establishment phase should the proposal be accepted, what each person brings to the endeavor, and their contact information.

**Dr. Natalie C. Wimberly** is a child of God journeying daily leaning forward with expectation and excitement about what God has done, what God is doing and what God will do. She has championed the work of anti-racism, equity and justice for most of her life. She currently serves in leadership as one of the co-chairs of the Anti-Racism Task Force. She has proven ability to create, envision, engage, and execute organizational vision, mission, goals and objectives.

Dr. Wimberly is willing and available to provide leadership during the Establishment Phase. Continuity of the work of the Task Force is crucial especially during the Establishment Phase to ensure that unwarranted delays or distractions do not occur during this important aspect of the development of the Commission.

Dr. Wimberly is a lifelong learner, ordained minister, executive, professional educator, mental health professional, advocate, advisor, and consultant who has written and received national grants and attended the Lake Institute for the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising.

She is a visionary with over 25 years of experience as a successful executive administrator in not-for-profit and for-profit organizations effectively creating collaborative partnerships that proved to transform individuals and institutions. She brings a wealth of experience and expertise that expands the historical movement of multiculturalism, cultural competence, cultural humility, diversity and inclusion, cultural safety, and anti-racism as well as the development of her own bio-psycho-social-spiritual-ecological model which supports an organizational culture of hope, equity, and justice.

Dr. Wimberly has an intentionally integrated perspective of knowledge and practical wisdom. She holds multiple degrees across several disciplines. She has earned a Doctor of Psychology degree in Clinical Psychology with certification in Health Psychology. She also completed two-year residency in neuropsychology; a Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) degree in Religion, Culture and Personality; a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling both from Boston University, as well as a Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree and a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree both from Livingston University (now the University of West Alabama).

She is both thankful, amazed and humbled by the journey to co-create God's kin-dom come, God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Dr. Wimberly's contact information:**

1616 Ridge Road, Queensbury, NY 12804  
[wimberlydrn@gmail.com](mailto:wimberlydrn@gmail.com) or 518-744-8768

**Rev. Justin Thornburgh** has committed his vocational work to the work of anti-racism and elevating voices from the margins. From his time in Chicago as part of a multi-ethnic church and his work in community organizing and activism to his continued efforts in Indianapolis as a leader and activist he has worked alongside Black and Brown siblings as an ally and accomplice in the struggle. With a prophetic voice he has stood on the steps of the capital and in pulpits of power to proclaim that God's voice is heard from our siblings who have systematically been silenced, and he has worked within his privilege as a white male to not speak for but to amplify their voices.

He would like to continue working in any way he can to help during the establishment phase

**Rev. Thornburgh's contact information is:**

Rev. Justin Thornburgh  
602 N Bosart Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46201



(773)330-4333  
[celticwander@gmail.com](mailto:celticwander@gmail.com)

The following individuals already involved in the Task Force and/or one of the subgroups have expressed an interest and willingness to help form the commission and/or participate on said commission.

Rev. Dr. Dan Brockway  
Rev. Abner Cotto-Bonilla  
Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing  
Rev. Joan Friesen

Rev. Rodney Lynch  
Ethan Medley  
Rev. Justin Thornburgh  
Dr. Natalie C. Wimberly

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**Task Force Members:**

Dr. Natalie C. Wimberly, Co-Chair  
Rev. Justin Thornburgh, Co-Chair  
Rev. Dr. Dan Brockway  
Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing  
Rev. Joan Friesen  
Sandra Lee  
Ethan Medley  
Rev. Rodney J. Lynch  
Rev. Dr. Don Ng

**Individual Subgroup:**

Sandra Lee, Chair  
Dolores O. Bowles  
Michael Friday  
Rev. Dr. William (Bill) Godwin  
Katharine Hsiao  
Wim Mauldin  
Rev. Dr. Marcia Patton  
Diane Plourde  
Rev. Michael Woolf

**Congregational Subgroup:**

Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Chair  
Rev. Dan R. Chadwick  
Rev. Dr. Corey Fields  
Dr. Tahlib McMichaux  
Lynette Miller  
Rev. Laurel Balyeat Morrison  
Rev. Franklin M. Ruff  
Janice Taylor  
Nancy Willbanks

**Institutional Subgroup:**

Rev. Joan Friesen, Chair  
Vernon A. Clement  
Michael Feicht  
Rev. Kymberly E. McNair  
Rev. Karen Mendes  
Dr. David Schirer  
Rev. Elaine Thomas  
Rev. Starlette Thomas

**Willing to help as needed:** Harold and Deborah Van Broekhoven

**ABCUSA Staff Liaison:** Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri