

BGM Report from the General Secretary June to November of 2022

The Office of the General Secretary continues to carry out the three important mission priorities for the American Baptist Churches USA identified by the Board of General Ministries in the “Role of the Office of the General Secretary” document: gathering the denomination; supporting congregations, regions, and national organizations; and creating space for local and global issues. Each of these priorities is evident in the work of the office the last five months.

I had the opportunity to attend several events hosted by American Baptist entities including the World Mission Conference, hosted by International Ministries and Space for Grace hosted by the American Baptist Home Mission Societies. While there was very little overlap in the attendance of these conferences, it was clear that the participants at each event are happy to be American Baptist and I applaud this model of national ABC events targeted toward specific constituencies.

It was also clear that planning an event “by the whole and for the whole of ABC” leads to experiencing the denomination at the event. This was especially evident in the Radical. Redeemed. Ready. Conference hosted by ABCUSA.

Radical. Redeemed. Ready.

The “Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready.” event was held June 15-18, 2022, immediately following the Board of General Ministries meeting. The planning team spent some time debriefing ways to improve upon events hosted by OGS; as well as, how events can continue to reflect our values. Some of the ways that our ABCUSA values were reflected in this event are shown below:

- High on creativity – the planning team reframed the traditional approach
- Interconnectedness – We engaged many ABC partners who assisted with programming during the Awakenings/Workshops. The presence of men and the leadership of ABC staff from across ABC organizations was appreciated.
- Achievement – Many positive comments were received about how a new space was created for future action and reflection.
- Passion was evident - laying on of hands of women seeking placement was an example.
- Altruism – embracing of the gifts of the women came through. Altruism was embraced when participants were invited to place honor emblems on one another. The significant scholarship amount of \$500 amount made a difference for some to attend.
- Integrity - was a key determinant throughout.

Myanmar

We continue to be involved in aggressive advocacy efforts for Myanmar. I sent letters to Senators Grassley and Ernst in advance of delegation meetings in June. ABCUSA served as a co-sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Summit in June and the workshop was very well received. Dr. Robin Stoops represented ABCUSA at this meeting and indicated that our

workshop was very well received. We are currently focusing advocacy efforts upon key senators: Menendez, Young, Rice, Schumer, McConnell and Cardin. The Burma Advocacy Group has launched a second signature campaign to promote the Burma Act Bill. Advocates are also promoting a Congressional Hearing, United Nations actions, and the possibility of attaching the Burma Act Bill to another Bill in the Senate.

Florence Li and Leslie Turley will be retiring in the next 12 months and both are willing to continue as volunteers on the Burma Refugee Commission. Leslie Turley, Rothangi Chhange, along with several Burmese leaders led a workshop on the situation in Burma for the World Council of Churches on September 1. In preparation for this workshop, we met with the Prime Minister of Myanmar to receive an update. At the request of Zo Tum Mung, I participated in a radio program broadcast into Burma on the night of August 5 that included a radio host, famous Burmese soloists, and other interviews.

Anti-Racism Emphasis

Karen Podsiadly agreed to join the Anti-racism Convening Table along with Paul Higgins to help steer the group toward a proposal for the board. The members of the convening table will be meeting on October 26 to work on the proposal. Participants have found the sharing of various perspectives and experiences on the issue to be rewarding and insightful.

New Task Force: Interpreting the Impact of COVID-19 on Congregations

The task force has met several times and is preparing to conduct a survey of congregations. Some of the overall research indicates that ABC has fared better regarding worship attendance and giving during the pandemic, but not as well as other congregations with respect to education and follow-up with online attendees. 57% of ABC congregations increased attendance during the pandemic and congregations that initiated online giving increased their income by an average of 15%. As a note of concern, 12% of ABC clergy have considered leaving the ministry “fairly often” during the pandemic.

ABCUSA Staff Changes

Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops has been called to serve as Associate General Secretary for Mission Resource Development following the departure of Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri, who is now serving with the American Baptist Home Mission Societies. Dr. Stoops recently completed a certificate in fundraising and has been active on the Burma Refugee Commission. He previously served as Executive Minister for ABC of Nebraska. Christie Farquhar began service with the Office of Travel and Conference Planning on August 2, 2022. Stevens Jules began service with ABCUSA as Associate ABCIS Coordinator and NetSuite Administrator on July 11, 2022.

The Leadership Team held a staff retreat on September 13-14, focusing on team building, assessing progress on the Strategic Transition Plan, and identifying staff needs during the transitional period.

National Executive Council

Louis Barbarin led the NEC in a follow-up discussion from the NLC's work on Silver Linings from the Pandemic. Staff members of NEC organizations are involved in Biennial planning and regularly discuss issues related to the Biennial including Orientation to American Baptist Life, partner sponsorships, and the Mission Table event. The NEC also partners with REMC officers to plan NLC gatherings. NEC leaders expressed appreciation for the presence of the General Secretary at their gatherings.

Orientation to American Baptist Life

After much input from stakeholders, Zina Jacque and Judy Fackenthal announced a rebranding of the Orientation to American Baptist Life. It will now be called, "ENGAGE 2023!" The goal is to explore what it means to *Connect, Equip and Belong* as American Baptists! They are also planning to produce two videos to promote the event and are carefully identifying groups for targeted invitations.

Everyday ABC Conversation

On June 6, 2022 Rev. Josh Sabo and Jill Scalise presented an Everyday ABC Conversation on "Homelessness and the Housing Crisis" and on September 15, Rev. Michael Ware and Rev. Kathryn Ray presented on the topic of "Building Multicultural Bridges." The Theologians Commissions will be responsible for the next conversation on "Advent in a Post-Pandemic World: Rethinking Our Worship." Dr. Marvin McMickle and Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell will be the presenters.

Biennial Mission Summit

The speakers and workshops for the 2023 Biennial Mission Summit are set and the theme for the event is, "For Such a Time as This." All plenary messages will be translated into English or Spanish and a significant portion of the workshops will be presented in Spanish. See the Biennial Mission Summit report for further details.

Regional Ministry

- The Cleveland Baptist Association announced that Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle has been selected to serve as the Interim Regional Executive Minister beginning on August 1, 2022. He will serve for a period of not more than 18 months while a search for a long-term Regional Executive Minister is being conducted.
- The ABC of the Dakotas finalized their search for their next Executive Minister and have called Rev. Dr. Dan Cash to serve the region.
- The ABC of the Great Rivers Region finalized their search for their next Executive Minister.
- Other Executive Minister search committees in process are:
 - ABCGI
 - ABCOPAD
 - ABC of Nebraska

Other Activities

- I participated in the World Mission Conference at Green Lake and was asked to bring greetings on behalf of ABCUSA. It was a great opportunity to expand my knowledge of ABC Missionaries. Rev. Soozi Ford planned the worship services for the event.
- I participated in the ABHMS Space for Grace event Sept 21-23 and was asked to bring greetings on behalf of ABCUSA. It was a great opportunity to engage with ABHMS staff and constituents.
- I attended the World Council of Churches meeting in Karlsruhe, Germany August 30-September 4 and co-led a workshop on the situation in Burma.
- I attended board meetings of the American Baptist Assembly at Green Lake and the American Baptist Foundation.
- I met with the GRR and DAK search committees as they conducted their final round of in-person interviews. I am also in process with the Cleveland Baptist Association search for a new Executive Ministers. Soozi Ford will now staff new EM searches that surface.
- I have had several meetings preparing for and conducting legal depositions. All cases have been tenured to insurance and six cases have been dismissed.

We continue to make progress along the directions outlined in the “Intentional Interim Strategic Plan.” Here a few highlights of our work since last year’s BGM meeting.

Intentional Interim Strategic Plan

The following items listed below, as excerpted from the “Intentional Interim Strategic Plan” have been addressed during the last three months and are either still in process or have been completed.

- Clarify the values that drive Office of the General Secretary procedures. {Completed}
- Design, distribute, collect, and analyze a survey regarding the role of ABCUSA. {Completed}
- Expand the opportunities for Mission Summit Conversation activities through Everyday ABC Conversations. {Completed}
- Expand opportunities for feedback regarding the Biennial, National Leadership Council, Orientation to ABC Life and other key events. {Completed}
- Develop and adopt a process for the General Secretary search process. {Completed}
- Successfully migrate 25 years of data from our internal ABCIS software system to the Oracle NetSuite platform. {In process}
- Provide training and development for Office of the General Secretary staff: {In process}
- Conduct at least one leadership team retreat. {Completed. Annual retreats have been held}
- Strengthen relationships with regional and national partners. {In process}
- Clarify expectations for new BGM members and incorporate those expectations into ABCUSA Nominating Committee documents. {Completed}
- Strengthen relationships among BGM members. {In process}
- Enhance the process for orientation of new BGM members {Completed}
- Conduct a gift assessment of BGM members {In process}

- Review and adopt a set of best practices for nonprofit boards{In process}
- Encourage each ABCUSA committee to clarify the responsibilities and benefits of serving on their respective committees. {In process}
- Host a successful virtual Biennial Mission Summit and build upon its momentum. {In process}

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