

2009 Biennial Minutes

EVENING GATHERING, FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2009

7:00 – 9:00 PM

WORSHIP

1. Attendees were greeted by the music of a Mariachi Band playing outside as they arrived. Pre-session music in the Civic Center was provided by the Stock Brothers.
2. At 7:00 PM, the 2009 Biennial Meeting was called to order by the President, Mary Armacost Hulst, who reported that there were 752 registered delegates as of 6:30 this evening, and the quorum would be 251. She reported that the minutes of the 2007 Biennial were approved by the 2007 Biennial Program Committee and are available on the ABCUSA website.
3. Mary Hulst called for a vote on the Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of the 2009 Biennial Meeting of Delegates. There was no discussion, and the Rules were adopted.
4. Mary Hulst called for a vote on the Rules of Procedure for the Statements of Concern. There was no discussion, and the Rules were adopted.
5. Jeff Savage, Chair of the 2009 Biennial Program Committee, moved the adoption of the provisional program as printed in the Program Book, subject to further changes that the Committee on Order of Business might recommend, and that the Biennial Program Committee be designated as the Committee on Order of Business. There was no discussion, and the motion carried.
6. Dennis Johnson, pastor of Baptist Temple in Charlestown, WV, was introduced as Parliamentarian.
7. Mary Hulst announced that information will be shared by the General Board at the Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon gatherings.
8. Mary Hulst announced that the Report of the ABC Nominating Committee will be considered on Sunday afternoon. If any one would like to make a nomination from the floor, they must notify the ABCUSA President by 2:00 PM on Saturday. Similarly, if anybody would like to propose a future Bylaws amendment, notice of that intent must be made through the ABCUSA office by Saturday at 2:00 PM. Finally, those who would like to speak to the Bylaws proposal or any other item of business need to register their intent to do so through the ABCUSA office.
9. The Mariachi Band processed into the room and led us in an opening song.

10. Sam Chetti, Executive Minister of ABCLA, Walter Clarke, President of ABCLA, and Bonnie Stevens, Co-Chair of the Local Arrangements Committee, welcomed us to their region. Bill Bogaard, Mayor of Pasadena, welcomed us to Pasadena.
11. An opening video was presented, followed by congregational singing led by the Biennial Worship Team.
12. Mary Hulst reminded us that, after the resurrection, Jesus' followers knew him by his hands and his feet. Today people will know him by our hands and feet. The Biennial Worship Team led us in the singing of *St. Theresa's Prayer*, based on the writings of St. Theresa of Avila.
13. Catherine Cordle presented a mime to the reading of 1 Cor. 12:12-26.
14. Roy Medley, General Secretary of ABCUSA, reviewed with us some of the many ways that our American Baptist forebears served as the hands and feet of Christ to the world. Then he and Virginia Holmstrom of American Baptist Women's Ministries celebrated the full funding of the Breaking the Chains project, going over our goal by almost \$100,000 in two years.
15. Mary Hulst interviewed Susan Gillies, Executive Minister of ABC of Nebraska, a region of 54 churches. Gillies shared, "Renewal is happening because we focus on the joy of the Lord being our strength." A closing prayer of blessing was voiced by Charles Gregory, First Baptist Church, Broken Bow, NE and General Board member from ABC of Nebraska.
16. Valoria Cheek, representing one of our corporate sponsors, American Baptist Extension Corporation, told of their ministry as they celebrate 50 years of service. A DVD celebrating the ministry was shared.
17. Reid Trulson called for the offering to support volunteer ministry. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, offered the prayer of dedication. The Stock Brothers provided the offertory music.
18. Nick Carter, President, Andover Newton Theological School, introduced our speaker.
19. Jacqueline Colbert provided special music.
20. Kirk Byron Jones, our main speaker for the evening, shared with us from Matthew 12:9-13, in which the man with a withered hand was told, "Stretch out your hand." The call to stretch is a divine, gentle dare to each of us. Genuine stretching is risky. With Jesus, it is worth the risk.
21. Daryl Walker opened our time of communion with music. Mary Hulst, Roy Medley, Elisai Echevarria, youth representative from ABC of Connecticut, and

Abby Reyes, youth representative from Evergreen Baptist Association, led us in a service of communion, with music by the Biennial Worship Team.

22. Worship was closed with the singing of *For the Healing of the Nations*.

23. The benediction was brought by Eduardo Font, ABCLA.

MORNING GATHERING, SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2009

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

WORSHIP

24. Gathering music was provided by Ivo Oliveira. Brad Berglund welcomed all to this time of worship, especially our youth, and introduced John Polite, who led the Biennial Worship Team for this service.

25. The session was opened with a video.

26. The Biennial Worship Team led us in singing, followed by a video.

27. Felix Munezero, youth representative from the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Casey Howard, youth representative from ABC of Nebraska, and Antonio Lombardi, youth representative from ABC of Rhode Island, went through the audience, asking individuals how they would be the hands and feet of Christ.

28. Carmen Chavez performed an interpretive dance to *Give Me Your Eyes*.

29. Marisol Martinez shared her experiences as a local church leader. She shared of a time when she braided the hair of a young girl with head lice, and the power of that experience for each of them. Each of us is called to touch those who are hurting; each of us has hurting people living in our neighborhoods.

30. Annette Kakimoto introduced the offering to support local Biennial expenses. Ken Medema provided the offertory music.

31. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, presented the Edwin T. Dahlberg Peace Award to Thomas Adams of Detroit, Michigan, founder of the Chance For Life Organization, a prison ministry.

32. Mary Hulst interviewed Paul Martin, President of the American Baptist Seminary of the West, and Kevin Eichner, President of Ottawa University. John Williams, Executive Minister of ABC of Central Region, offered a prayer of blessing on these and all ABC colleges, universities and seminaries.

33. The Biennial Worship Team led us in singing. Jestine Ware read the scripture passage from Galatians 2:19b-20.

34. A video introduced Nick Vujicic, our main speaker for the morning. Nick shared about the physical challenges with which he was born, and then challenged each of us to examine our own lives. What is the point of being whole on the outside if you are broken on the inside? God has given gifts to each of us. Our choice is to be angry with God for what he has not given, or thankful for what he has given. When you add “go” to “disable” you get “God is able.” Each of us must pray, thank God, and trust God. Nick then offered an invitation, to which a number of attendees responded.
35. The Biennial Worship Team led us in a closing song.
36. Jason Petty of The Spoken Word led us in the benediction.

AFTERNOON GATHERING, JUNE 27, 2009

3:00 – 5:00 PM

DISCERNMENT SESSION

37. Mary Hulst welcomed the delegates to this session and opened with prayer.
38. Reid Trulson, Executive Director of International Ministries, shared some of their work, reminding attendees of the rich history and continuing mission of the organization. He also introduced a new video, *IM Overview: Connecting with Churches, Strengthening Mission*.
39. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, Executive Director of National Ministries, shared some of their work, including More Than a Week and Katrina relief.
40. Mary Hulst thanked the Biennial Boosters for their financial support.
41. Mary Hulst presented a brief summary of the proposed amended Bylaws. Under the new structure, some things will remain the same, some things will end, and some new things will begin.

What Would Remain the Same:

- ABC commitment to a gospel based mission
- ABC commitment to the local church
- Representation is still important, though not in the same ways
- National Boards: NM, IM, MMBB

What Would End:

- Legislation as the primary emphasis in our governance
- Large numbers in our board structures
- Interlocking board structures
- General Board concept
- Statements of Concern and General Board passed resolutions and Policy Statements

What Would Be New:

- Mission Summit and Mission Table
- Development of diverse leadership pool
- Board of General Ministries
- Mission as our primary emphasis
- Smaller boards chosen for skills and diversity; greater use of technology to facilitate meetings resulting in reduced costs
- Ability to respond more quickly to mission opportunities
- Public Witness Statements begun by a covenanting partner, affirmed by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the other partners

42. George Tooze, Thom Lacy, Annie Marie LeBarbour and Steve Van Ostran each shared their perspectives on the proposals:

- George Tooze, President of the MMBB Board, reminded delegates that MMBB holds over \$2 billion of their assets, with the future of 17,000 families at stake. The new Bylaws would allow MMBB to get the specialized skills and giftedness that they need on the Board to best meet these responsibilities.
- Annie Marie LeBarbour, President of the NM Board, reported that the NM Board strongly supports the proposed Bylaws because it would provide new freedom for the Board. This would be freedom to concentrate on the strategic mission of NM and to manage the governance of NM. It would NOT be freedom from ABC. NM is still working on its new Bylaws, which would be discussed, revised and voted on in November.
- Thom Lacy, President of the IM Board, asked delegates to support the proposed Bylaws. Having independent governance will allow each agency to resolve problems more quickly, and would allow Board members to focus on only one Board. IM has a draft of its new Bylaws, which will be adopted this fall if this motion carries.
- Steve Van Ostran, Executive Minister of ABC of Rocky Mountains, shared that these proposed Bylaws would allow our denomination to reclaim its heritage of emphasis on mission. The Mission Summit and Mission Table concepts are a move to the future, allowing the local church to move to the forefront of denominational life. The new Bylaws would also allow the Boards to recruit the expertise they need from among us.

43. Frank Christine, Jr., Vice President of ABCUSA, made the following motion: “On behalf of the General Board, I move the adoption of the proposed ABC Bylaws as amended (document 1006:6/07; draft dated 11/04/08) as mailed to all cooperating churches and as posted on the ABCUSA website, and the election of the slate of Directors.” Coming from the General Board, the motion does not require a second.

44. Mary Hulst invited delegates to ask any questions for clarification that they might have. The following delegates spoke:

- Joseph Gratzel, First Baptist Church, Manasquan, NJ, asked how many votes are needed to adopt the new Bylaws. Mary Hulst responded that it requires a 2/3 majority.
- Dwight Stinnett, Executive Minister of ABC of Great Rivers Region, asked for clarification on Class B directors. Do we have assurances that they will be on the Boards? Aidsand Wright-Riggins of National Ministries responded that NM has been in existence since 1832, and helped birth the Northern Baptist Convention. In 1907, NM committed to continue its connection to ABC, and nothing has changed that commitment.
- Melinda Welton-Mitchell, First Baptist Church, Framingham, MA, asked for the list of Directors on which we will be voting. Roy Medley and Mary Hulst replied that the list was available at registration and on the website, and they distributed the few copies that were left. Roy added that almost all have previous experience on the General Board, and he read the list aloud.
- Gordon Swan, First Baptist Church, Newton Center, MA, asked why we have only one vote on both the Bylaws and the slate of Directors. Additionally, he felt that it is very difficult to understand what we are voting on, with the huge number of pages in the amended Bylaws. David Knipel, replied that the new Bylaws will take effect on January 1, 2010, and Directors must be in place at that time. Mary Hulst reminded the delegates that the new proposals were mailed to every church 90 days before the meeting, posted on the website, detailed in a learning experience yesterday, and distributed in hard copy here in Pasadena. If specific questions remain, we are happy to answer them today.
- Dianne Steelman, Columbia Baptist Church, Cincinnati, OH, asked why the list of Directors contains no nominee from Ohio. Roy Medley replied that the slot is there, waiting to be filled. The timing would have required the Executive Minister from Ohio to appoint somebody, and Ohio chose to wait to elect somebody.
- Carol Day, Union Baptist Church, Mystic, CT, shared that she only received the CD from her church within the last week. Is there a flow chart reporting the number of members on each Board? The Board of General Ministries will have 45 members. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, of National Ministries reported that their Bylaws are still being developed, but they are looking at a Board of fifteen to nineteen members. Reid Trulson of International Ministries reported that they are looking at seventeen or more.
- Rhonda Cushman of Calvary Baptist Church, Norristown, PA, said that she was elected a Biennial delegate just two weeks ago. She has been trying to understand the new proposals, but does not. In broad strokes, what does this do? Mary Hulst referred her back to the list presented earlier of what will stay the same, what will end, and what will be new. Jeff Woods of the Office of the General Secretary said that this proposal attempts to give each Board the ability to have a sharper focus on their

mission. There is also an avenue for grass roots efforts through the Mission Summit and Mission Table.

- Jeff Cooper of First Baptist Church, Twin Falls, ID, asked how we will do legislation. Mary Hulst replied that the Board of General Ministries will have this function. Jeff Woods added that the policies already passed will remain in effect, and any future policy can be proposed through any covenanting partner, including the regions.
- Susan Gillies, Executive Minister of ABC of Nebraska, said that she understands that if this passes the program Boards will vote on their Bylaws in November, and these must be approved by the General Board. What would happen if the General Board could not approve the new Bylaws for IM, NM and MMBB? David Knipel replied that if the General Board does not approve the Bylaws of the program Boards, these would go back to the program Boards for revision. However, this process must be complete by December 31, 2009.
- Rick Newton, First Baptist Church, Cheshire, MA, asked why we need to de-couple the Boards now. Roy Medley replied that the complexity of having General Board members also serve as program Board members results in unnecessary challenges for the Board members. This is a difficult role to get right.
- Thomas Burnett, youth representative, First Baptist Church, Salt Lake City, UT, asked how this helps to represent youth. Youth representatives are not required under the new system. Mary Hulst replied that the Nominating Committee is required to address diversity issues, and age is a diversity factor. Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, added that this new system will allow more people who are younger and working to find time to serve on the Boards.
- Laurie Sweigard, Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA, suggested that our center as a denomination has always been mission. What in our current structure prevents the Mission Summit and Mission Table from occurring? Mary Hulst replied that these proposals give it strength and broad the input. Jeff Woods added that it is difficult to change culture without changing structures and systems. Marcia Patton added that the new proposal adds a focus on the local church that is not there now.

45. Mary Hulst reminded the delegates of the time limitation of 5 minutes per speaker that was adopted on Friday evening, and informed them that Tim April, General Board member from Upper Merion Baptist Church, King of Prussia, PA, will be timing the remarks. The following individuals, who had registered to speak, shared their thoughts about the proposal:

- Grant Ward, Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA, Philadelphia Baptist Association spoke against the motion, reading a statement that the church adopted in its recent business meeting. In part, it stated, “Our principal concern regards the provisions of the new by-laws that transform all existing resolutions and policy statements into “Public Witness Statements” of the ABCUSA, and that set a higher threshold to rescind

- Curtis Price, Wedgwood Community Church, Seattle, WA, Evergreen Baptist Association spoke in favor of the proposal. As a representative from the newest ABC region, and one of the most ethnically diverse, he is looking for a structure in which all voices are heard. Our ethnic caucuses are significant, and bring a richness of diversity that helps us all.
- June Totten, Riverside Baptist Church, Washington, DC, DC Baptist Convention spoke against the motion, sharing a concern that the document is unfinished. She agrees that there is a need for re-structure, but this proposal leaves too many unanswered questions. We need to continue to seek the mind of Christ together, not in separate bodies, and retain the ability to speak as one voice.
- Michael Harvey, First Baptist Church, Worcester, MA, ABC of Massachusetts, spoke in opposition, with a concern that we need a process in which important issues can be talked about with respect for every person. We need to let structure flow from the process of intentional dialogue.
- George Hancock-Stefan, Central Baptist Church, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, ABC of New Jersey, spoke against the proposal, sharing four points of concern. Baptist polity is built on a congregational model, and this proposal is a different model. This new proposal is top heavy with paid staff and special groups. It is inappropriate for us to adopt this without seeing the NM and IM documents. Finally, it is a bad idea to adopt Bylaws with the idea that they will be “tweaked” later.

There being no additional registered speakers, a ballot vote was taken.

46. Robert Hendrix, First Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, OH, ABC of Ohio, made a motion to amend Article X, Section 1(d) of the amended Bylaws to ask each region to elect one person to the Board of General Ministries rather than nominating five individuals. The motion was seconded by Benjamin Marte, First Baptist Church, Los Angeles, CA. In presenting his motion, Robert Hendrix pointed out that the new Bylaws were presented to us as an imperfect document. We will need to continue to tweak it as we go along. This is a tweak he feels to be important. Rather than asking each region for five names, we should empower the regions to elect their representative, trusting that the diversity needs will take care of themselves. There being no additional speakers, a ballot vote was taken. If passed, this motion will be referred to the General Board for action.
47. Irma Gomez, President, and Roberto Dieppa, Executive Minister of Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico brought an invitation to attend the 2011 Biennial Meeting in Puerto Rico.

48. Mary Hulst closed the session in prayer, asking special prayer for Brad Berglund's son, Brandon, who is experiencing a medical crisis that has required Brad to return to Denver.

MORNING GATHERING, JUNE 28, 2009

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

WORSHIP

49. The West Virginians provided music as the delegates and participants gathered. J. Michael Clyburn, President of Alderson-Broaddus College, said a few words.
50. The session was opened with a video.
51. The Biennial Worship Team led us in opening songs.
52. The Light Unlimited Drama Ministry of First Baptist Church, N. Hollywood, presented our scripture from Philippians 2.
53. The Rainbow Acres Rancher Choir presented special music.
54. Mary Hulst and Roy Medley presented the Sparrowk President's Award to Robert and Margene Phares, who responded briefly.
55. National Ministries shared a story of transformation through "home mission." Aidsand Wright-Riggins, III, told the story of a declining church in Phoenix which, with support from National Ministries, has turned itself around. The story was told through slides and video.
56. The Anointed Spirit presented special music.
57. Marie Onwubuariri shared of her experiences in her local church. After seminary, she was called to a church with the reputation of being "difficult." Actually, they were in need of a pastor who loves them. She was the church's first female and the first non-white pastor. Now, the church has grown and become ethnically diverse. It is serving as the hands and feet of Christ in its community, and ministries have exploded. This church has found that love of Jesus is the key to success.
58. Thomas Miller sang a song of response.
59. Victoria Goff introduced the offering, to go to the Habitat build occurring in the Mission Fair, and offered the prayer of dedication. The West Virginians provided the offertory music.
60. Roy Medley reminded us that the discernment session this afternoon would be in Ballrooms D & E, and that tonight's worship would be at First Baptist, Pasadena.

61. Roy Medley introduced Emmett Dunn of the Baptist World Alliance, who brought greetings and invited us all to attend the World Congress, July 28 – August 1, 2010 in Honolulu.
62. One of our corporate sponsors, the Christian Community Credit Union, shared of their ministry through a video.
63. Mary Hulst interviewed Saw Yi Hla Gabriel and Has Mu Htaw, guests from the Myanmar Baptist Convention. Paul Lewis, retired missionary to Burma and Thailand, offered the prayer of blessing.
64. International Ministries shared a story of transformation through “international mission.” Reid Trulson reminded us that Jesus transforms us through our service, not as a pre-requisite to service. Missionary Support Networks allow churches to partner with our IM missionaries around the world. A video shared the blessings of these partnerships to both the churches and the missionaries.
65. The Hula Ministry of Trinity Missionary Baptist Church, Honolulu, HI, performed for us.
66. Roy Medley introduced our speaker.
67. The LA Mass Celebration Choir, led by Tedd Szeto, provided special music.
68. David Coffey, President of the Baptist World Alliance, was our keynote speaker. He reminded us that church challenges are not new; Philippians was written to address disputes and quarrels in a local congregation. The genius of Christianity is not in great programs, but in a great Savior. If we are to be the hands and feet of Christ to a broken world, we must have the mind of Christ, and we must loosen our grip on power and privilege. Each of us must take the greatest and best thing in our lives and offer it to Christ.
69. After a closing hymn, Steve Hasper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pasadena, led us in the benediction.

AFTERNOON GATHERING, JUNE 28, 2009

2:45 – 4:45 PM

DISCERNMENT SESSION

70. Mary Hulst welcomed the delegates and led in prayer.
71. Brenda Fluker, Chair of the ABCUSA Nominating Committee, brought the following slate of officers for our consideration: President - Frank Christine, Second Baptist Church, Los Angeles, CA; Vice President – Patricia Stratton,

Bowdoinham Second Baptist Church, Bowdoinham, ME; Budget Review Officer – James Ratliff, The Riverhead Baptist Church, Valley Stream, NY. These are all nominated for terms from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2011. There were no nominations from the floor, and a ballot vote was taken.

72. Mary Hulst announced that the vote yesterday on the Bylaws amendments were 377 in favor, 217 opposed and 20 abstentions. The motion fails and the new Bylaws are not adopted. Therefore, we must consider the motion from the General Board setting the number of Regionally Nominated Representatives at 68 for both 2010 and 2011; and that the number of Nationally Nominated Representatives be fixed at 22 for both 2010 and 2011, resulting in a total General Board of 102 in both 2010 and 2011. These totals include the standard 12 ex officio or designated Representatives. Delegates voted by holding up the green ballot and the motion carried.
73. Mary Hulst reviewed the process of considering the Statements of Concern. Patti Stratton, Chair of the committee, presented the Statement of Concern on Neighborhoods of Grace in a Culture of Fear with a video based on Hebrews 13:1-3. She moved the adoption of the Statement on behalf of the committee and set 20 minutes as the time limit for consideration. Joyce Kellam, Vice Chair of the committee, spoke in favor of its adoption. There were no additional speakers registered to speak. Delegates voted by holding up the orange ballot and the motion carried.

**Statement of Concern
on
Building Neighborhoods of Grace in a Culture of Fear**

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” Hebrews 13: 1-3 NRSV

We in the 21st century are facing social challenges that are similar to those that have haunted us in the past. With displacement due to natural disasters, famine, and war, as well as immigration for economic advancement, people are resettling in the United States in ways that both enhance and disrupt established communities. The resulting diversity in the local population and the pressures on the educational and social infrastructures have led to increasing tensions and conflicts. This has been particularly difficult for some who believe that cultural stereotypes have been used against them in the “war on terrorism.” Others have been marginalized by their perceived resistance to integrate into the larger culture. It is our concern that advances made in civil rights and social justice may not be equally shared, especially among those who now are commonly viewed as “threats” to our society.

For Christians, hospitality is an expression of grace. Our vision and sense of community is also global, as the gospel is preached and lived throughout the world. As Peter discovered in being hosted by Cornelius (Acts 10), resident prejudices are transformed by an awareness of God’s presence in previously “despised” people. We are constantly challenged to see the image of God in the stranger as well as in our neighbor. As followers of Christ, this encourages us to be guided by the inspiration of our faith to view those in our immediate communities and around the world in a loving and hospitable way, and to resist the temptation to use stereotypes and submit to a fear

of the “enemy.” The God we serve is the creator of all; our service in Christ must be directed toward friend and stranger alike.

Likewise, the biblical call to love our enemies and to treat our neighbors with respect and care is clear. Whether we draw our inspiration from the stories of Jesus or the example of Joseph to his brothers (Genesis 50:19-20), or from the inclusive and ethnically-embracing model of the early church, we are led to help create a culture of mercy and neighborhoods of grace—to build bridges of understanding and hope to overcome barriers of hostility and hatred in this conflicted world. In the process, we can be open to the way God strengthens the body of Christ by the presence of diverse people, ideas and cultures. We are guided by what Christ envisions the universal church to be (Revelation 7:9-10), rather than by what the world around us expects when strangers come into our midst.

As American Baptists we can respond to this call by building neighborhoods of grace. We can work locally to assist in refugee resettlement, to bring diverse peoples together in dialogue and community service, to advocate for those who are victims of hate crimes and bigotry, and to aid those who are seeking to follow their own hopes and aspirations and find their place at the “American table.”

We call upon American Baptists, as individuals and congregations, to:

- Reflect on and affirm Jesus’ commandment to respond charitably to our neighbors by being cognizant of social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place in our churches, neighborhoods, communities and country;
- Express hospitality and support to those who have been displaced or who are resettling into our communities;
- Educate and equip ourselves to engage people, who are religiously, culturally and ethnically diverse, through suitable programs for improved mutual understanding;
- Learn, develop and apply the skills of greeting others, initiating conversation and developing friendships, while growing in our understanding of cultural differences;
- Welcome all people with Christ’s compassion in the expectation that we may be entertaining angels unaware.

74. Patti Stratton presented the Statement of Concern on Poverty Amidst Prosperity Call to Economic Justice with a video based on Amos 5:24. She moved the adoption of the Statement on behalf of the committee and set 20 minutes as the time limit for consideration. Douglas Tatreau, a member of the committee, spoke in favor of the Statement. There were no additional speakers registered. Delegates voted by holding up the gold ballot, and the motion carried.

Poverty Amidst Prosperity: A Call to Recommitment to Economic Justice

The specter of poverty continues to haunt the world’s most prosperous nation. When the Bible tells us that “there will never cease to be some in need on the earth” (Deuteronomy 15:11 NRSV), it is calling us to be mindful of the condition and struggle of the marginalized. That’s why in the same verse we are commanded, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” The presence of poverty should not diminish the value and importance of all God’s people, nor should anyone be subject to another because of the power and influence that are derived from wealth (James 2:5-7). We are called to be faithful to Christ’s commandment to love one another and to honor the demands of God to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God” (Micah 6:8 NRSV). Since 1975, American Baptists have corporately lifted up the plight of poor people and stated our concerns about the residual effects of economic injustice upon the social and spiritual fabric of our society.

The United States needs to keep the issue of poverty and economic justice on the top of its agenda. In his second inaugural address (1937), President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." Today the gap between the haves and the have-nots in America is widening and the middle class is shrinking. Individuals and households are facing financial crises (many for the first time) due to sudden unemployment or unmanageable debt. As one commentator has noted, "The [American] dream is in grave danger because the ruling elite stopped looking out for the collective interests of the society and all but stopped investing in the future. We are swimming in a vast sea of indebtedness, most of it bringing no worthwhile return" (Bob Herbert, *New York Times*, March 11, 2008).

American Baptists can continue our moral legacy on economic justice by bringing current challenges into focus, including the following:

- Predatory lending practices, coupled with unrestricted interest rate charges, that place millions of people at economic risk;
- Trends in which public assistance purchasing power fails to keep pace with the rising cost of living;
- A continuing decline in the quality of public education, which diminishes the economic and social future of our children, especially those who cannot afford private or parochial education;
- Reduced funding and access to education, health care, food, shelter, employment training and transportation for persons living in need.

American Baptists are urged to "put feet on their prayers" on behalf of our poor and needy neighbors. It is imperative that we influence our political and socioeconomic processes to honor the dignity and value of all our neighbors. As Jesus defined his own call to ministry "to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18, NRSV), let us hear and respond to the call.

Therefore, we call on American Baptists, individually and collectively, to serve God's purposes by:

- Advocating for economic justice on the local, state and national level while listening to those who feel their voices are unheard or ignored amidst the clamor of political agendas;
- Lifting our prophetic voices against the predatory practices that create perpetual indebtedness, which amounts to usury;
- Identifying available resources to assist those facing financial difficulties;
- Encouraging responsibility for personal financial management;
- Becoming aware and supportive of persons going through difficult times resulting from chronic and crisis-based poverty;
- Making moral commitments through our budgets (family, church, state and national) to ensure the just treatment of all people.

75. More than one hundred and fifty signatures having been secured, a signature statement on The Importance of the Public Square in American Baptist Life was presented by David Gregg, Grace Baptist Church, ABC of Metro Chicago. Patti Stratton set 20 minutes for debate. The following individuals spoke to this statement:

- David Gregg shared his concern that the new Bylaws would eliminate Statements of Concern. Since Public Witness Statements would be addressed only region by region, there would be no opportunity to address these as a family.

- Alice Greene, Irving Park Baptist Church, Chicago, said that we need to speak out on issues of importance. Just because topics are divisive or can be hurtful does not mean that we should not discuss them.
- Tripp Hudgins, Community Church, Wilmette, IL, reminded the delegates that the power of the Baptist tradition is the power and potency of shared dialogue. We need to make room for public conversation.
- Gordon Swan, First Baptist Church, Newton Center, MA, emphasized the viability of the local church, which is central to our identity. The new Bylaws give the regions too much power.

On the Public Witness of American Baptists

We Delegates have come to this Biennial Convention facing again the perennial question of how to structure our denomination. Our free-church polity gives us a nimbleness in the face of historical change, empowering and requiring frequent reevaluation, finding a new structure that addresses new challenges with the abiding truths of the Gospel according to the basic tenets of free church polity. The new structure before us responds creatively to the complex challenges of pastoral ministry, evangelism and prophetic engagement in our nation and world at the dawn of this new century. We acknowledge also that this new structure emerges from the shadow of the strife and dissention in our denominational life over the past few decades. We have disagreed with one another over a variety of interconnected doctrinal issues, including: ordination; evangelism; the authority of scripture; human sexuality; the tensions of inclusiveness; the independence and mutual accountability of local churches, regions and national bodies; and the nature of church health and outreach. Our disagreements have, as they often do in our tradition, been taken up in public debate, and on occasion have erupted into bitterness. Feelings have been hurt by and on every side of every issue, by hard and heavy words spoken from the dais, and the unity of our body has been strained by uncharitable and intemperate words in open debate. As happens in our proudly democratic tradition, which assumes every believer to have something of worth to offer, our recent public debates have sometimes shed more infernal heat than gospel light.

To some degree, every restructuring “fights the last war,” so to speak, and so every restructuring risks over-compensating for the difficulties of its recent history. Our last restructuring (1970s) over-compensated for its own recent past by vesting great authority for policy in the General Board, diminishing the role of the Biennial Convention in debating the major issues. Unfortunately, the bylaws under consideration at this convention likewise over-compensate in their provisions for “Public Witness Statements”. Under these new provisions, statements about important issues of faith, identity, evangelism and justice are voted on region-by-region, requiring a supermajority of three quarters of the region and national program boards to pass (27 out of 36 boards). *These Public Witness Statements will never be discussed or debated at the Biennial Convention or in any other single forum where all of us are represented*, depriving us all of the wisdom of our sisters and brothers and of the opportunity to forge a denomination-wide agreement. Worse still, the voices of the minority are silenced utterly: there is no provision under this system for minority opinions to be aired or their votes to be recorded. As Biennial Delegates, we believe this to weaken our common life.

Our recent strife has not obviated our need for a public arena. Like the public squares of old, where many of our forbears on their soap boxes evangelized individuals and called princes and principalities to account, American Baptists need a place where we can all gather to hear news from other precincts, to be comforted by a strange word of grace and to be challenged by a new prophetic voice. We need a common way to address the most important questions of our day, at least provisionally, for that current moment. We need to hear together the clear wisdom in the

voice of the majority, as well as the important dissent of some minority that may in the long run be proven right. We need a way to discern together what we stand for in response to the new call of the Spirit from the still, small voice, from the ancient words of Scripture and tradition and from the deep cries of the least of these, our brothers and sisters. At our best, our public debate has testified boldly to the prophetic and transformative Gospel of Jesus Christ, in which we are commanded both to assert the claims of conscience and to love each other more deeply than mere agreement. At our best, this is how we forge the general outlines of our common life together.

Although we are weary of our recent theological disputes, half deafened by a public clamor too loud with contention and too meek in celebration, we also acknowledge this inescapable lesson of our history: denominational challenges requiring a broad response, forged in the open by the raised voices of the whole, will surely again arise. In such a moment, it is a necessary privilege to reason together to discern the mind of Christ for the denomination. Though mindful of the risks of open debate, we recognize this as our way, the way we forge resolution and move forward. Therefore, we delegates to this Biennial Convention of 2009 challenge ourselves and our denominational leaders going forward to reevaluate the provisions under the new structure for Public Witness Statements, making space for the public registration of minority dissent and finding ways to extend discernment about these matters beyond the regional level back to the Biennial Conventions, where they ultimately belong.

76. Mary Hulst announced that the General Board has re-elected Roy Medley for a third term as General Secretary. Roy Medley reminded us that Jesus was an out of the box leader. Four hundred years ago, Baptists were out of the box, and birthed a new denomination, based on the idea that the worth of the individual is a higher value than institutions. Some of them paid with their lives for their statements. We need to remember that God calls us from convenient love to the sacrificial love of neighbor. Our duty goes well beyond no harm to our neighbor; we must have a thirst for justice, a hunger for righteousness and a radical love for our neighbor.
77. Following a video on United Mission, Leo Thorne recognized the following churches for their leadership in UM giving:
- Prairie Baptist Church, Prairie Village, Kansas – 1st in Total UM giving
 - Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, Huntington, West Virginia – 2nd in Total UM giving
 - Primera Iglesia Bautista de Carolina, Carolina, Puerto Rico – 3rd in Total UM giving
 - First Baptist Church of Champaign-Savoy, Savoy, Illinois – 4th in Total UM giving
 - South Parkersburg Baptist Church, Parkersburg, West Virginia – 5th in Total UM giving
 - Primera Iglesia Bautista de Carolina, Carolina, Puerto Rico – largest increase in total UM giving among all Hispanic congregations
 - Park Windsor Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California – largest increase in total UM giving among all African-American congregations

78. There being no further business to come before us, Mary Hulst declared the meeting to be in recess until our gathering this evening at First Baptist Church, Pasadena.

EVENING GATHERING, JUNE 28, 2009

7:00 – 9:00 PM

WORSHIP

79. Opening music was played by the Biennial Worship Team as the delegates and participants gathered, followed by a brief organ prelude.
80. Roy Medley thanked Sam Chetti, Executive Minister of ABCLA and ABCOSH, and Walter Clarke and Bonnie Stevens, Co-Chairs of the Local Arrangements Committee, the region of ABCLA and ABCOSH, and the many volunteers that made this meeting possible. He thanked Tedd Szeto for filling in for Brad Berglund in leadership of the Worship Team during this time of medical crisis for Brad's son, Brandon. He shared a special thanks to Jeff Savage and the Biennial Program Committee for the excellent work that they did.
81. Roy Medley introduced Jimmy Allen, Coordinator of the New Baptist Covenant, who brought greetings and shared the ongoing progress of this important movement.
82. Roy Medley introduced Jerome King del Pino, General Secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, who brought greetings. Roy read a portion of a formal letter of greeting sent by the Methodist bishop.
83. Richard Ice shared the ministry of American Baptist Homes of the West, one of our corporate sponsors.
84. We viewed the opening video, followed by music with the Biennial Worship Team.
85. Jamie Washam, pastor of Underwood Memorial Baptist Church in Wausatosa, WI, read the scripture.
86. Sherry Duke Williams of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta sang *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*.
87. Mary Hulst interviewed Linda and Jim Dahn of Westhaven Baptist Church, Port Huron, MI, who are long-time volunteers with National Ministries. Peter Wolf, a past president of National Ministries, offered a prayer of blessing.
88. Jeffrey Johnson presented the New Life Award to the Revs. David and Maureen Freshour, who both responded.

89. Roy Medley introduced Rick Warren, who brought greetings and welcomed us to California.
90. Jeff Woods introduced our new regional ministers: Stephen Bilz, ABC of Oregon; Leonard Thompson, Cleveland Baptist Association; Steven Van Ostran, ABC of the Rocky Mountains; and John Williams, ABC of the Central Region.
91. Mary Hulst announced the newly elected ABCUSA officers, Frank Christine, Patricia Stratton and James Ratliff. Frank Christine, newly elected President, shared his thanks and asked for our prayer support for his leadership. William Epps, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles and Frank's pastor, brought a prayer of dedication.
92. Tedd Szeto led the congregation in a hymn written by Nancy Hall, *Hark! The Voice of Jesus Calling*.
93. Ed Rogers shared about his ministry in his local church. When he first went to the church, he felt like an expert. Then he learned what God can do when we stop being experts and let him take over. God requires us to take the inward transformation that Jesus brings and share it with others. Ed challenged us to go be the hands and feet of Christ and watch what God does.
94. Hank Pederson, Chair of the World Relief Committee, and Sam Chetti of ABCLA brought the call for the offering to support One Great Hour of Sharing and the Omega Project, an ABCLA program aimed at youth. Lisa Rothenberger shared the details of three OGHS projects. Sam Chetti offered the prayer of dedication. Offertory music was provided by the Biennial Worship Team.
95. Wallace Charles Smith, President of Palmer Theological Seminary and pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, DC, introduced the speaker.
96. The Biennial Worship Team shared special music.
97. Robin Smith was the keynote speaker. Preaching from Psalm 139 and Matthew 22:34-40, she reminded us that our hands and our feet alone are not enough. We must allow Christ to act through us. If we love others as Christ has loved us, his compassion for the world will flow through our hands and feet to those who are hurting.
98. The Biennial Worship Team led us in a song of response, *Let Me Be Your Hands*.
99. Roy Medley thanked Mary Hulst for her leadership and presented her with a small gift.

100. Mary Hulst presented the closing challenge, with scripture read by Madison Hulst and *St. Theresa's Prayer* sung by Anne Comstock and the Calvary Baptist Church Choir, Denver, Colorado.
101. Jeff Savage brought our prayer of benediction.
102. The Calvary Baptist Church Choir joined other musicians in leading the congregation in the singing of *Hallelujah* from Handel's *Messiah*, with organ accompaniment by Kevin Padworski of Calvary Baptist Church. With this powerful music, the 2009 Biennial meeting was adjourned.

REGISTRATION FOR THE 2009 BIENNIAL MEETING (Pasadena, CA)

Registered Delegates:	786
Registered Participants:	540
Musicians/Guests/Staff/Volunteers:	421
Total	<u>1,747</u>

Officers:

Rev. Dr. Mary Armacost Hulst, President, ABCUSA, Centennial, CO
 Frank Christine, Jr., Vice President, ABCUSA, Northridge, CA
 Dr. James R. Ratliff, Budget Review Officer, ABCUSA, East Hampton, NY

2009 Biennial Program Committee:

Rev. Brad Berglund, Centennial, CO
 Rev. Dr. Samuel Chetti, Los Angeles, CA
 Frank Christine, Jr., Northridge, CA
 Walter Clarke, Arleta, CA
 David L. Greenfield, Bloomington, IL
 Rev. Dr. Joseph DeRoulhac, Redlands, CA
 Beverly Fink, Manhattan, KS
 Rev. José Guerra, Bakersfield, CA
 Rev. Dr. Mary Armacost Hulst, Centennial, CO
 Rev. Annette Kakimoto, Gardena, CA
 Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, Valley Forge, PA (Ex Officio)
 Rev. Reginald Mills, Springfield, IL
 Rev. Lauren Ng, San Rafael, CA
 Fred A. Robbins, Kulpville, PA
 Dr. Jeffery Savage, Springfield, OR (Chair)
 G. Elaine Smith, Washington, DC
 Bonnie Stevens, Encino, CA
 Rev. Dr. Douglas Stowers, Atlanta, GA

Staff Advisory Group:

Rev. Dr. Perry J. Hopper, MMBB, Associate Executive Director
Annie Marcucci, Office of the General Secretary, Director, Travel and Conference Planning
Karen Mason, International Ministries, Director of Special Events
Dr. Laura Miraz, National Ministries, Associate Executive Director, Missionary Support Services
Lorie Smith, Office of the General Secretary, Mission Resource Development, Executive Assistant to Biennial Program Coordinator
Rev. Dr. Leo S. Thorne, Associate General Secretary for Mission Resource Development and Biennial Program Coordinator

Production Group:

Rev. Brad Berglund, Worship/Music Coordinator, Centennial, CO
David L. Greenfield, Production Coordinator, Bloomington, IL

Local Arrangements Committee:

Mitzi Casas	Shirley Jiles
Carolyn Chetti	Gina Johnson
Jean Diesto	Jason Laurence
Teena Frazier	Eddie Ledesma
Gussie Harris	Marisol Martinez
Joyce Hasper	Charity Matic
Archie Honrado	John Polite
Douglas Hubbard	Tina Tome
Kathy Hubbard	Jill Torres
Rickey Jefferey	Pamella Walker

Statements of Concern Committee:

David Blythe, Brooklyn, NY
Rev. Solomon Ernst, Sr., Columbus, OH
Rev. Dr. Paul C. Hayes, Noank, CT
Rev. Deborah Hughes, Rochester, NY
Edgir Jean, Irvington, NJ
Joyce Kellam, Brooklyn, NY
Rev. Dr. Dwight Lundgren (Staff)
Dr. Paul M. Martin, Quartz Hill, CA
Patricia Stratton, Bowdoinham, ME
Douglas Tatreau, Weymouth, MA

Biennial Worship Team

Brad Berglund, Coordinator
Steve Arrington, Drums/Percussion
Melanie Burns,
Keyboard/Piano/Organ/Vocals
Randall Burns, Trumpet/Vocals
Frank Colon, Piano/Keyboard/Vocals
Anne Comstock, Vocals
Aprilis Hernandez, Vocals
Justis Kao, Keyboard, Piano, Vocals
Kathy Longhat, Vocals
Steven Mikesell, Bass
Ivo Oliveira, Guitar/Vocals
Tedd Sxeto, Violin/Vocals
Daryl Walker, Piano/Keyboard/Vocals
Pamella Walker, Vocals