



# CONNECTIONS

ABC  
USA

ABCUSA CONNECTIONS is a ministry of ABCUSA. Email the editor at: [bridget.holmstrom@abc-usa.org](mailto:bridget.holmstrom@abc-usa.org)

Spring 2014

## UPDATE

### *Transformed by the Spirit*

*Transformed by the Spirit* is a bold initiative to engage ABC churches and groups to find answers to uncertain questions, to grow and to discern ways in which the Spirit is seeking to invite us to join the movement of God in our changing contexts. How can we do what God is calling us to do?

*Transformed by the Spirit* was initiated in 2012. In phase one, 43 regional and national groups came together across ABC. The intention was to take the learnings from this first phase of *Transformed by the Spirit* and engage congregations on a journey: a journey to discover, a journey to make “adaptive changes,” a journey to take risks to respond to the changing landscape.

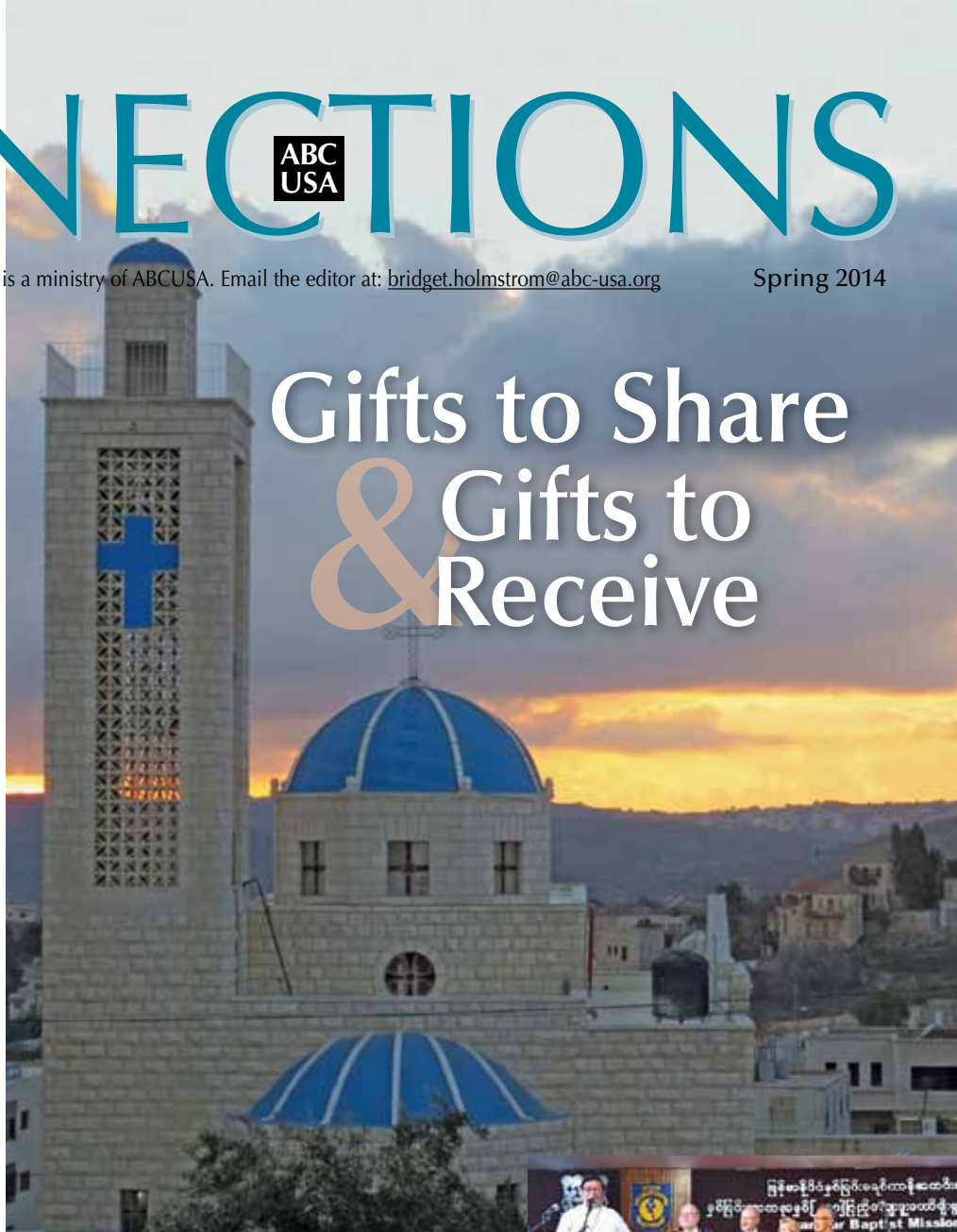
#### ***Transformed by the Spirit: Where are we now?***

We are currently in phase two of the initiative. We are reviewing what worked for the Adaptive Challenge Teams and Action Learning Teams, and what didn't work. We want phase two of *Transformed by the Spirit* to take hold and be even more successful than the first phase! Through both regional and national learnings, our hope is that *Transformed by the Spirit* will bring American Baptist churches the opportunity and means to reach out to their communities and grow in their varying surroundings. In addition, there are now five beta regions: Central Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountains, Great Rivers, Connecticut, and Nebraska. These regions are working with coaches to deepen the work of *Transformed by the Spirit* in several groups of churches in these regions.

*Transformed  
by the Spirit*

Journey/Discovery/Renewal

## Gifts to Share & Gifts to Receive



### ***American Baptists celebrate a tradition of embodying Christ's love through cooperative witness, service and dialogue.***

*By Rich Schramm, Consulting Editor*



ABCUSA General Secretary Roy Medley, International Ministries Executive Director Reid Trulson, ABCUSA past President Ruth Clark and President Don Ng present a Judson bicentennial commemorative plaque to the Myanmar Baptists.

Cooperation has been a hallmark of Baptist life for centuries. It's a concept lived out even by the earliest Baptists, who although empowered by the freedoms of autonomy and soul liberty, opposed the traditional parish mentality and sought to work with other believers to broaden the effectiveness of their outreach into the world.

That commitment to mutual ministries continues today at all levels of American Baptist life. Local congregations find partnering with other Christian bodies often provides opportunities to more dynamically address the *continued on page 2*



Medley travelled to Tbilisi, in the Republic of Georgia, in 2013.



Medley, pictured with Bishop Ilia Osephashvili, the new Archbishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia



Baptist World Alliance board executive committee worship at the ABC Mission Center.

needs and callousness of an increasingly secular society. At the regional, national and international levels as well, vital work in the name of the Gospel has been done ecumenically.

Such partnering has not come without concerns. Some have been “skeptical of ecumenical movements or of interchurch cooperation beyond the most practical sharing of resources in mission or local community activities.” Further, “American Baptists, always at the table for initial discussions of ecumenical endeavors...often struggled with resistance from some within their constituency.”<sup>1</sup> And yet the prayer of Christ for His followers, in their lives and their mission, “that they be one” has long inspired most American Baptists to support—and celebrate—the work likeminded Christians can do together to fulfill the Great Commission.

In the twentieth century that work reflected an emerging global perspective. Northern Baptists supported the formation and objectives of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905, and formally joined as one of its earliest member communions after forming as a denomination in 1907. And in the years following World War II, American Baptists were among those denominations fulfilling the mandate of Acts 1:8 by launching the far-reaching ministries of the World Council of Churches (1948) and National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (1950). In all these endeavors—and countless ecumenical partnerships at regional and

local levels—American Baptists have committed themselves both to cooperative ministries of outreach and justice and to maintaining our historically distinctive beliefs as a Christ-centered tradition in that process.

In his 12 years as American Baptist Churches general secretary, Rev. Dr. A. Roy



Roy Medley at the site of the Hopevale Memorial commemorating the eleven American Baptist missionaries who took refuge in the mountains of Capiz during the World War II invasion of the Philippines. They hid in the forest they call “Hopevale” with the help of their Filipino friends. They were all killed on December 19, 1943.

Medley has traveled countless thousands of miles; attended innumerable gatherings, worship services and celebrations in the U.S. and abroad; and met with a host of ecumenical and church leaders—all in an effort to fulfill the Gospel mandate in partnerships with others who call Jesus Christ Lord and Savior.

As Medley begins his role as the chair of the National Council of Churches (NCC) Governing Board this year, he does so with a clear vision: “We have gifts to share; we have gifts to receive. We are not the only people of God.”

Our quest to engage spiritual neighbors

in dynamic, productive work is not new. More than a half century ago, American Baptist leader Rev. Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg served as NCC president with an equally straightforward perspective on the power and scope of cooperative Christian ministry: “Jesus did not confine himself to so-called matters of comfort, peace of mind and family conduct, but spoke out on the public questions of the day.... We have a biblical mandate to enlighten the conscience of our generation on the life and death issues of our day.”<sup>2</sup>

Another American Baptist leader, Dr. M. William Howard, also brought his denomination’s commitment to living out the Gospel mandates by joining with others when he served as NCC president 1979-1981.

This longstanding American Baptist perspective has manifested itself in many ways and places, and among many similar

motivated people of faith in the U.S. and around the world.

As the third millennium of Christian witness opened, new opportunities for cooperative ministry presented themselves. Within our tradition, “Baptists Together,” a 1999 conference of denominations seeking better mutual understanding and unity, challenged participating bodies to apply the biblical call to unity in outreach and service. “Christian Churches Together” formed early in the last decade to involve 34 church organizations to consider “the need for expanding fellowship, unity and witness among the diverse expressions of





Dr. Medley and Luran Bethell after she received the Human Rights Award for her work on human trafficking at a Baptist World Alliance Congress in England.



Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed (National Director for the Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances for the Islamic Society of North America) and others listen to Roy Medley during a discussion of interfaith relations.



The Baptist/Muslim Dialogue meeting, bringing together different faith groups to learn from one another.

Christian faith today.”

Even before he began as ABC general secretary at the beginning of this new millennium, Dr. Medley knew clearly that American Baptists—“as a people motivated by mission, the heartbeat of our life”—needed to look for cooperative opportunities for productive service and dialogue.

Since then—in Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, Cuba, the U.S. and dozens of other locations—he has engaged religious leaders and organizations to seek a common witness in areas of need ranging from peacemaking and religious freedom to interfaith dialogue. In many places where oppression and apathy are formidable realities, such work requires a definite stepping out on faith.

Patience, however, often provides genuine inspiration. Most recently, in December of 2013, Medley helped to celebrate the Judson bicentennial by worshipping with and encouraging Christians in Burma’s Chin State and at the Myanmar Institute of Theology in Rangoon. Recalling the words of Adoniram Judson, the Baptist missionary who planted the seeds of Christian faith there in 1813, he said, “We still believe this: For you the future is as bright as the promises of God.” In Burma, as elsewhere, Medley’s message calls for continuing hope and service—and partnership. In a country long embroiled in ethnic and religious oppression, the light of hope has encouraged both Burma’s Christians and their overseas partners.

Beyond ecumenical ministry, American Baptists understand as well as any people that engagement with the wider world is a biblical mandate. In this we follow in the footsteps of the pioneering leader Roger Williams, who while uncompromisingly Christian in his worldview, also saw that God’s call to establish the Rhode Island

follow His teachings about peace, and are in accord with Baptist convictions about the centrality of religious liberty in civic life.”

In his new role as chair of the NCC Governing Board and his ongoing responsibilities that support ecumenical and interfaith discussion, American Baptist General Secretary A. Roy Medley continues a tradition that has drawn heavily on partnerships. “Our faith as American Baptists always has been a generous one with other Christians. In a world so much in need of healing and redemption there are countless challenges we are called to face together. And, with God’s blessing, we will continue to need each other for that task.” ■



Dr. Medley addresses the Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee at the Mission Center in Valley Forge in March 2014.

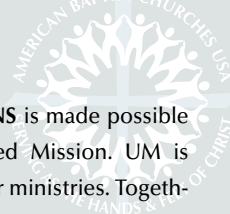
colony in 1636 mandated community and communication with people of other, even non-Christian traditions.

The Baptist/Muslim Dialogue, begun several years ago to open channels of communication and understanding, is such a contemporary manifestation: an ongoing opportunity to listen to and share perspectives from radically different faith traditions. In doing so, while maintaining a Christ-centered perspective, we allow for the possibility of cooperation in areas of mutual concern—peace, hunger, human trafficking and other core societal challenges. For General Secretary Medley, his active participation in these discussions reflects “our desire as Jesus’ disciples to

1. *Down by the Riverside: A Brief History of Baptist Faith* by Everett C. Goodwin (Judson Press, 2002; page 43).

2. *Edwin T. Dahlberg: Pastor, Peacemaker, Prophet* (Judson Press, 1998; page 101)

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Don Ng and Ronny Lanier at Mission Summit 2013.

Rev. Dr. Don Ng began a two-year term of office as president of American Baptist Churches USA in January 2014. A long-time denominational leader, Ng was on the staff of Educational Ministries for 20 years (1978–1998), directing Discipleship and Youth ministries, and providing leadership in curriculum development and camping and conferencing ministries. He also has been a member of the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, and president of the Asian American Baptist Caucus, among other responsibilities. Since 1998 Ng has served as senior pastor of historic First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco, one of four congregations across the U.S. profiled in the denomination's recent *Transformed by the Spirit* video.

President Ng recently shared the following perspectives on his ministries and denominational identity.

# I like to talk about Jesus Christ!

*By Rich Schramm, Consulting Editor*

**Q** You bring an obvious passion and commitment to your new role as president of the denomination. How important have American Baptists been in your life journey?

**A** Never in my best mind would I have thought that a little boy from Boston would end up becoming president of ABCUSA! When my father served honorably in WWII with the U.S. Army, he returned from Germany to Boston as a U.S. citizen. With the legal ability to sponsor my mother and older brother from China, it was the First Baptist Church of Boston that assisted him. I was born in the shadows of Fenway Park and Baptist heroes like Samuel Stillman and Isaac Backus. I can actually say that if it wasn't for the American Baptists, I would not have been born!

Every stage of my life has been a blessing beyond my imagination. I grew up at FBC Boston and became active in the Baptist Youth Fellowship. When the American Baptist Convention met in Boston, I served as a page for General Secretary Edwin Tuller. Gordon College and Andover Newton Theological School provided me with the foundation for my ordination in 1975, and my life and career just took off. I know that from all statistics and church/denominational analyses, denominations are declining and everyone is scrambling to discern God's calling and new directions. But from my personal life experiences, American Baptists have been my life and my lifeline! I'm proud of being an American Baptist, for all of our heroes and strengths, as well as for our challenges and weaknesses.





Rev. Lauren Ng, Rev. Marie Onwubuariri, Rev. Dr. Ng, Rev. Jennifer Ikoma-Motzko, and Rev. Karen Yee (far left)

American Baptist Seminary of the West 2013 Commencement Speaker and Honorary Doctorate recipient Rev. Dr. Donald Ng addressing the graduates (left)

Serving Christ as a minister for the past 39 years, I think I have always stepped out in faith. I found myself never needing to look for a job—opportunities came to me and I just stepped through the door. And God continues with blessings. Perhaps that's a key to revitalization and transformation—the need to trust in God's power and action in our lives and in the world. By becoming over bureaucratized and highly professional, have we lost our sense of calling and trusting in God's ways? I know that when I left Educational Ministries after serving for 20½ years and accepted a call to First Chinese Baptist San Francisco in 1998 with a significant change in my salary, I believed that this was what God wanted me to do with my life. I wasn't trying to be a martyr in any sense, but when the congregation heard about this, they rededicated themselves to the church and said that if the pastor is willing to move cross-country and be with us, we need to step up too. And they have in very significant ways!

**Q** *How can the distinctive mission of American Baptist Churches effectively speak to the needs of an increasingly secularized society? How can we be relevant, transforming agents for the Gospel message?*

**A** It may just be that denominational structures that we have come to know for the past 40 years have lived out their days; thus the restructuring that ABC did two years ago. But when we believe that God is alive and working in our lives and through our religious institutions to bring about equity, peace and justice, new life is upon us. I believe in this, and that's the reason why I want to serve as ABC president.

In the face of secularism and pluralism in society, I believe that American Baptists are best suited to be proclaimers of the Gospel and advocates for change. Rather than to see ourselves as irrelevant and inconsequential to society—that is, as a problem—we sincerely need to be counter-cultural and consequential. From our belief in “soul liberty” we can freely dialogue and interact with people from other faiths with respect and appreciation. Our current commitment in advancing the Baptist/Muslim dialogue is indicative of this. Our multicultural diversity within a non-majority

denomination is permitting us to listen to voices that we were not able to hear before, thus positioning ABC to bring about a closer reflection to the likeness of the beloved community that the world needs to see. And as an American Baptist, I like to talk about Jesus Christ. I know that in my own life, Jesus is my Lord and Savior and I want our denomination to stand up for Jesus in a world that badly needs a Savior.

**Q** *Do you see specific priorities for our work?*

**A** As we all know, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. There are many priorities that we must address, but if there's one thing that I have learned in my 20 years in EM and now 16 years at the church, it is that one has to stay awhile to make things happen. The challenges that we have are not short-termed fixes but deep-seeded problems that require a long time to change. We say these are adaptive rather than technical changes.

Let me share two illustrations. As we become more diverse in so many different ways, the flip side of that is how are we joined together as one family? We may arrive at this understanding by subscribing to historic Baptist principles or having a common vision

or perhaps engaging in mutual projects. Whatever it might be, I think we need a passion to unify us or to articulate why we call ourselves a family. Our local church in San Francisco is clear in its mission to proclaim Christ in Chinatown. Nothing would distract us from that.

My second illustration is the new structure that has been in place for the past two years. We have seen a tremendous response from the 2013 Mission Summit in Overland Park, Kansas, followed by the Mission Table at Green Lake in November. At both of these national ABC events—comprising of people from all parts of the family—was the opportunity to gather around tables to discuss ministry topics. One may say, what is so novel about that? But the intriguing result is that we may have tapped into a deep want in people that has been there and we haven't been aware of. American Baptists have good ideas to share. They have issues

**“American Baptists have been my life and my lifeline! I’m proud of being an American Baptist, for all our heroes and strengths as well as for our challenges...”**



First Chinese Baptist Church, San Francisco



The Ng family: Joy, Greg, granddaughter Story, Don, and Lauren at Mission Summit 2013 in Overland Park, Kansas

on their minds. They have passions in their hearts. And just providing the forum for people to share and exchange ideas has been redemptive and uplifting. We are planning to have table conversations again when we meet for the 2015 Biennial Mission Summit.

hopes are vast, I just hope that I can assist ABC to remain faithful in Christ as it has been and to make some progress. I hope to serve for two years and leave it in a better situation than I received it.

**Q** *You must be pleased to have had your congregation lifted up in the recent Transformed by the Spirit video as a model of effective ministry by growing through adaptive change. How has First Chinese Baptist Church grown—and changed—to effectively minister amid evolving urban demographics and challenges?*

**A** First Chinese Baptist has been very gracious in supporting me in my service to the denomination while I remain fulltime as its pastor. They know that they won't see me as much, but with gifted leaders and my able

pastoral staff colleagues, they are carrying on the mission well. Our church was originally the Chinese Baptist Mission, owned and sponsored by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1880. When the church was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, funds were collected from all over the denomination to rebuild the mission that was completed in 1908. This is to say that our church has always been an integral part of ABC life and heritage, and my serving as president simply continues that commitment today. Our church continues to grow and ministers to our local community in Chinatown. With almost 600 in our membership, we have active ministries teaching English and citizenship classes to new immigrants, as well as summer day camp for community children. A new outreach program called Reception Ministry was started last month to give out leaflets on Grant Avenue inviting neighbors, visitors and tourists to come into our sanctuary for prayer or a cup of Lanna coffee from our ABC Thailand missionaries Mike and Becky Mann. Our church members come from as far as 60 miles away to be involved in our ministries.

As seen in the *Transformed by the Spirit* video, we have invested in the Chinatown YMCA across the street by helping them renovate their gym. And in exchange we now have another attractive venue for one of our Sunday morning services. ■



**“American Baptists have good ideas to share. They have issues on their minds. They have passions in their hearts.”**

**Q** *What excites you most about being ABC president? If you could summarize your message of challenge and hope to the people with whom you are meeting and worshipping, what would that be?*

**A** I realized that when I was elected as president in June 2013, I would be the first Asian American to become ABCUSA president. This goes back to my thoughts of humble beginnings in Boston. How could God possibly lead a Chinese boy who spoke Chinese before English, grew up in the ghettos of Roxbury and usually would not raise his hand in class, to become president. When I travel and speak to Baptist groups, I share about how my pastors and Sunday school teachers taught me and equipped me for ministry. I encourage my hearers that while there is always something we can do to improve ABC, there is so much more that we are proud of—and opportunities for them to serve Christ like I prayerfully hope that I have. Why would anyone not want to be associated with people like Martin Luther King Jr., Adoniram and Ann Judson, and Walter Rauschenbusch!

I shared recently at a pastors' group that I hope I won't make any serious mistakes as president since in doing so I would bring shame and embarrassment to my Asian American community. They told me that they would pray for me! While my vision is big and





## The Mission Summit and Mission Table: How do they relate to *Transformed by the Spirit*?

Ministry challenges are present in every local church, region and organization. Many deal with similar challenges, and use varying strategies to meet and solve these challenges.

Participants from ABC regions, seminaries, and national agencies joined together in conversation at the first ever ABC Mission Table in early November, 2013, to focus on 32 ministry challenges and to discern, listen and learn from one another. The 32 topics were determined from a national survey which was a part of the *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative, and were originally discussed at the June 2013 Mission Summit prior to the Mission Table.

Learn more at:

<http://www.abc-usa.org/missiontable/>



SAVE THE DATE!

# BIENNIAL MISSION SUMMIT 2015

An American Baptist Gathering  
Overland Park/Kansas City  
June 26–28, 2015

**Come/Return** to Kansas City to build on the success of Mission Summit 2013

**Contribute** to a vision for the future for ABCUSA through Mission Summit Conversations

**Explore** the richness and beauty of diversity within the American Baptist family

**Hear** nationally recognized preachers and speakers

**Greet** long-time friends and make new friends from across the country and around the world

**Meet** missionaries currently serving both here and abroad

**Worship** and celebrate with ABC musicians, talented choirs and American Baptists from across the country

**Learn** how God has been transforming us by the Spirit since the last Mission Summit and the Mission Table

Additional events happen before and after the official Mission Summit dates. Check the website for details.

[www.americanbaptists2015.com](http://www.americanbaptists2015.com)

# Upcoming Events



American Baptist Churches USA  
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May 11	Baptist World Alliance Day, Mother's Day
May 18	Baptist Heritage Day
May 26	Memorial Day
June 1	One Great Hour of Sharing, Religious Liberty Sunday
June 8	Pentecost, Children's Day, Baptist Youth World Day of Prayer
June 15	Father's Day
June 20	World Refugee Day
June 22	AB Homes and Caring Ministries Sunday



## Rhythms of the Spirit

Nurturing  
a Contemplative Life

**Do you struggle for balance  
between prayer and activity?**

**Do you long for more silence and solitude  
in your life and ministry?**

**More energy for compassion, peace and justice?**

The Rhythms of the Spirit conference, offered in a retreat style and in two locations for 2014, provides a unique opportunity to explore and practice the contemplative life together. We'll focus on your own spiritual practice providing time to develop solitude and silence, creating the expansive space necessary to welcome God's voice. If you desire spiritual direction, each conference will provide the opportunity for you to meet one-on-one with a spiritual companion. Please join us.



**Summer: July 28-August 1, 2014**  
**Green Lake Conference Center**  
**Wisconsin**



**Fall: November 3-7, 2014**  
**Redwood Glen, California**

**Register now at:**

**[www.rhythmsofthespirit.com/](http://www.rhythmsofthespirit.com/)**