



CONNECTIONS

ABCUSA CONNECTIONS is a ministry of ABCUSA. Email the editor at: bridget.holmstrom@abc-usa.org

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UPDATE

On *Transformed by the Spirit*:



“One doesn’t have to be a prophet to see that the church is in the midst of huge shifts and a period of re-formation. I know how real the challenges are in every aspect of the life of the church in our country. But we are not without hope!”

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches

Engaging a World of Change and Challenge

Equipping Churches and their Communities to be

Transformed by the Spirit

By its very nature, the Christian faith is profoundly and fundamentally relational. With God’s incarnate love revealed in Jesus Christ came a presumption no disciple can ignore: God was in the world to transform it, to make it whole—and to empower believers to become partners in that effort.

We gather together as American Baptists to worship and to serve. But can we take for granted that we are prepared to genuinely and effectively relate to those of increasing number outside our church walls? If we do it well, why is church membership and attendance decreasing? If we do it effectively, why is the society that surrounds us so needful, unhealthy and self-directed?

The centrality of the local church, in fostering both spiritual growth and societal change, has always been understood to be a hallmark of American Baptist life. However complex our denominational

structure may seem, it only succeeds if it functions effectively to feed the ministries and strengthen the outreach of each American Baptist congregation.

In this age of relentless change—not only in technological evolution but within the protocols and standards of society as a whole—the Christ-centered church faces unprecedented challenges to its ability to relate to a world in flux. A world seemingly spinning farther and farther away from the biblical mandates to love kindness, do justice and walk humbly with God. A world in which caring service in many places and situations often rates as a much lower priority than self-serving ambition and material success.

Few would question the belief that if the local church is to be an effective, transformative agent of change today and in the future, it must understand the society in which it functions. Those who tout “post-denominationalism” as a reality don’t allow for the essential *continued on page 2*

Journey/Discovery/Renewal

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Transformed by the Spirit

Listening to God's Will:

part a national and regional organization such as American Baptist Churches can, and must, play in preparing local congregations to be relevant—a balm and a guide in an unhealthy and directionless world. American Baptist Churches, as the servant of its local congregations, knows that its role is to provide the resources for churches to understand, engage and transform that society.

Transformed by the Spirit is an ambitious manifestation of that understanding. Inaugurated three and half years ago by the denomination's National Executive Council, it is an expansive effort committed to discerning "how God may be at work among the critical challenges that American Baptist congregations face." Its focus is to engage regional and national bodies and the churches they serve in a process of identifying those challenges within today's culture, and also uncovering the opportunities that arise for serving as the hands and feet of Christ.

"Adaptive Changes" will be needed to make our witness effective in changing societal environments. Through the collective inspiration and creativity of pastors, lay leaders and denominational staff—meeting in groups over the next few years—*Transformed by the Spirit* will offer a vision and a game plan for those changes. It won't be easy; *Transformed by the Spirit* readily identifies "Adaptive Challenges" as those "for which we presently do not have an answer, but which must be addressed if we are to live into God's future for us."

As a national initiative committed to strengthening the denomination's more than 5,200 local congregations, *Transformed by the Spirit* was the catalyst for the first Mission Summit in Overland

Park, Kansas, in 2013. More than 1,000 persons from across the denomination discussed 32 ministry challenges that had been identified in a national survey. A follow-up Mission Table in November 2013 included discussion of highlighted topics such as missional outreach, discipleship, emerging leaders, church planting, women in ministry, violence, alternative models of pastoral leadership and multi-cultural/multi-ethnic ministries. The dialog will continue at the next Mission Summit in June 2015.

In its initial stages, a Journey Team, comprised of congregational, national and regional leaders, has provided resources and guidance, inviting congregations and partners to confront their missional challenges and to share what has been learned. In addition, the National Leadership Council has discussed those challenges as national and regional bodies prepare for next year's second Mission Summit.

In its first phase, *Transformed by the Spirit* brought together 43 regional and national groups to consider and share the learnings, and to provide a basis for involvement by the denomination's churches. In the subsequent phase, the work of Adaptive Challenge Teams and the resulting Action Learning Teams has been reviewed to determine what did and what didn't work in the process. The goal is simple: using learnings from national and regional sources, give churches "the opportunity and means to reach out to their communities."

As part of the Adaptive Challenge/Action Learning progression, participants have affirmed foundational truths that undergird the entire *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative:



"We believe that the Spirit of Christ is working in the midst of these changes—perhaps what we are experiencing is the work of God in our present situation.

"We believe that the Spirit of Christ is still very much at work among us, inviting us into a new chapter of ministry and mission together.

"We believe that the Spirit of Christ is already out in front of us in our changing contexts, inviting us to participate more fully in God's mission in the world."

The work done regionally and nationally to fine-tune *Transformed by the Spirit* has now moved on to its most ambitious, and most likely challenging, phase.

That phase has begun with anticipation—and a presumption.

If the local church is the fundamental unit of mission—as American Baptists historically have affirmed—then it is at the congregational level especially that American Baptists must both confront and partner with an increasingly needs-plagued and secularized society. *Transformed by the Spirit* is a bold and unprecedented initiative designed to do just that. It seeks to be both the hands and feet of Christ within the community, a ministry that embodies the Gospel and integrally maintains its unique message.

Toward that end, beginning this spring a "beta test" phase is preparing American Baptist churches for such a Christ-centered involvement. Participating "beta test" regions include ABC of the Central Pacific Coast, ABC of Connecticut, ABC of the Great Rivers Region, ABC of Nebraska,



Members of the Dominican Republic Mission Team work together to begin a garden.



Youth in the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey gather at Baptist Camp Lebanon to listen to the Spirit's call.

and ABC of the Rocky Mountains. Other American Baptist organizations, among them ABC of Greater Indianapolis, Philadelphia Baptist Association, and the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches, also have been actively involved in the *Transformed by the Spirit* process.

"Nebraska volunteered to be one of the five regions to participate in *Transformed by the Spirit* because we feel it is important that our churches re-imagine how to engage their local communities in a meaningful way," reports Rev. Greg Mamula of the ABC Nebraska staff.

"Many congregations across the country and in Nebraska have a 'field of dreams' mentality—'If you build it, they will come,'" he notes. "That might have worked for generations past, but it is not a good model to follow in a post-Christendom world."

Transformed by the Spirit has brought a fresh—and relevant—presumption to mission, one which Mamula feels engages both Nebraskan Baptists and their neighborhoods. "We like the idea that the newest version of *Transformed by the Spirit* encourages congregations to read Scripture together and to simply walk their neighborhoods and observe what Christ is already doing. As Baptists we value Scripture, so [it's important] to have a ministry rooted in Scripture reading and less on 'Seven Steps to a Better... Whatever' or a 'Five Ways to Get People Inside the Church' programs. Reading Luke 10:1-12 before board/committee meetings, in Sunday schools, in youth groups, etc. already has *continued on page 4*



A Cool Summer Experience, a ministry of First Baptist Church, Waukegan, IL, is a faith-based program that targets 4th-5th graders at serious risk. They match outdoor experiential learning with rigorous content, imparting a sense of spirituality and of awe of the mysteries of creation.



Churches will find a variety of missional expressions through *Transformed by the Spirit*. Omega Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, participated in a trial group early in the process, working with youth in crisis, a VA hospice and a women's shelter.



American Baptist Churches engage in work to reach out and connect with their local communities.

proven to be an important way of focusing the groups' attention around Christ."

Receiving, as well as giving, is a *Transformed by the Spirit* component that Mamula finds important and adaptable. "We like the concept that members are being asked to be engaged in the process by walking around their neighborhoods just to observe and see what God is doing. Too often churches gather their members in their buildings and look through their windows and ask 'What do those people out there need?'—without actually engaging them. It creates an 'us-versus-them' mentality. The ultimate goal is to simply increase the church attendance, but not actually engage in root issues. The process of *Transformed by the Spirit* forces people to move outside the facility as observers—before trying to develop a ministry to meet a perceived need."

Preparation for outreach also was an attractive emphasis for the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches. The region choose to participate in *Transformed by the Spirit*, according to Executive Minister Rev. Marcia J. Patton, "because we understood it to be helpful to us as we seek to share beyond our borders, one of our mission priorities."

Two region endeavors had a particular impact, she notes. "We had a group of folk from the Seattle area looking at how we might go deeper into our cross-cultural relationships. They went through the Adaptive Challenge Team materials and

as an Action Learning Team did a couple of experiments. We worked at setting up a group that will meet here and with others across the U.S. in the second phase of *Transformed by the Spirit* to look at cultural diversity. This team will have two people each from three churches and will communicate with people from other regions and churches."

"I also facilitated a group of pastors from five different churches from all over our region who met by Skype. This group looked at church growth, recognizing in the Action Learning Team portion of the work that we didn't know how to do church in this day and age. Each pastor experimented with different ideas, and the results varied according to their particular situation. It was a good sharing group for the pastors."

Like several other regions initially involved in *Transformed by the Spirit*, ABC of Greater Indianapolis is working toward "a distinctly congregational perspective," according to Executive Minister Rev. Joan C. Friesen.

"We are rolling out more of a region-wide emphasis on two fronts," she reports: "how we help pastors work on church challenges in a deeper and experimental way, and how we engage interested persons from a variety of churches on a specific topic." Although the impact of these initiatives may not be understood until the end of this year at the earliest, the engagement process has begun.

The congregational engagement phase also is in its early stages in Nebraska. "We have three churches participating in the process, spread out geographically across Nebraska," Rev. Greg Mamula notes. "They are all small congregations and it is too early to measure 'results' and how this has impacted the churches' understanding of being 'the hands and feet of Christ.'"

"I think the participating regions are simply in the beginning stages." In Nebraska, the participating churches "are still a few months away from trying to discern what God might be doing," Mamula says.

Transformed by the Spirit, by design and intention, is an initiative that will take on increasing vitality and influence as it evolves into congregational life. It offers the possibility of dynamic change in how—and how effectively—American Baptists confront the challenges and opportunities that surround them. It provides "the sense of hope that is now prevalent in the denomination," according to American Baptist General Secretary Dr. A. Roy Medley. "We are moving into the future; we are going to move into it with faith and hope and joy."

For more information on how your congregation can become involved in the *Transformed by the Spirit* initiative, please contact: Jeff Woods at Jeff.Woods@abc-usa.org. ■

By Rich Schramm, Consulting Editor

Inspired, Transformed... American Baptist Churches

Inspirados,
Transformados...
Iglesias Bautistas
Americanas

¡Pendientes!



Película de Líderes Inspiradores

*serviendo como las manos y pies de Cristo' mientras celebran IBA
y nos inspiran' a transformar para el futuro*

El video es hecho posible gracias a sus aportaciones al Fondo Misionero Unido. ¡Gracias!



See it
in your church in
November
on an
ABC Celebration
Sunday!
www.abc-usa.org/inspired



Jimmy Carter



Suzan Johnson Cook



Luis Cortés, Jr.



John Lewis



Tony Campolo



Joan Brown Campbell



Neville Callam

A Film of Inspirational Leaders

*serving as the hands and feet of Christ while they
celebrate ABC and inspire us to transform for the future*



Women in Ministry across the country

Women In Ministry

Action Learning Team Leads the Way

Over the past year and a half, the Women In Ministry Action Learning Team (WIMALT) has prayerfully considered adaptive challenges for ABC churches concerning calling women senior/solo pastors.

The team settled upon the following:

Focus: To break down barriers that hinder clergy women from gaining access to paid senior/solo/lead pastorates.

Adaptive Challenge: How can we change the hearts and minds of barrier keepers? How can we change or influence structures that maintain barriers?

In order to address the above, the WIM ALT developed and launched three experiments:

- A **“Mentor/Mentee” database for prospective female pastors** and “veteran” female pastors, connecting mentors and mentees for encouragement, guidance, development and opportunity.

- **Create and nurture opportunities for American Baptist women and American Baptist Women In Ministry (lay and clergy women) to have small group discussions** regarding the barriers that exist between clergy and lay women, how those barriers may play a role in the “call” process for women to serve as senior/solo pastors and what strategies might we put in place to reduce and ultimately tear down those barriers.

- **Identify senior/solo pastors retiring within the next 3-5 years who would be willing to adopt some specific strategies** (recommendations provided by WIM ALT as well as ABWIM/Ministers Council) to intentionally prepare congregations to be open and willing to call the best candidate, irrespective of gender, to serve as their next

senior/solo pastor.

All three of these experiments are currently up and running:

Team member Rev. April Van Ness, with support from Rev. Pat Hernandez, recently led a dialogue with clergy and laywomen, continuing to cultivate open dialogue and support for one another.

In the second experiment, team member Rev. Dr. A. Paulette Birchett, supported by Rev. Pat Hernandez, developed and launched a “MentorMentee” National Survey to identify female clergy who would be interested in participating in a mentor/mentee relationship, beginning with this experiment. Approximately 33 female clergy from across the USA responded, “yes.”

Team members Rev. Dr. Jim Kent, Rev. Susan Crane and Rev. Chris Smith, developed and launched a 3 phase, “Retiring Pastors Initiative.” Phase 1 entailed a national survey to identify senior/solo pastors retiring from their current pastoral position in the next 3-5 years, who would be willing to engage in specific activities

(small group bible studies, guest speakers, panel discussions, lecturers, greater female leadership involvement, etc.) and use materials from a specific resource list to prepare their congregations to be open to calling God’s best for them, irrespective of gender. Approximately 85 senior/solo pastors from across the nation took the survey, and approximately half of that number agreed to participate in the experiment. Phase 2 (currently underway), is a series of follow-up surveys with questions about how pastors are using the resource list and changes they may or may not have observed within their congregation. Phase 3 (long term goal) will happen over the next several years, with the National Ministers Council Office keeping track of congregations whose pastors participated in the experiment, looking to see how many of those congregations seriously considered and actually called a woman to serve as senior/solo pastor.

The WIM ALT worked together to ask hard questions, enhance surveys, offer suggestions, etc. to make our efforts fruitful. Additional team members include Rev. Steve Bils and Rev. Allison Tanner, along with coach Rosey Oaks-Lee, and staff members Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, executive director of the ABC Ministers Council and Rev. Patricia Hernandez, national director of American Baptist Women In Ministry.

Although the WIM ALT will end its official work at the close of the 2015 Biennial, it is understood that the experiments will continue, with the help of the national offices (Ministers Council and ABWIM) and others. ■

by Rev. Chris Smith, WIM ALT Facilitator



New Prayer Focus

The Board of General Ministries (BGM) Action Group, "Communicating ABC Identity," will be sharing a prayer list highlighting a Region/Associate Ministry Organization, Caucus, etc., for each month. The three groups for each quarter will appear in issues of *ABCUSA Connections*. In our monthly Enewsletter, we will provide a picture and brief story/prayer request given to us by that group. We hope that through this, American Baptists will learn about stories of the denomination in local areas so that we will know how God is at work in our American Baptist communities. Be on the look-out for your region or group to be highlighted in future newsletters.

October: American Baptist Women Travel to the Republic of Georgia

November: Rochester Genesee Region

December: Highlight on our newest Associated Ministry Organizations, Chin Baptist Churches USA and Karen Baptist Churches USA ■



Our First Highlight:

American Baptist Women Travel to the Republic of Georgia

Six American Baptist women—Rev. Patricia Hernandez, Deborah Malave Diaz, Rev. Valerie Andrews, LaKeeyna Cooper, Rev. Angel Sullivan, and Virginia Holmstrom—traveled to the Republic of Georgia this summer. During their 2-week spiritual pilgrimage, they met with pastors and deacons in eastern Georgia and learned that 20 percent of the Baptist churches in Georgia are pastored by women. The afternoons included sharing cross-cultural experiences and encouragement as women in professional ministry. Pray for women who serve as pastors and church leaders in the U.S. and across the globe. Pray for ministries like American Baptist Women In Ministry and American Baptist Women's Ministries that encourage and empower women to serve God. ■



BIENNIAL

MISSION SUMMIT

2 0 1 5

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

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

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

Hear nationally recognized preachers and speakers

Worship and celebrate with 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

Register your church online today!
Church registration closes February 6, 2015,
when individual registration opens.

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

www.americanbaptists2015.com

Upcoming Events



American Baptist Churches USA
P. O. Box 851
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

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November	ABC Celebration Month Look for the film <i>"Inspired, Transformed... American Baptist Churches"</i>
November 2	AB College Sunday
November 9	Stewardship Sunday
November 11	Veteran's Day
November 27	Thanksgiving
November 30	1st Sunday of Advent
December 10	Human Rights Day
December 25	Christmas
January 1	New Year's day
January 6	Ephiphany

American Baptist

Network
of Spiritual
Directors

Growing together to connect, nurture and encourage



Please visit this website: www.abcspiritualformation.com, which has been created to network American Baptists who express their call to ministry as spiritual directors. Spiritual direction, while an ancient practice, is still a relatively new vocation among American Baptists. In response, ABCUSA has launched *Rhythms of the Spirit*, one of whose goals is to identify and create a network of American Baptists like you who have trained or are exploring training as spiritual directors. Brad Berglund, a certified spiritual director, is coordinating *Rhythms*.

I am interested, like you, in encouraging the spiritual practices of our faith that lead to a greater love of God and neighbor through Christ. So, let me encourage you to use this list

1. to network with other American Baptists who are practicing this vocation,
2. to attend a *Rhythms of the Spirit* conference www.rhythmsofthespirit.com and
3. to connect with Brad

I rejoice in the new things the Spirit is doing among us!
In Christ,

A. Roy Medley
General Secretary, ABCUSA



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