

ABCUSA COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Report to the Board of General Ministries

Raimundo C. Barreto, Chair
November 11, 2020

I am grateful for the opportunity to report to this Board on behalf of the CCUIR. The ABCUSA Committee on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relations acts on behalf of the denomination to engage in interfaith and ecumenical relationships through partnerships that include the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and other efforts for the visible manifestation of our oneness in Christ. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we only met once, virtually, on Nov. 2, 2020.

This report has two parts. The first one is more informative, to inform all BGM directors of recent and forthcoming activities of the CCUIR. The second part includes motions passed by the Committee for the approval of the Board.

The Committee offers condolences and prayers for Zina Jacque, in light of the passing of her beloved husband Andre L. Bell. We also use this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to Cecelia Dachtler for her devoted service on this Committee in the past several years.

Despite the challenges posed by the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in, the Committee has carried on with its mandate. We received a few reports from ABCUSA representatives in ecumenical and interfaith partner organizations. Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus, reported on his involvement on behalf of ABCUSA in ecumenical, interfaith, and Myanmar issues. His report highlighted his work as president of Friendship Press, the ABCUSA representation at the BWA, and the situation in Burma/Myanmar. Friendship Press (FP) is the publishing arm of the National Council of Churches, US. Together with the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), FP has been engaged in a 3-year process of updating the NRSV where new textual discoveries or changes in English language usage warrant modification. The introduction of Word@Hand and Word@Hand Journeys can be found on the ABC website.

As for the BWA, Dr. Medley reported that, due to the pandemic, the BWA postponed its BWA Congress, which was to be held in Rio de Janeiro in July 2020. The Congress will now be a virtual gathering on July 7-10, 2021. Among the main events in the BWA life in the past year, the BWA Executive Committee voted to take under the umbrella of the BWA the “21 Wilberforce” organization whose focus is the promotion and protection of religious liberty. Baptist World Aid (BWAid) remains active in responding to the global crisis through grants to member conventions and unions for relief efforts.

Dr. Medley also attend conferences with the U.S. Department of State. The latest of these conferences was held on October 7. During that meeting, US officials received a research paper authored by Dr. Zo Tum Hmung of the Chin Association of Maryland describing the most recent findings regarding the Chin people who are refugees or IDP’s. The changes in immigration policies over the past four years, authored in large part by Stephen Miller, a senior advisor to the

President, have reduced the number of refugees and immigrants to be resettled by the US to the lowest numbers in modern history. This, plus the effects of the global pandemic, have increased the perilous plight of our brothers and sisters in Myanmar. Ecumenical bodies advocating for the ethnic minorities in Myanmar continue to press for humanitarian aid, a return to higher refugee quotas, and for the U.S. government in cooperation with the UNHCR to work with Malaysia and India to secure the human rights of refugees within their borders.

Loida I. Martell reported on the work of the Theological Studies and Faith and Order Convening Table of the NCCC. This convening table is ending discussions on Conflict and Climate Change, and starting new conversations on Racism and Justice. Dr. Martell has been invited to be part of the Advisory Committee for Truth and Racial Justice. The Advisory Committee meeting on June 24, 2020 discussed the crisis that arose in light of the Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor killings. The Theological Convening Table also met twice in the Fall to discuss the theme of racism and justice. In one of those occasions, Dr. Martell reported on her essay “Emergent Diseases in a Globalized World: The Viral Nature of Racism,” in which she discusses the interrelated issues of novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, aka COVID-19), climate change, and racism.

Raimundo C. Barreto offered a report on the work of the NCCC Interreligious Convening Table and its Muslim-Christian dialogue. Recent meetings he attended focused on topics like religious nationalism and white supremacy and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan proposal, among others. Joint initiatives on Rohingya and Uighur Advocacy, and on civil discourse in the U.S. was also part of the agenda. The NCCC currently co-sponsors five national dialogues: Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, Hindu-Christian Dialogue, Sikh-Christian Dialogue, Jewish-Christian Dialogue, and Muslim-Christian Dialogue. In the past year, ABCUSA was represented in four of them. The exception was the Sikh-Christian Dialogue.

Dr. C. Jeff Woods, Interim General Secretary, Dr. Roy Medley, Emeritus General Secretary, Dr. Loida Martell, and Dr. Raimundo Barreto attended different sessions of the NCCC 2020 annual Christian Unity Gathering – “Breathing Life into Our Nation”, a virtual event focused on “Repentance, Re-formation, and Reparation.” Dr. Martell participated in the CUG closing worship service, reading a litany in remembrance for those who have died as a result of novel coronavirus. She also participated in the NCC Memorial Day service, offering an intercessory prayer for those who have been impacted by the virus’ path of death and destruction. The CUG panels and worship service are available on the National Council of Churches’ YouTube channel.

At our Nov. 2 meeting, the CCUIR voted to nominate Annie Svitavsky to serve on the NCCC Joint Action and Advocacy Convening Table. See motion below. The Committee also reiterated plans for participation in the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in September 2021.

CCUIR received an invitation from Dr. Rev. Liberato C. Bautista, Asst. General Secretary for the United Nations and International Affairs of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church for ABCUSA to participate in the life and work of Christians Witnessing With Migrants. CWWM is an international, interfaith and tripartite group of migrants/refugees, migrant-serving institutions, and religious bodies focused on the plight of

migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking of persons—with particular attention to forced mobility or forced migration. The Committee unanimously voted to accept the invitation to join Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM), with Raimundo Barreto serving as ABCUSA’s representative. See motion below.

The Committee is moving forward with the process to present the 2021 Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award during the Virtual Biennial Mission Summit in 2021. Information about the Award can be found on the ABC website. We are inviting applications through BGM and other networks. The deadline for applications is January 31, 2021. CCUIR will hold a conference call to select the awardee in early February 2021. We are planning a go-to-meeting for the Mowbray Award presentation in late May or June, which could then be posted on the ABC website prior to the Biennial. More information will be shared later. We hope to count on as many BGM directors as possible on that occasion.

Finally, the Committee on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relations (CCUIR) made the following nominations, which I respectfully present to this Board for consideration and approval:

MOTION: The Committee voted unanimously to accept the invitation to join Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM), with Raimundo Barreto serving as ABCUSA’s representative.

MOTION: The Committee voted unanimously to nominate Annie Svitavsky to serve on the NCCC Joint Action and Advocacy Convening Table.

MOTION: The Committee voted unanimously to nominate Trisha Miller Manarin, Executive Minister, DC Baptist Convention, to serve as ABCUSA’s representative with Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP).

This concludes my first report as Chair of the CCUIR to this Board. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the denomination in this capacity, and delighted to collaborate with a group of women and men committed to the Christian ecumenical witness and to God’s work for mutual understanding, conflict transformation, and peace and justice through interreligious relations.

CCUIR Members: Raimundo C. Barreto, chair; Cecelia Dachtler, Zina Jacque, Shawna Simmons, Annie Svitavsky, Jim Wolfe, Jeff Woods, Interim General Secretary, staff