

ABCUSA COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Report to the Board of General Ministries

Raimundo C. Barreto, Chair
May 27, 2021

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), and other efforts for the visible manifestation of our oneness in Christ. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we met virtually on March 18 and May 18, 2021.

We are pleased to announce that we have a new CCUIR webpage as a part of our ABCUSA website. We invite you to explore the webpage by clicking on the following link:
<https://www.abc-usa.org/ccuir/>.

Jeff Woods, Interim General Secretary, reported the following:

American Baptists have had a presence in the country of Burma since 1813 when the first missionaries landed on the shores. Unfortunately, many of these years have also been riddled with strife. This strife came to a climax on February 1, 2021 when the Burma military seized control of the government. The ABCUSA response to this crisis is an example of the work of CCUIR as we have worked with our partner agencies, including the Baptist World Alliance and the National Council of Churches to: advocate for an end to military control, raise funds for displaced persons, and held meetings with government officials both in the U.S. and in Myanmar. These efforts have yielded results as sanctions have been imposed upon the military, bills have been passed on this issue, and relief funds have been raised and forwarded to those in need.

The conflict in the Middle East is another example of our common advocacy work with our ecumenical and interfaith partners. Dr. Trisha Manarin, Executive Minister for DCBC is our representative to the organization, “Churches for Middle East Peace” who is researching and advocating on this issue.

The National Council of Churches in conjunction with Friendship Press has announced an upcoming release of a new version of the Bible, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Dr. Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus is president of Friendship Press.

Regarding COVID-19, Dr. Woods is currently a member of the White House Community Corps and Faiths4Vaccines. These groups receive regular updates from leaders such as Dr. Fauci, Dr. Murthy, Dr. Collins and this information is passed along to our regional and national partners and posted on our website.

Dr. Woods has received an offer of three scholarships for the upcoming virtual Baptist World Alliance Congress and is recruiting attendees for those registration scholarships. The Baptist World Congress is scheduled for July 7-10, 2021, and is going to be the first virtual Congress in the organization's history. See bwa2021.org. Chaks Zadda, one of our representatives to the Baptist World Alliance, is preparing a report regarding our ABCUSA response to the global pandemic based upon our documents.

The CCUIR hosted a follow-up meeting of previous participants in the Baptist Muslim dialogues on March 22, 2021. Twenty persons attended the event and provided updates regarding their building of respect for those persecuted in their respective communities.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) – Dr. Woods joined a virtual hearing about ways the U.S. government can better protect and support individuals fleeing religious persecution through the U.S. refugee resettlement program, the U.S. asylum system, and overseas assistance.

Unrest in Congo – Dr. Woods wrote a letter to the U.S. State Department seeking assistance in the release of Pastor Mulunda, who appears to have been arrested without due process for exercising free speech. He is a respected leader and promotor of peace in the Congo. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins brought the situation to Dr. Woods' attention, stating, "My friend and colleague in ministry, Rev. Dèvis Mulunda, of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Springhouse, PA informed me of the arrest of his father in Congo yesterday, MLK Day."

The following persons signed onto the letter from OGS:

- Jim Winkler, President of the National Council of Churches
- Elijah Brown, General Secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance
- Amanda Tyler, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
- Aidsand Wright-Riggins, Executive Director, New Baptist Covenant

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 is in the final stages to present an update of the NRSV to the governing board of the NCC for its approval. The introduction of Word@Hand and Word@Hand Journeys can be found on the ABC website.

ABC Commission on Burma Refugees: Together with members of the commission, Dr. Medley has been involved in the extensive efforts of ABC to lobby our government, the UN and other national bodies regarding the violent attacks upon the people of Burma by the military which overthrew the democratically elected government on February 2, 2021. The Commission composed letters to key world leaders including President Biden, Senators and Members of Congress, the United Nations, the interim General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and the president of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States. Through the active participation of Baptist leaders from Burma living in the US, the Commission briefed

congressional and State department officials about the situation, and also sponsors monthly prayers meetings for Burma. He has participated in White House briefings on immigration and refugee policies of the government and we are pleased to see the commitment to rebuild the immigration and refugee apparatus of the US government and to increase the cap on the number of refugees the US will accept.

Baptist World Alliance: Dr. Medley continues to serve on the Executive Committee, General Council and the Commission on Interfaith Relations. He invited BWA leadership and its North American region to participate in the Faith4Vaccines roundtable, an effort by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith leaders to secure equitable and wide-spread distribution and promotion of the Covid-19 vaccines within the US and overseas. The roundtable has worked actively with the Biden administration and the faith community to involve faith leaders in messaging to congregants about the importance of being vaccinated as well as engaging houses of worship as locales for inoculation. The emphasis has been on reaching resistant or underserved communities of people.

Baptist-Muslim: With Dr. Woods and Dr. Barreto, organized a follow-up gathering of the Baptist participants from the third North American Baptist-Muslim dialogue held in 2018. With Associate General Secretary Marie Onwubuariri and Dr. Barreto, discussed strategies for continuing to encourage interfaith and specifically, Baptist-Muslim, engagement by American Baptists; submitted suggestions regarding efforts the CCU/IR might pursue, and subsequently participated in a videotaped presentation on the history of Baptist-Muslim dialogue.

Dr. Loida I. Martell reported that she participated in the "Conversations on Fire and Faith" webinars that the NCC sponsored, including "Where Are We Going?"

Dr. Martell continues to work on her paper on "Emergent Diseases in a Globalized Word: The Viral Nature of Racism"-- and presented an initial version of at the American Academy of Religion. A version for popular consumption will be posted as a podcast on the Hispanic Theological Initiative "Open Plaza" website. The paper was inspired and initiated by the work done at the NCC.

Dr. Raimundo C. Barreto reported as follows:

Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM). We have completed the process of joining the CWWM, implementing the decision taken at the CCUIR November meeting. Rev. Benjamin Chan, representing International Ministries, and I, are the current ABCUSA presence on that body. 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 in persons—with focused attention to forced mobility or forced migration.

International Conference Brazilian Tragedy: A Risk to the Common Home? - I attended this conference organized by the Brazilian National Council of Churches, The Brazilian National Conference of the Catholic Bishops, and several other ecumenical bodies, with participation of representatives from the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, and the UN to address the

serious crisis Brazil faces as one of the countries on May 4-6, 2021. A number of religious, human rights and socio-biodiversity organizations came together to discuss the multifaceted crisis Brazil is facing with the erosion of democracy, the repeated murder of activists working for ethnic, racial, social, territorial and gender justice, the threats to the Amazon socio-biodiversity, the destruction of forests, biomes and native peoples, and the health crisis caused by the irresponsible administration of the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly 500,000 people in Brazil have died as a result of Covid 19. As members of the common home, our participation in this event reinforces the view while people in different parts of the world have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways, their plight is not unrelated from ours in the U.S. I moderated a panel on the topic of Human and Social Rights: Aggravated Inequalities, with participation from a representative of the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon region and from the African-derived religions in Brazil.

The National Council of Churches of Christ – The last meeting of the Muslim-Christian dialogue team assessed the religious responses to the COVID-19 crisis around the world. Particular concern was placed on the situation of migrants, refugees, and stateless persons and the fair access to vaccines around world. The NCCC is advocating for global access.

Baptist World Alliance asks for prayers and support for Burma/Myanmar, for Covid relief, and other worldwide emergencies.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Faith and Order Commission is holding a series of three webinars on Churches and Moral Discernment. The third webinar is scheduled for June 15, 2021. Registration is open to everyone.

Teaching Ecumenism in the Context of World Christianity – This conference organized by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey will discuss the status of the ecumenical commitment to overcoming the pain of division between churches across different traditions and cultural contexts and the walls that separate humanity in light of the increasing awareness of the diversity of Christianity we have witnessed around the world in the last few decades. I will be one of the plenary speakers of this conference on June 2-4, 2021.

The 11th Assembly of the WCC is scheduled to take place in Karlsruhe, Germany from August 31 to September 8, 2022.

Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award: On March 18, the Committee met virtually to review the nominations received for the Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award. The Committee voted to honor Rev. Ineda P. Adesanya, Associate Minister of Spiritual Life at Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland CA, as the 25th recipient of the Award. The Award was presented to Rev. Adesanya virtually on May 18. The video of the presentation will be a part of the CCUIR virtual booth at the ABCUSABiennial Mission Summit.

Despite the challenges posed by the unprecedented situation in which we continue to find ourselves, the Committee has continued to carry on with its mandate. We received a few reports from ABCUSA representatives in ecumenical and interfaith partner organizations.

This concludes my report as Chair of the CCUIR to this Board. I continue to be deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the denomination in this capacity, and am 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.