

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT!
(Revised)

1911: 6/08

“A model for doing and being mission, ABC style.”

American Baptists, under the Lordship of Christ and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, are being led to discern what our future might be. The forces of a rapidly changing culture and world are once more challenging American Baptists to look long and hard at who we really are and how we can best engage the world on behalf of the gospel of Christ. We came into existence as a mission minded people concerned with sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world around us. And, now, in these days of rebirth and refocus, we are seeing the possibilities for a “mission minded” people committed to being the hands and feet of Christ in this new century.

From many quarters and for multiple reasons we have surmised that it is time for us to look at how we are structured nationally as American Baptists, how we relate to one another, and how we focus our strengths and abilities to present an American Baptist mission witness to the world around us. We have done this often in our life together, with our last major revisions occurring in the 1970's. The GEC which is suggesting such an examination of our structure and culture is asking how our present structure and culture can be adapted to more effectively enable our common life and common work to be more flexible and responsive. In effect, can we claim the best of what it means to be a movement and what it means to be an institution in our ABC structures?

The General Executive Council (GEC) has spent several of its recent meetings from 2006-2008 focusing on the model contained in this paper. There was affirmation. There was caution. There was encouragement. There were new ideas. The contributions were positive and uplifting. We are offering the best a unified GEC can offer.

In their fall 2006 meeting, the General Executive Council received a number of proposed models for restructuring the national portion of our denomination. After due deliberation they selected two that seemed to hold the most potential. A Writing Team composed of nine members of the GEC was then appointed to put together a single proposal based upon these two models, as well as the concepts and suggestions that came from other members of the Council. The attached proposal reflects that discussion and subsequent discussions over the last two years. It also reflects previous presentations to the General Board and the Board's response and insight. In June of 2007 the revised overall framework was presented to the General Board and the Biennial delegates for feedback and affirmation on the general direction of the model. Overall it was generally affirmed. It now comes to the General Board as a final recommendation to present to the ABC delegates at the 2009 Biennial in Pasadena. Only ABC delegates gathered at that Biennial have the right to change the bylaws that govern our structure.

The General Board will have a first reading in June 2008 of the proposed bylaw changes required to implement the new structure. The second reading will occur in

June 6, 2008

November 2008 at which time the General Board will vote whether to recommend the bylaw changes to the Biennial delegates.

As it began its work the Writing Team spent considerable time in reflection upon its understanding of the nature of the church and what it means when we say, “the local church is the fundamental unit of mission.” The Writing Team scanned factors found in our culture which are reshaping how we do ministry and mission. They also examined recent developments in organizational theory. Two concepts were especially helpful to the team as it did its work: the concept of “simultaneous loose and tight organizational connections” and the concept of federations.

The federation model, used by many non-profit organizations, including United Way, Habitat for Humanity, and the Salvation Army, allows for the coordination of certain activities by a central office and decentralization of others. Often, a federation’s most valuable asset, namely its sense of mission and identity, is shared throughout the entire organization, and is sometimes referred to as a “brand image.”

The theory of loose and tight organizational connections, further allows for simultaneous, yet diverse outcomes to be achieved within the same organization by varying degrees of interaction among the component parts. High degrees of interaction lead to outcomes characterized by control, consistency, and accountability. Low degrees of interaction lead to outcomes characterized by innovation, empowerment, and localized determination. Many local congregations have successfully implemented such a strategy to foster creativity in their ministry teams, while maintaining accountability in their financial and governing policies. The concepts underlying federations as well as the theory of simultaneous loose and tight connections undergird the proposed model.

As we consider possible new directions in our structure, a summary of the implications of such changes is offered:

WHAT WOULD END?

There are number of things that would end:

- Legislation as a primary emphasis in our governance
- Large numbers in our Board structure
- Interlocking Board structure
- The concept of a General Board

WHAT WOULD REMAIN THE SAME?

There are a number of things that would remain the same:

- The ABC commitment to a gospel based mission
- The ABC commitment to the local church
- The importance of representation, but expressed in different ways-
- A desire to support vital, thriving, healthy churches
- National Boards: NM, IM, and MMBB

WHAT WOULD BE NEW?

There are a number of things that would be new for us:

- The Mission Summit and Mission Table (Discussion, research, mission centered)
- Mission as the primary emphasis
- Board of General Ministries
- Smaller boards chosen for skills and diversity and greater use of technology to facilitate meetings, therefore more affordable
- Ability to respond more quickly to mission opportunities
- Development of a diverse leadership pool

PRIMARY CHANGE IN ABC CULTURE

The restructure known as SCODS which created our present national structure in the seventies, sought to create stronger representation by the churches and greater coordination among the mission societies by creating a General Board. It had become evident that the annual meeting of the convention could not provide the consistent guidance and oversight that was needed for the expansive ministries of American Baptists in a fast-paced culture. The intent was that the General Board would identify mission priorities and coordinate their implementation, and that it would express the mind of Christ on important issues.

However, the shortcomings of the SCODS structure have become increasingly evident. First, the structure involves an extremely large number of people that makes for high costs in a time when every church body is seeking to reduce costs. Secondly, board members are elected primarily for their ability to serve as representatives of the churches and not for the skills needed on the boards. Thirdly, the fact that General Board members also serve as directors of the program boards creates confusion among the board members as to their primary role and the duty of loyalty. And fourthly, the focus on legislation, by which we mean its statements in the forms of policy statements and resolutions, has proven problematic.

Therefore, a key proposal to what is being placed before you is the recommendation that national focus shift from legislation to mission.

MISSION SUMMIT AND MISSION TABLE.

The proposal recommends the creation of the Mission Summit to be held at the time of the Biennial and a Mission Table which will meet following the Biennial.

WHAT IS THE MISSION SUMMIT AND WHAT WILL IT DO?

The Mission Summit will capture the input of the Biennial, the largest number of American Baptists gathered in one place, as it provides a venue for examining the world landscape for those issues and concerns calling for a mission response from American Baptists as we seek to be healthy missional congregations engaged with God's mission in the

world. The Mission Summit will become the place and the time when American Baptists of varied color, gender, age and economic status will sit together, reflecting and discussing what this people of God can do in Christ's name in our world.

In the Mission Summit, Biennial participants would learn of critical trends impacting the mission and ministry of the church within and without the United States; would participate in mission reflection and workshops based on the best practices of congregations, regions and boards; and experience opportunities to network with people and congregations sharing similar mission contexts and emphases.

The Mission Summit would have at its very heart the local church and how to strengthen healthy missional congregations who could join with other local churches, as well as Regions and National bodies, to impact our ABC global mission. One of the great values of this way of working is that a large number of ideas and programs will surface, resulting in a wide breadth of mission efforts being worked upon by this family. This is an exciting concept which holds great promise for our denomination.

This effort to bring to the Biennial the possibilities for mission could give focus to our American Baptist-wide mission for years to come. Local churches, Regions, affiliated organizations, National Boards, seminaries, and colleges, could look at what is being proposed and determine where and how they can join the common effort.

FUNDING THE MISSION SUMMIT

Those attending the Summit would be delegates and visitors participating in the Biennial. Therefore, they would pay their own travel to and from the Biennial site.

WHAT IS THE MISSION TABLE AND WHAT WILL IT DO?

The Mission Table is a focused group of American Baptist clergy, laity and staff persons charged with receiving the input from the Mission Summit working as a substantive missional think tank on behalf of the denomination. The Mission Table will be composed of people representing the broad spectrum of American Baptist mission partners. It would include: local church members and pastors (one per Region); the President of the ABCUSA; the General Secretary and 3 others from General Ministries; the executive directors plus 3 others each from NM and IM; the executive director plus 1 from MMBB; Regional executive ministers; 1 person from each of the recognized caucuses; one each from the American Baptist Men, American Baptist Historical Society, American Baptist Extension Corporation, American Baptist Homes and Caring Ministries, and the American Baptist Assembly; the President and executive director of American Baptist Women's Ministries and the Ministers Council; and, 3 representative from ABC seminaries and 3 from ABC colleges. At our current numbers, the Mission Table would have 104 participants.

The local church participants would come from nominations by each of the Regions. Each Region will suggest 5 people to the National Nominating Committee which would, in turn, select one from the five provided by the Region in order to provide a group which is representative of the denomination. (The National Nominating Committee consists of the ABCUSA President and Immediate Past President, 3 appointed by the REMC, the intercaucus president and 6 representatives from the Board of General Ministries—3 clergy and 3 laity.)

At the Mission Table the key mission partners of the denomination, together with the representative pastors and laity, can further refine and pursue areas of common mission emphasis, making recommendations for areas of action. This table will go a long way toward encouraging relationships so that staff of the mission partners can effectively network around shared responsibilities and priorities. This table's sole focus will be the furtherance of God's mission through American Baptists, not the institutional life of the denomination. One present example of how this might work is a taskforce called together by the General Secretary, composed of representatives from OGS, International Ministries, National Ministries, regions and congregations, working to address the immigration of Burmese refugees from Thailand.

General Ministries, through the Office of the General Secretary, will be responsible for administering and resourcing the Mission Table. However, because the denomination's mission partners are a part of the Mission Table, the mission partners will be responsible for carrying back to their boards and agencies for implementation the implications of the Table's work for them. The Mission Table, as stated, serves as a broad mission think-tank for the denomination. It is not a programmatic entity that then implements program. It also has no directive authority over the national boards or other participants at the Table. However, it is to the boards' and other participants' best advantage to incorporate the insights and suggestions of the Table into their thinking and program as determined by them.

It is the opinion of the GEC that the Mission Summit and Mission Table could become the guiding light for this denomination as a missional body. The work of the Summit and Table should impact all levels of the denomination—international, national, regional, and local churches.

Though not a specific part of these recommendations, it is possible that Regions across our ABCUSA might want to sponsor area Mission Summits, challenging their churches and church members to look at mission opportunities around them. The result of such gatherings could be the expansion of mission networks—all across our denomination. The potential for mission engagement by ABC church members is enormous as well as exciting.

BIENNIAL

We are recommending that the Biennial remain a staple in American Baptist life. The purpose of the Biennial is to celebrate our ABC mission; to provide training for the support of that mission; to experience renewing and life-giving worship; and to care for

necessary governance tasks. Delegates will receive mission reports; be offered training, -be encouraged to work faithfully as partners in mission, and, through surveys and other methodologies will offer recommendations of mission priorities. In addition, delegates will continue to elect ABCUSA officers and members of the Board of General Ministries, and will have final authority over the bylaws of the ABCUSA. The Board of General Ministries will bring legislative and business items from time to time to the Biennial.

The enhanced significance of the Biennial will be its relationship to the Mission Summit and Mission Table. All Biennial delegates and guests who desire to do so will become participants of the Mission Summit. We would have large numbers of American Baptists bringing their voices and insights to the discernment of what God is calling American Baptists to be and to do.

In addition to these basic and governing actions, we envision the Biennial providing some or all of the following:

- Dealing with and deciding upon broad priorities for the ABC
- Celebrating our ABC identity
- Building energy for our vision and mission
- Offering support for pastors and all clergy
- Providing significant worship and fellowship
- Giving hands on resources for local churches and their ministry
- Providing workshops and forums for education in the best practices for ministry and mission
- Showcasing preaching
- Promoting emerging talents for the Leadership Pool
- Creating a significant place for the youth of our denomination
- Celebrating Mission Achievements and Baptist heroes
- Receiving honored guests from mission partners, from Baptist and other denominational bodies, and from ecumenical and mission agencies.
- Training events for the leadership recruitment pool.
- Discussion and discourse from a theological perspective dealing with current and relevant issues.

The Biennial is still the one event that brings together in one place the largest number of American Baptists. In that place we can worship, learn, celebrate God's work through us, grow in our insights, inform our opinions through learning experiences and stand arm in arm together as American Baptists in the United States of America. Going forth, educated and challenged to the call to mission that comes from our Lord, we can give witness to our faith and how our faith impacts lives through the local church and the American Baptist Churches in the USA to which we belong.

The planning for the Biennial would be led by the ABCUSA officers and staff. Representatives from the National Boards and Regions would be asked to participate in this effort.

GENERAL MINISTRIES BOARD (ABCUSA)

The statement of purpose for the ABCUSA as set forth in the prologue of the current bylaws does not change.

Rather than a General Board, we are proposing that a smaller entity of 30 people be created to be known as the Board of General Ministries (ABCUSA). It will be responsible for the welfare of the denomination as a whole and will oversee the work of the ABCUSA through the Office of the General Secretary. As such it will have the governance functions of a legally incorporated Board. Those functions will include:

- Responsibility for legal matters for the ABCUSA
- Seeking the welfare of the whole denomination (cooperating churches, regional boards, national boards, AMOs and covenanting organizations) through vision, leadership, and coordination.
- Presenting an overall picture of ABC life
- Interpreting our Baptist distinctives, American Baptist core values, and our mission future
- Promoting and celebrating ABC identity
- Electing the General Secretary
- Evaluating the performance of the Office of the General Secretary
- Overseeing such treasury and other internal administrative functions as required for the effective functioning of the denomination
- Assuring the provision of resources to the regional offices and their executives for executive search committee guidance, executive orientation and evaluation, and staff and board development
- Supporting stewardship and fund raising
- Developing/Overseeing the policies regarding the relationship of American Baptists to other Christian bodies and faith traditions
- Coordinating denominational services necessary for the maintenance of the professional ministry in the denomination
- Reviewing and assessing the performance of denominational functions carried out by other entities
- Planning and implementing Biennial meetings of the denomination
- Providing leadership and staffing the Mission Summit, Mission Table, (including coordinating research), the NLC, and the Covenanting Partners
- Overseeing the development and maintenance of the Leadership Pool

The 30 member Board of General Ministries shall consist of the following:

- Three officers elected by the Biennial
(President, Vice President, Budget Review Officer)
- Three ex-officio with full rights: Past President, the General Secretary, and the President of the Intercaucus Group
- 18 elected by the Biennial

- 5 elected by the Board of General Ministries to obtain diversity and skill set needed
- A director elected jointly by ABC International Ministries, National Ministries and the MMBB boards, and
- All shall be members of cooperating American Baptist churches

The National Nominating Committee shall bring to the Biennial delegates a slate for 3 designated ABC officers and the 18 persons to be elected by the Biennial to the Board of General Ministries. Each nominee would serve a four-year term with the opportunity for an additional term, for a maximum of eight years of service. A nominating petition endorsed by at least 50 congregations may be used to bring a name before the Biennial for any elected officer in addition to the slate brought by the National Nominating Committee.

AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

As stated earlier, the denomination is described best as a federation. Federations are associations of autonomous entities that voluntarily relate to one another and that are committed to one another--in our instance, by a covenant of relationships. This model at work in our ABC setting provides assurances that ABC relationships will appropriately reflect the autonomy and interdependence which is central to our polity. The proposed structure will clarify some of the misconceptions of the SCODS restructure as a hierarchical model which gave some boards authority over others.

At the same time, assurances are built into the current proposal that will safeguard the ABC identity of each of the national boards. The proposed bylaws of the Board of General Ministries state that those elected to it must come from cooperating churches and that the delegates in Biennial Session have final authority over its bylaw changes. Secondly, each of the national boards has in its proposed bylaws the provision for a special director elected to it by the Board of General Ministries. This special director gives to the Board of General Ministries the right to approve any bylaw change suggested by a national board that would alter its ABC identity or change its relationship to the American Baptist Churches. No such change can occur without the approval of the Board of General Ministries. In other words it gives General Ministries veto power over any such change. Likewise, General Ministries has in its proposed bylaws the provision for a special director who will represent the 3 national boards. This special director gives the right to the 3 national boards to vote on any proposed amendment to the bylaws of the Board of General Ministries that would alter its ABC identity or change its relationship to the American Baptist Churches. This in effect gives them veto power over any such change in General Ministries.

PUBLIC WITNESS STATEMENTS

Policy Statements or Resolutions, here forward in this proposal, will be referred to as Public Witness Statements. Public Witness Statements may be developed and come from any of the National and Regional Boards provided they have been adopted by their Board of

Directors as statements of those entities. For a public witness statement to become an American Baptist statement, three-fourths ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the covenanting Regional and National Boards (with the exception of MMBB) must approve the statement. The Board of General Ministries would be responsible for conducting the voting process leading to an official ABCUSA statement and publishing those statements that are approved by the covenanting partners. Current policy statements and resolutions remain as official ABCUSA statements. Public Witness Statements will represent the spiritual discernment of the covenanting partners as they seek to educate, activate, and advocate the teachings of Jesus.

LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT: A NEW PROPOSAL

The selection of people to serve and fulfill the leadership functions in the denomination is a critical task. Therefore, we propose that General Ministries create and be accountable for a leadership recruitment effort. This effort through partnerships with National Boards, Regions and local churches would identify present and emerging leaders and build a pool of prospective leaders. The overall purpose of the leadership recruitment effort would be to (1) build a repository of proven leaders for this denomination, and (2) have the opportunity to develop leaders for future service in the denomination. This pool of names would reflect the quality and gifts of leadership needed in denominational service and would identify the skills that persons have to offer. This data base would be a source for suggestions to fill vacancies on boards, task forces, etc. for the denomination. However, these entities would not be limited to the pool as the only source for names to consider in their organization.

Further, the leadership recruitment effort would carry the responsibility of providing on-going training, orientation and development of leadership skills for those whose names are added to the pool. As an example, those in charge of the leadership recruitment effort could plan a major leadership training event at the time of the Biennial. Those whose names were in the Leadership Pool would be invited to attend the event where the focus would be on skill development and ABC identity.

GENERAL SECRETARY

We are recommending that the present office of General Secretary continue to be known as the Office of the General Secretary. Such a title reflects the tradition of this position as well as the common language used by Baptist bodies around the world. This person would be “head of communion” for the denomination and would carry broad responsibilities for leadership and vision for the denomination as a whole. The General Secretary and staff will be responsible for managing the implementation of the responsibilities of the Board of General Ministries.

The General Secretary will be elected by the Board of General Ministries upon the nomination by the National Nominating Committee, augmented by a member chosen by

National Ministries, International Ministries, and MMBB. The General Secretary, like other national and regional Executives will serve with no set term of office.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

This body is the present General Executive Council. It is proposed that the National Leadership Council (NLC) include:

- President of the ABCUSA
- The General Secretary + up to 3 other staff from OGS
- Representatives of the National Boards (Exec. Dir + up to 3 others)
- Regional Executive Ministers
- Executive Directors of the following organizations:
 - AB Women's Ministries
 - Minister's Council
 - American Baptist Assembly
 - ABEC
 - Interim Ministries
 - AB Historical Society
 - AB Foundation

The minimum threshold criteria for membership in the NLC will be:

- Have an autonomous board and be financially viable
- Have a paid Executive
- Is a national ABCUSA organization that indicates its willingness:
 - To support the statement of purpose in the bylaws of the ABCUSA
 - To cooperate wholeheartedly in such relationships and projects at all levels of denominational life which seem advisable.
 - To be identified as an organization related to and participating in the life of the ABCUSA by use of the name and/or logo.
 - Is primarily devoted to providing programs and/or services to the ABCUSA.
 - Is accountable to the ABCUSA Policy Statements and Resolutions, and internal covenants within the GEC/NLC where applicable.

The final determination about membership for organizations, having met these threshold criteria, will rest with the National Leadership Council.

The National Leadership Council will meet once in the Biennial year and twice in the off-year. Its purposes will include to:

- Build and foster authentic relationships
- Participate in continuing education related to their executive roles
- Facilitate implementation of denominational priorities, including the work of the Mission Table
- Demonstrate progress on those priorities in their respective boards
- Conduct trend analysis

- Suggest means of improving the functioning of the denomination
- Participate in theological reflection

The General Secretary, along with the President of the ABCUSA, also may convene a meeting of the Covenanting Partners to discuss issues pertaining to them.

THE NATIONAL BOARDS

National Ministries, International Ministries, and MMBB will continue to be autonomous and interdependent boards of the denomination and faithful to their charters, providing leadership and resources for the mission of the denomination. The Board membership of each would be reflective of the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in our denomination. They would remain in a committed partnership with the Office of General Ministries and with Regions. Their focus, like all of the ABC, would be helping and supporting the local church in its mission. These bodies would have representation on the Mission Summit and Table so that communication between these bodies could go both ways in order to promote common goals.

The selection of the Executive Director of each of these Boards would be handled within each autonomous Board. When a candidate is selected, said candidate would be presented to the Board of General Ministries for election as a national secretary of the denomination.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE MINISTERS COUNCIL

Regions continue to be valued partners in our denomination. Regional Executive Ministers serve as ABC leaders representing their Regions and together they form the Regional Executive Ministers Council (REMC). In this staff forum they would continue to focus on mutual regional concerns reflecting the home base where each Executive serves. In addition, they would blend their perspectives from the Regions to give the denomination a view point which is needed to be able to serve the local church faithfully. They would be a part of the Mission Summit and Table in such a way as to reflect the concerns and needs of their Regions. At the same time they would be there in a committed partnership to further and strengthen the mission of the ABCUSA.

FUNDING THE ABCUSA MISSION

It is clear that one of the major issues driving the consideration of a new ABC structure on the national level is the funding of the ABCUSA mission. We have experienced a serious decline in United Mission and other specific opportunities to help fund our mission effort. Therefore, this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The GEC, in consultation with the ABC Treasurers Council, has sought to create a financially sustainable structure. The proposed new model reduces costs to the representative process by \$117,601 or 43%.

The assumptions that were used for the financial model are as follows:

Mission Table: The Mission Table is held every two years as a post-biennial event and structured as a 3-day, 2 –night meeting. 100% of expenses are covered for local church, Caucus, and General Ministries participants. 50% of room and board costs are covered for REMC, National Boards, covenanting AMOs and college and seminary participants. A \$17,000 travel pool is made available each year to help local church representatives attend interim meetings as needed.

NLC: The National Leadership Council meets two times a year and each meeting is structured as a 3-day, 2-night event. 100% of expenses are covered for the ABC president and General Ministries participants. 50% of expenses (including travel and room and board), are covered for REMC, National Boards and covenanting AMO participants.

CRITICAL ISSUES TO THIS NEW MODEL

In all the deliberations over this proposal that have occurred in the General Board and General Executive Council, two issues have been consistently raised. They are critical to this proposal because they are critical to American Baptists. The issues are REPRESENTATION and DIVERSITY.

REPRESENTATION

When SCODs was adopted in the early 1970's, representation was a central issue to the structure that was put into place. Representation was important to National Boards, the Nominating Committee, Caucuses, the AMOs, and all appointed Committees, Commissions, and Task Groups. But as important as representation was to these bodies, it became the hallmark for the General Board. Members of the General Board were chosen by Election Districts in each of the Regions and by the National Nominating Committee to be sure that the General Board reflected who we were as a denomination. Gender, race, rural, urban, young, old, geography became important. We wanted our American Baptists who represented these groups to be present through their representatives at the meetings of the General Board.

As the General Executive Council and the General Board have worked on this proposal, we have said representation is still important and critical. What we have in this proposal is a different approach to representation, but it is still there and it is still central. When we count those who will participate in the Mission Summit and those designated to be part of the Mission Table, as well as the Board of General Ministries and the National Boards, we will have a large part of our constituency participating in the governing and

mission efforts of our denomination. We think there could be even more representation in this model. Therefore, we continue to celebrate representation and make it a hallmark of who we are. The leadership pool will be a resource bank of names gathered from across the country which will greatly help us in seeking representation.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is an ABC core value, defining who we are. We are the most diverse denomination in America today. We celebrate our diversity. It gives us strength. It gives us direction. It gives community to us. This proposal calls for all bodies, the Summit, the Table, the Board of General Ministries, the National Boards, the NLC, appointed committees, commissions, and task groups to reflect the diversity of this denomination in its membership composition. A Joint Board Nominating Review Committee will regularly examine the make up of the national boards and the Mission Table to determine if they reflect the makeup of the denomination. This body will make recommendations to the various nominating committees to redress under-representation. This committee shall be composed of the President of the ABCUSA, the presidents of the national boards, the chair of the REMC, the presidents of the Ministers Council and American Baptist Women's Ministries, and the chair of the Intercaucus. Regions will be encouraged to submit diverse names based upon the following: urban, suburban, rural, large, small and mega churches, race, gender, age, geography, language, culture, clergy/lay, physical ability, and economic class.

In addition, the National Nominating Committee will be mandated to ensure that the diversity of the Mission Table accurately reflects or mirrors the diversity of the ABCUSA.

The National Nominating Committee will review the names sent by the Regions to ensure diversity and will report back to each Region and the NLC if names submitted do not meet the level of diversity needed to enable mutual accountability.

We will be intentional about building and strengthening leadership capacity as "mature respondents" so that we move beyond representation to actually accessing the gifts of diversity as evidenced by the meaningful engagement by all to fulfill our mission and purpose.

SUMMARY

Approximately every 35 years, or once every generation, American Baptists have significantly reshaped our denominational life to more adequately respond to the challenges of a new era. Each has built upon the past while also significantly diverging from it.

In this first part of the 21st Century, the GEC is making its best recommendation to the General Board and the Biennial for a structure that builds upon the best of SCODS while also offering significant changes to create a more nimble and streamlined structure. We believe it offers several significant advances over our current system. At the same time,

given the ever increasing pace of change, we anticipate that we will continue to build upon and refine this model as we live with it. Our goal has been to enable us to more effectively serve as the hands and feet of Christ in this era and to see our local churches and denominational bodies excitedly engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ to the world.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED BY GENERAL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES

1. Will there be any requirements that members of the program boards have to be from a Cooperating Church?

This is an issue that needs to be taken up in each board as it drafts its own set of bylaws

2. Will the Mission Table just meet once every two years?

As a whole, yes. There is the possibility that taskforces could be spun off that would meet otherwise as well. The budget assumes that the mission partners would fund their participation in any taskforce and there is a modest budget to provide for participation of local church members of the table to serve on a taskforce that would meet in between meetings of the table.

3. What was the thinking leading to removing a term limit from the General Secretary? Is there language in New York state law about how to resolve a situation involving dissatisfaction with someone in a position without a term limit?

The idea was to make this position consistent with every other leadership position in the denomination - national executive directors, regional executive ministers and pastors. The bylaws will reflect that the General Secretary serves at the pleasure of the Board of General Ministries and may be removed by them with or without cause. The bylaws will also state that the Executive Committee may suspend the General Secretary until such time as the board meets to act. There will be an annual evaluation.

4. With a small General Ministries Board, how will Puerto Rico have representation?

In the new model the Board of General Ministries becomes a separate board that together with NM and IM make up what used to be the General Board. There is an agreement that each region shall be represented on at least one of these three boards so that no region lacks representation on one of the national boards. Likewise every region is present at the Mission Table (both region staff and local church) and at the National Leadership Council - two important places for their voices to be heard in the new structure

5. Could the "guest theologian" always be someone from an ABC college or seminary?

At the Mission Table, which is the broad mission think tank for the denomination, seminaries and colleges are represented in order to ensure that we engage missiologically with one another. These representatives will be from American Baptist related schools. At the NLC theologians may be invited in from time to time as guests. While the priority will be to invite American Baptist theologians there will be times when we will also want to draw from the wider Baptist family or the wider church.

6. How is the role of the National Leadership Council different from the Board of General Ministries? What is the relationship of the NLC and the BGM?

The National Leadership Council will be the place where regional and national staff leaders gather to move forward the ideas of the Mission Table and to assess the overall effectiveness of our efforts. It is also a place where denominational leadership gathers to build relationships, to learn from each other and to receive training. The Board of General Ministries is the corporate entity known as ABCUSA which is tasked with specific responsibilities on behalf of the whole denomination such as ecumenical relations, supporting and staffing the Mission Table and the NLC, looking to the welfare of the whole denomination, and attending to issues of professional ministry. The BGM is a member of the NLC and the General Secretary serves as its chairperson.

7. Are there functions listed as functions of the Board of General Ministries which should really be functions of the Office of the General Secretary?

Because the Office of General Secretary serves as staff to the Board of General Ministries, the staff serves to implement the policies established by the board to fulfill its charter purposes within ABC life.

8. Can individual colleges and/or seminaries apply to become a member of the National Leadership Council?

In the past they have not been on the GEC which is what the NLC replaces. In the new Mission Table they are given representation through the American Baptist Association of Seminary Administrators and the American Baptist Association of Colleges and Universities. It is assumed that if colleges and seminaries wish to apply to be represented at the NLC it would again be through each respective organization (ABASA and ABACU), not as individual institutions.

9. Why are there 3 representatives from ABC colleges and 3 representatives from ABC seminaries on the Mission Table?

First, because they are a vital part of ABC mission and ministry helping to train future leaders of the church, and second, so that they are there to help us think theologically about mission at this table from their various perspectives.

10. How does the proposal meet the criteria of the "local church being the fundamental unit of mission"?

With local churches being present not only on the boards but also at the mission table and integral to the Mission Summit, their voice is enhanced in this proposal. They also retain final word on changes in ABC bylaws through the biennial delegates. Further, the addition of the Mission Table provides a place for the whole system to look at the needs and resources of our local congregations. They also have the right and encouragement to add names to the Leadership Pool.

11. In the new system with regions submitting names to the Nominating Committee which then selects the slate for election by the Biennial isn't this taking away the representation decisions away from the regions?

Not at all. The regions will have put forth a pool of names of several people, each of whom they feel would be a good representative. The reason for the pool, is that even with the best of intentions, it is difficult to guarantee the diversity of the board membership if each region is selecting one person. By the Regions putting forth several names in which they have confidence, the nominating committee is able to select from among them a slate that represents the face of ABC and also to build the Leadership Pool.

12. How will the transition from the current General Board to the separate, smaller boards be accomplished?

This is a detail that will be developed as the national boards and ABC officers continue to develop a transition plan. There will be more answers in November.

13. Will the content of the Common Criteria change? Will the process by which churches become cooperating change?

The structure proposal does not alter either the Covenant of Relationships which contains the common criteria, nor the process by which churches are recognized as cooperating churches.

14. On page 9 of "The Future is Bright", it is stated that for a Public Witness statement to become an American Baptist statement it must have approval from 3/4 of the covenanting regional and national boards. What are these boards?

Three national boards: General Ministries, National Ministries, International Ministries, and member regions boards which currently number 33.

15. What happens to statements which don't receive a 3/4 majority?

The originating board may maintain it as a statement of its own, and any other board may adopt it as well, but without the 3/4 affirmative vote required, it does not become a statement of the whole denomination, an ABC statement.

16. Will there continue to be a World Relief Committee.

Yes, there will continue to be a World Relief Committee related to General Ministries representing the boards.

17. Who will vet a nominee's church as being "cooperating", or rather who determines if a church is cooperating? Will it be the spirit or the letter of the statements that will determine cooperation?

"Cooperating church" is a technical term for a church which has been accepted by a region into membership and thereby into ABCUSA as a member church. The process remains with the regions as it is now.

18. We first want to be clear that the Ministers Council is not going to be represented on the Board of General Ministries, and consequently, it will not be represented on the Executive Committee of that Board either. This is a change from the present structure that has the President of the MC serve on the General Board and the GBEC.

True. In order to meet the cost reductions needed in the Representative Process, there is no provision for observers (whose expenses were covered by the Rep Process.) The Ministers Council remains on the National Leadership Council and the Mission Table.

19. Will there continue to be a Professional Ministries Team coordinated through the Office of the General Secretary? This Team does not appear to be reflected in any of the materials or on the grid. It is the only national body besides the Ministers Council that directly addresses the work of the clergy.

Since General Ministries has responsibility to "coordinate denominational services necessary for the maintenance of the professional ministry in the denomination" we will continue to staff this team and coordinate their work.

20. On page 9 of the narrative, it appears that the Program Boards, Regions and other groups are not limited to using the Leadership Pool in selecting candidates for positions. This greatly reduces the importance of the Leadership Pool and does not provide assurance that candidates selected for positions will have the training and development that the Pool would provide. We believe this training and support should be provided for all persons assuming leadership roles in the denomination.

The Leadership Pool will be a primary resource. However, especially at first, the Pool may not have someone with a specific skill a board might need. We don't believe this diminishes the importance of the pool, as it will be also used by regions and in the formation of taskforces, etc. This is one of the areas of opportunities for growth, as the pool grows both in numbers, skill sets, and training, more and more boards will turn to it to find the personnel needed on their boards, committees, task forces, etc.

21. At one point in the earlier drafts, it seemed as though the Leadership Pool had responsibility for supporting the diversity criteria that is so important to our denomination. This emphasis on having a pool of diverse leaders is now removed from the Leadership Pool to the Joint Board Nominating Review Committee. Will the importance of diversity still be emphasized in the work of the Leadership Pool? How will these two groups coordinate their efforts and work together? We note that the President of the Ministers Council has been added to the JBNRC, which is a new role for our President.

The leadership pool is a database, not a governance entity. People from a variety of ABC entities will be submitting names and information to that pool. There is a commitment to having a diverse Leadership Pool, but there needs to be an entity to assure diversity. Therefore, it is important that the JBNRC be an entity that monitors how well diversity is being met as outlined in the April 2008 GEC meeting: "urban, suburban, rural, large, small, and mega church; race; gender; age; geography; language; culture; clergy/lay; physical ability; and economic class."

22. We note that the National Leadership Council will not include a representative from any of our ABC seminaries or educational institutions. We believe that this voice should be heard at this table.

They have not been a part of the current GEC. They will be represented at the Mission Table as they are now on the General Board. The GEC established minimum threshold criteria for membership in

the NLC with the understanding that ABC entities who feel they meet the criteria may apply for representation on the NLC, but the final decision rests with the NLC. (pp 10-11)

23. On page 10 of the narrative, we note that the General Secretary will no longer have a limited term of office. This is a big change that we've not heard in previous discussions. Please understand that our concern over this has nothing to do with our feelings about Roy, but we can't help but have questions about this change. Will it apply during the present General Secretary's tenure or after? Will it result in having a General Secretary for life? Since many organizations are moving away from limitless terms, we would like to hear the rationale behind this recommendation.

The rationale is to bring this position in line with national and regional executives and with pastors within the denomination. Just as no pastor, executive minister, or executive director is guaranteed a position for life, neither is a general secretary. The Board of General Ministries like a church or the other boards has the option to terminate the service of a general secretary who is not fulfilling her/his role satisfactorily. Regular evaluations will remain in place.

24. On the "Mission Connections and Stewardship Grid" we note that the Board of General Ministries is to serve ABC congregations by providing ABC identity and Mission support materials. This is good and very important for the functioning of our local churches. We believe that the BGM also ought to help the local churches by sharing ABC's identity to others on a national level through media advertisements and promotions, which the local church is simply not equipped to do. This would be a tremendous help to the local churches, and models of how it can be done are found in many other denominations. Efforts like this would help to show that the denomination truly is committed to the local church as our fundamental unit of mission.

We would love to do this. One issue is funding and these are expensive propositions. "Serving as the Hands and Feet of Christ" is proving to be a wonderful identity statement and is being widely embraced. We continue to explore how we might use this theme with the larger public.

25. We understand that a major impetus for restructuring was inadequate funding for administrative operations. It seems important for the narrative to fully lay out the expected revenue streams of the new model. What will our local churches be asked to do? Will NM, IM, OGS and the Regions all appeal separately to the local churches? Will the UM continue to be divided between the regions and the national bodies according to the same formula?

We will continue to function under the current budget covenant until the covenant partners agree to change it. The budget covenant that is in place was adopted with the understanding that it would permit greater opportunity for appeals by the partners than the old system allowed. United Mission remains integral to the covenant and the funding stream.

26. In the new structure, where would (ecumenism) the Committee on Christian Unity be placed? Will the function of the committee change, if so, how?

OGS (General Ministries) retains the responsibility for ecumenical relations. There would still be a committee on Christian Unity.

27. Will we continue to maintain our relationship with WCC, NCC, BWA, etc ?

Yes, and with Christian Churches Together, as well.

28. How will communication about ecumenism be handled with the churches?

As it is now, through OGS staff and media.