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The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

A Newsletter of the American Baptist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Region

. . . powerful and Spirit-filled

Fort Morgan Baptists Engage in Weekend Journey of Discovery

WORDS OF THANKS ARE NOT ENOUGH FOR THE WORK OF DESMOND Hoffmeister, our Transition Executive Minister, who is a deeply committed man of God. On the weekend of September 16-18, 2005 Desmond lead the church family at Fort Morgan First Baptist Church in a special journey to discover God.

When Al Forbes of "The Believers," a visiting music group from the local Nazarene church, heard Desmond's presentation, he declared, "Now that's preaching!" After the weekend journey, members of the host church testified, "It was powerful and Spirit-filled." Desmond's Spirit-filled life of faith was also evident in the closing service on Sunday morning when he challenged people in the congregation to commit their lives anew to Jesus Christ. Treasurer, ClairLeibhart, said, "I felt different and strangely moved. I have never experienced anything like this before." Between 50 and 60 people moved up the aisle to the altar to lay their lives anew before God.



(in the foreground) Desmond Hoffmeister and Steve Mitchell

The weekend schedule was simple. The Friday night service was held with pie and fruit following. The Saturday morning breakfast was an informal time when Desmond shared his powerful testimony. Worship on Saturday evening began after a pot-luck dinner. A regular service on Sunday morning followed. God's Spirit was felt at every turn. Those who attended were blessed by Desmond's ministry among them.

Submitted by Tom Wheeler, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Fort Morgan

Inside Information

- Top Ten Reasons to Give to the World Mission Offering
- Denver Seminary Offers American Baptist History and Polity Course
- Clusters Begin to Discover Their Unique Ministry and Mission

**This week
in Colorado Springs
we'll continue
*Discovering God
Together*
at the
**2005 ABCRM
Gathering****

through. . .

- " **Worship**
- " **Discovery Sessions**
- " **Prayer**
- " **Fellowship**
- " **Stories**
- " **Worshipful Work**

Details are available from your church office and in previous issues of this electronic newsletter. Go to www.abcrm.org, click on the "Communication" menu to view archived issues.

“Discovering God is a wonderful thought.”

SE WY/NE CO Churches Plan for Ministry and Mission

The Southeast Wyoming/Northeast Colorado Cluster met at the American Baptist Church in Fort Collins, CO, on October 4, 2005. Dan Vincent, pastor, and members of the Fort Collins congregation hosted the event and provided a gourmet soup buffet lunch.

As the cluster members began their work together, they heard Brian High (pastor of FBC/Cheyenne, WY) say, “Discovering God is a wonderful thought.” As a long-time American Baptist, Brian spoke of opportunities he has had to discover God through his denominational involvement. Most memorable for him were the association meetings in another Region. “We discover God,” he said, “through each other and God’s Word.” He recalled that the gathering of the association was much like what we expect a cluster will be. As God’s people gather with open minds, they inevitably learn something about God.

Since this particular cluster is made up of churches from three (former) Areas, the need for people to get better acquainted was evident from the outset. A time of group prayer and sharing presented participants with an opportunity to get to know one another better.

The prayer and sharing groups modulated into working groups as the morning progressed. Facilitated by ABCRM staff persons, groups discussed the shifts they are experiencing in their churches and the communities in which they minister.

They noted:

- Church is now a consumer-driven choice rather than a requirement.
- Many churches have become either mega or niche churches.
- We are polarized around ideas both in our nation and in our churches.
- Technological language pervades all of society.
- We are in the midst of a meth crisis.

Additional observed shifts include increased mobility, planned obsolescence, mass communication, stressors on our time, and the altered family unit.



The good news is that these shifts imply new opportunities for ministry in God’s name. Aside from the more obvious opportunities to establish niche churches and specialized ministries with singles, single parents, and grandparents who are caring for young

children, the group identified these additional opportunities: an exchange of ideas among youth leaders, cooperative mission trips, offering financial training to people in the community who have trouble managing their money, and the nurturing of relationships in order to provide stability. In addition, the unprecedented growth along I-25 in Northern Colorado clearly presents these cluster churches with the opportunity to plant a new church in the growth area.

The abundance of ideas attests to the creativity of members of this

cluster. In order to begin to get a handle on what it is God may be calling this cluster to do, the participants viewed the list of opportunities through an ABC/ABCRM lens. What

opportunities are unique to American Baptists? Who are we and what do we have to offer our communities?



Those present agreed that we are an independent people living in community. We can relate to one another in non-judgmental ways. In other words, we can learn to disagree without being disagreeable. An American Baptist community can be a place in which others will not be judged. We value acceptance, and can offer a safe harbor to those who need it for one reason or another. Both our image and our message need to convey these principles.

What's next for this cluster? A committee, chaired by Dan Vincent, was formed to look at the plethora of ideas generated for cluster ministry and mission and determine the next steps. It is the intent that this committee will communicate its findings at the cluster meeting held during the 2005 ABCRM Gathering. Region staff will work closely with the committee as the future takes shape. However, the cluster will be what its churches determine it to be.



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Cluster Members Appreciate Open Forum



"Attending the cluster meeting was a first for me. Going into it I expected to gain a broader understanding of what God was doing in our Region, and I was not disappointed. It was a great experience to meet representatives from other churches and have the opportunity for fellowship. We are fortunate to have the leadership team we do in ABCRM and it was an honor to represent Loveland."

**Becca Zeiler Giffin
Program Director,
FBC/Loveland, CO**



"I was pleased with the format and content of the meeting. It was both interesting and encouraging to hear what is going on in the churches of our cluster. . . . We concluded with a time of sharing with Desmond. He discussed some of the challenges the Region faces as well as some of the accusations that have been leveled at the Region and staff. As Desmond talked with us, he invited questions and comments. It was both informative and encouraging to be able to openly discuss the rumors that have been circulating around the Region. . . . I left the meeting encouraged."

**Myron Reed
Associate Pastor,
Calvary Baptist/Cheyenne, WY**



Association Principle is Basic for Baptists

As Baptists, we are mission people. We want to “do” mission. We also realize that the task is often too great for any single church, so we are part of a denomination, called American Baptist Churches USA. In fact, the very realization that the missional task is monumental led to the beginning of Baptist denominational life.

Through the years, American Baptists have adopted many forms of association (e.g., areas, election districts, and regions) in order to cooperate more effectively. By forming clusters, we continue to build on this heritage for the sake of effective ministry and mission.

“Re-affirming the Association Principle,” a Statement of Concern adopted by the delegates to the Biennial last summer, calls American Baptists to: “practice the historic Baptist principle of voluntary association at all levels; encourage leaders to foster a variety of ways to work together under the guidance of God; recognize that diversity exists within our ABC family and celebrate the many ways we cooperate in service to God; witness that the body of Christ consists of many different members, that not all members are alike, and that each member is necessary for the healthy functioning of the church.”

Pursuing shared ministry and mission requires a commitment to working across cultural and theological differences. Although we relate in different ways, we remain partners in ministry as we work together for the sake of the wider vision of the Reign of God.

Ingrid Dvirnak
Newsletter Editor

Western CO/Moab, UT Churches Get Back to the Basics

Representatives from churches in the Western CO/Moab, UT Cluster came together at First Baptist Church in Grand Junction on Saturday, October 8, 2005. Senior pastor, Scott Hogue, and Minister of Worship, Janice Newman teamed up with several from the FBC congregation to cordially host the day’s activities. ABCRM staff persons, Desmond Hoffmeister, Mike Oldham, and Wayne Dvirnak led the event.

Just as Acts 2 describes a new day for the early church at the end of Pentecost, so this cluster gathering heralded a “new day” for these churches on the Western Slope. In speaking about the need to get back to the basics of first century church life, Mike Oldham, Ministry and Mission Coach for this cluster, said the cluster concept invites believers to come together out of devotion to God and to each other. This kind of devotion inspires us to share with those who need our help, care for one another, pray together, and reach out to neighbors wherever and whoever they might be. Getting back to the basics—that’s what Ministry and Mission Clusters are all about.

After an extended time of prayer and sharing, individuals were invited to verbalize their expectations for the day. Nouns—*koinonia*, covenant relationships, and responsibilities—formed a solid core of the list. Action phrases such as “laying a solid foundation” and “rebuilding family” indicated the depth of commitment held by the people who gathered to discover and discern the scope of this cluster’s ministry and mission.

As was the case with Discovery and Discernment Session participants in other clusters, they studied societal shifts, focusing primarily on those that impact the church. The list was similar to those generated by other clusters (e.g., consumerism, time constraints, influence of media, blended families), but the announcement that we’re living in a “glocal” world caught everyone’s attention. Explaining the newly coined phrase, Desmond Hoffmeister said global thinking is now a given among our youth. A problem/need originates locally, but it is assumed that the solution will be found globally.



Because of these monumental shifts, churches are gifted with ministry opportunities. A sampling of identified opportunities follows:

- Cultivate a regional culture that is healthy for lay and clergy leadership.
- Bridge we/they culture.
- Develop support systems.
- Provide stability in the midst of change.
- Nurture a culture of diversity.
- Plant new churches and revive existing churches.
- Align the Region's agenda with the agenda of the local church.

What challenges lie ahead for this cluster of churches (and quite possibly, for other clusters in our Region)? Geographic distances inevitably contribute to the feeling of isolation, although on the Western Slope, the pastors as well as ABW Ministries groups take them in stride. One pastor stated, "If I turn my radio off, I can use the miles as a time to listen to God." Trust among churches and between churches and the Region rises to the top of the list as well. Region staff persons were encouraged to stick with the intentional shifts currently being made. The group affirmed that denominational shifts should serve the local church. Regarding change in the local church, it was proposed that the Region assist in training pastors to be transformational leaders who are equipped to help create church cultures that accept new models for ministry and mission. It was also noted that in a culture of change, healthy churches



have the unique opportunity to inform the change.

Going back to the basics once again, the ABCs of being American Baptist were reiterated. The local church is autonomous, so each congregation chooses its own pastor. Believer's baptism is foundational. Other distinctives include soul liberty, separation of church and state, and priesthood of the believer. Mission is the glue that holds us together. From within this framework, American Baptists proclaim God's inclusive love.

So in which collaborative ministries will the churches on Colorado's Western slope and their sister in Moab, UT engage? It's too early to tell. It may be that after each church owns and names its unique call, some natural ministry groupings will evolve. Church planting is always a probability. Providing educational opportunities for clergy and laity is a possibility.

Cluster leaders were identified in the persons of James Conley (FBC/Delta) and Ken Pettis (interim, FBC/Austin). Together they will review the findings, sift through the possibilities, and present their discoveries to the Cluster at the Gathering in Colorado Springs later this month.

Sharing the Excitement

"We're excited, how 'bout you?" Did you ever yell this cheer back and forth to the opposing team at your high school sporting events? That is how I feel about the new Ministry and Mission Clusters. When the idea of shifting to "Clusters" instead of Areas was discussed early in the year at an Area II Advisory Board meeting, I was ecstatic. Having been an American Baptist all my life, and having spent all of those years in Delta, I have seen the ups and downs of our Area's distance dynamics. I was delighted at our Area Meeting in April to have the cluster discussion and thus a unanimous vote to go forward.



On October 8th as the first Discovery and Discernment Session for the Western CO/Moab, UT Ministry and Mission Cluster was held in Grand Junction, I went with excitement. We discussed shifts, vision, challenges, and discerned ways our cluster churches can come together and support one another. As we go into the 2005 ABCRM Gathering on October 21st in Colorado Springs, I hope all of you are yelling *"I'm excited, how 'bout you?"* with the changes that are happening in our Cluster and our Region.

*Cheryle
Messenger,
First Baptist,
Delta, CO*



Top 10 Reasons to Support the World Mission Offering

1 International Ministries (IM) has a continuing legacy of amazing power. The story that began with the Judsons has multiplied through the years.

2 IM is one of the most respected mission sending agencies in the United States. The Baptist World Alliance has been quoted as saying, "IM is the finest sending agency in the USA." World Vision always lists IM as one of the top sending agencies.

3 IM has indiginitis. This means we have a missiology and history of successfully working with national leaders and raising them up to develop their own leadership. This is proven by the thriving church in Burma and Nagaland (India) *after* government policy forced foreign missionaries to leave the country. IM always has more requests for assistance from indigenous leaders than can be met because they know we will empower them to continue on their own.

4 The way IM works. When turmoil in the Congo forced missionaries to be evacuated, all other agencies, including the U.S. State Department looked to IM to provide leadership in that evacuation.

5 There is a fiscally responsible record of audits and oversight that assures money is used properly.

6 IM gets more bang for the buck. Because of indiginitis (*see #3*), ministry by IM missionaries is multiplied.

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Denver Cluster Breaks Ground for Transition to Ministry

At the invitation of Kay Farley, Ministry and Mission Coach for the Denver Cluster, representatives from several churches and ministries met at Aurora Hills Baptist Church on Wednesday, October 12. Host pastor, Jim Simon, challenged the pastors and laity present to think about what it means to be a living sacrifice.

"These words don't appear to fit together," he noted. By looking at examples from the life of Jesus, we learn that if we live our lives sacrificially, some people will mock us. Others will abandon us. Still others will believe us. Sacrifice will produce forgiveness and show our complete dependence on God. Cluster ministry may require some sacrifice as pastors and lay leaders take time from their hectic schedules to come together periodically to explore the possibilities of common ministry and mission in Denver. But stepping out of an isolation mode and getting to know each other has benefits. Those who met together in this initial cluster meeting experience some of those benefits.

It may appear ironic to some that ministry in the city lends itself to operating in isolation. One would assume that pastors and churches located on the extensive plains of our Region would experience isolation, whereas pastors in city settings would experience close fellowship because of their proximity. This is not necessarily the case. Perhaps one reason for this anomaly is that some people gravitate to the city in order to be anonymous. Those who live in more rural areas seek relationships and

make a serious effort to form them. In this cluster gathering, participants agreed that it takes focus, vision, and purpose to step out of a mode of isolation. The October 12th meeting was a first step.

Challenges of city churches are similar to those experienced by all cluster churches. The familiar trends of aging and diminishing congregations were recognized as was the need to find more effective ways to minister to senior members of our churches and communities. In many locales, the facilities themselves are notable assets that could be shared. One participant suggested the need to change the definition of success in order to keep our focus on ministry and mission, rather than numbers and growth.

With Desmond Hoffmeister, Transition Executive Minister, leading the group, participants engaged in a progressive discussion of society shifts that provide us with unique opportunities for ministry and mission. For example, the group considered the current mega church phenomenon. To a great extent, mega churches have defined success as well as worship. People gravitate to these churches because they seek anonymity, excellence, professionalism, and perhaps entertainment. Ministries are specialized. The culture is corporate. Leadership is staff driven. Key questions were then framed:

- How can we maximize these characteristics in our churches?
- Can we be small and still incorporate these characteristics?
- Since we usually offer the

SE CO/NM Cluster Infused with New Energy

Lake Avenue Baptist Church of Pueblo was the gathering place on October 13 for American Baptists in the SE CO/NM Ministry and Mission Cluster. Host pastor, Rob Clausen, and cluster coach, Mike Oldham welcomed participants. Those who had attended the preexisting Area III meetings recognized familiar faces and made new friends with first-timers.

Recalling the Hebrew nation's Exodus and reviewing the contents of Caleb's report as written in Numbers 13, Mike Oldham described the scene in contemporary terms as God's own version of "Brat Camp." God's rebellious children were spending time in the desert in order to learn to trust their leaders, work with each other, and form community. Their response was, "We want to go back to Egypt. Everything was better there." Mike skillfully compared modern day churches to the Israelite nation. Instead of looking to the promised



land of the future and saying, "Wow, that's a great place to be headed," we hear murmurs of "I like the past a little better."

Cluster dialogue is hopeful, positive talk about the future. However, in order to get to the future, it is

necessary that we recognize where we are today and how we have arrived here. Cultural shifts were named and analyzed. Realizing that the church is no longer the hub of family life, that there are monumental changes in family structures, that the connection between church and society is changing, that our world is multicultural, and that people have a myriad of options to consider on Sunday morning, the group discussed ways to take advantage of these shifts.

To move into effective cluster ministry, one participant perceived that it will be essential to reinvigorate our spiritual curiosity and rediscover mission. Another urged the group to recognize that short-term needs *can* indeed be met. Still another advocated for identifying a ministry and doing it well. Interchurch and intercultural activities will be essential as will networking and the establishment of strategic partnerships with churches and organizations.



Cluster dialogue turned to challenges that must be addressed in order for effective ministry and mission to take place. One group summed it up by saying, “Plain and simple, change hurts!” They noted that churches have adopted a sedentary attitude and exhibit fear of moving into the future. The challenges to revive the churches’ sense of purpose and mission, demonstrate value in belonging, reflect real life beyond the “Sunday morning mask,” discover ways to open the doors to new ministries, communicate stories of current successful ministries, and build community in this hi-tech age were highlighted.

In addition to discussing the uniqueness of American Baptists, the group detailed some of the ways the Region could help them achieve their purposes. Participants expressed appreciation for the cluster meeting and encouraged the scheduling of similar gatherings in the future. Advance notification of all events was requested, as well as prayer lists and new bits to circulate among the cluster churches. The identification of a “point” person in each congregation to help build a cluster-wide communication network was suggested.

Collaborative ministries for future consideration include cooperative mission trips, traveling VBS leadership team, and shared youth leaders. While change might include some painful steps, change is possible. At the end of the day, those who gathered in Pueblo agreed, “We have a lot of work to do!” But the work has begun.



Newly Energized Leaders Reflect. . .

When I was asked to attend Thursday’s meeting, I had not a clue what it would be about. I decided to go to see if I could learn new things to present to the Pulpit Committee in my home church. Well, was I surprised to learn I was only one of about 15 churches searching for a pastor and most all attending had the same common challenge—lack of growth and passion. The list of opportunities presented were definitely far reaching and the challenges numerous, but what I learned was this: we have done a very good job at isolating ourselves and not sharing information. This meeting is the beginning of a new path of becoming a group.

I wrote on the evaluation that I felt the cluster was at Kindergarten level. That’s good because everything we need to learn to become a good citizen we learn in Kindergarten, so everything we need to learn to become leaders and voices for our churches and for ABC/ ABCRM, we will learn in groups such as this.

*Bev Embry-Anderson
FBC/Cañon City*



After our SE CO/NM Cluster meeting, I am both energized and exhausted.

I am *exhausted* because there is a lot of work and there are a lot of challenges ahead of us.

I am *excited* because we are moving beyond institutional maintenance and a survival mentality in the ABCRM.

And anytime we move from trying to recapture an idealized view of the past, and have the courage to let God lead us into greater things in the future, I GET EXCITED!

*Clint Walker
Youth Pastor,
FBC/Colorado Springs*



American Baptist History and Polity Course Offered at Denver Seminary

Denver Seminary offered an American Baptist History and Polity Course this past summer. It was taught by Louise Barger, former Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountain Region.

Because it was offered during the summer, the class was fast-paced, covering Baptist history from the pre-Reformation days to the present in a time span of two weeks and 25 hours of lecture time. The instructor brought her own personal history of

and experience with the ABC/USA to the class. She creatively crafted the class schedule to incorporate guest presenters, who are pastors of American Baptist churches in the metro Denver area.

The national biennial of ABCUSA convened near the end of the class. It was fascinating to attend the Biennial after having learned about the origin of American Baptists and how the denomination has progressed throughout the years. The Biennial provided a place for

experiential learning about American Baptist polity. The concepts of church freedom and the associational principle were solidified in my own mind.

While Denver Seminary is not an American Baptist seminary, there are an increasing number of American Baptist students enrolled at the school. Those who took this class appreciate Dr. Barger's skillful instruction and the opportunity to take the class locally.

Kathy Scott
2004 M. Div. graduate,
Denver Seminary

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