



The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

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

Discovering God in Places of Discomfort

During the 2005 ABCRM Gathering I preached about Elijah discovering God in the discomfort of a cave. For a variety of reasons, we as American Baptists are indeed experiencing considerable discomfort as a faith community. One of the main sources of discomfort stems from our attempt to develop the ability to live together with other Christians who have very different views and convictions than we do. In short, how do we rise to the challenge of affirming the oneness of the body of Christ with people that have experienced God in ways that are so different from ours?

We face this challenge in the context of our relationship with the Colorado Council of Churches. Relating to some members of the ABCUSA family is yet another challenge. Our Region is not immune to these sources of discomfort.

We have decided to renew our membership in the Council for a trial period of three years. During or at the end of that period we have the freedom to evaluate our membership based on the following criteria:

1. Have our participation and presence made a difference in shaping the Christian message communicated to the broader society?
2. Is our membership enhancing our vision or mission?

We have made an unequivocal commitment to communicate the actions of the Council. We certainly will solicit your opinions from time to time on various issues, thereby enabling us to articulate the position of our constituency. Although the vote at the Gathering to remain members of the Council was overwhelming, we are aware that for some, this is a difficult decision to accept. We honor you for your tolerance and acceptance of communal expression of the body.

Because we want to recognize the dissenting opinion as well as the opinion of those who feel strongly that we should be members of the Council, we are offering ABCRM churches the opportunity to register your convictions if you so choose. We are providing you with the option of indicating that financial contributions from you should not go to support our contribution to the

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Council. We would also welcome the intent of those churches who wish to have their financial support pay for our contribution to the Council.

Last week the General Board voted to include new language in "*We Are American Baptists*," a document that describes who we are as a denomination. The addition reads as
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follows: [American Baptists are people] “who submit to the teaching of Scripture that God’s design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, and acknowledge that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical teaching.”

The ABCUSA community continues to struggle with how we are going to live together as individually incorporated entities living in covenant to do mission together when there are such strong, differing convictions on the subject of human sexuality. I have been asked by our General Secretary, Roy Medley, to be part of a delegation to meet with the Board of the ABC of the Pacific Southwest as they continue to deliberate their relationship with ABCUSA.

Next year we will have a time and process to deliberate how we will deal with the issue of human sexuality. We will also have opportunity to give input on what our new Bylaws are going to look like. All of these issues will compel us to struggle with the discomfort of living together with sisters and brothers who are either different or who interpret and live our Christian faith in different ways.

May God help us not to allow the discomfort to displace and alienate us. May God help us to walk thru the discomfort and discover the still small voice to guide us.

*Desmond Hoffmeister
Transitional Executive Minister*

Dealing with Difficult Issues

I always feel a deep amount of pain when I see people divided over the great issues of our time. Regardless of whether it is political divisions that seem to make Republicans and Democrats arch enemies or whether it is religious issues such as abortion or homosexuality or the debate over whether the preacher should be male or female, difficult issues are deeply seated in our beliefs and practices.

I have discovered that the truly difficult issues seem to come from two root issues.

- The authority of the Scriptures or
- The interpretation of the Scriptures.

The phrase that seems to pop up most often is, “But that (whatever it is) is unscriptural.” Usually our disagreements result from differences in the way scripture is interpreted and the amount of emphasis that is placed on any particular passages. Yet, the phrase, “It’s unscriptural,” comes from both sides of the argument.

So what holds us together and allows us to function in harmony when deep issues divide us? Jesus and the salvation He brings is the glue of our faith. What did Jesus say about differences of thought and opinion?

Jesus said in John 16:2-4 “...a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.”

Jesus also spoke of the coming of the Spirit of Truth, promising that “. . . when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth (John 16:13).

Remember Jesus and John in Luke 9?

“*Master,*” said John, “*we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.*”

“*Do not stop him,*” Jesus said, “*for whoever is not against you is for you*”(verses 49-50).

So what holds us together and allows us to function in harmony when deep issues divide us? Jesus and the salvation He brings is the glue of our faith.

As we seek to come to agreement on scriptural and spiritual truth, we must be willing to learn from one another. When there are differences of opinion, I believe we must dialogue and understand one another and discern why we each hold the beliefs that we hold.

And of course Jesus’ principal teaching is “. . . Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All [people] will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

So when there are differences among us, remember Jesus and what he taught and what He was about!

*Tom Wheeler
Pastor, FBC/Ft. Morgan*

Colorado Council of Churches

Full Council Meets

In keeping with our mandate from the Region Board to be fully active in the Colorado Council of Churches, in addition to myself as the representative on the Executive Committee and the Full Council, Desmond Hoffmeister has appointed Wayne Dvirnak to be one representative to the Full Council and represent us on the Unity Commission. He has appointed Kay Farley to be the other Full Council representative and our representative on the Justice Commission.

The Council met on November 10 at All Saints Lutheran Church in Aurora, CO. The major share of the activity centered around work of the two commissions. The Unity Commission announced the speaker at the Sunrise Service will be Joe Nixon, pastor of Shorter AME Church. They are exploring involvement with the Milestones Project designed to help parents teach their children to value and respect people who are different from themselves. They are setting up another dialogue with the AJC (American Jewish Committee) and continue the dialogue with a group of Evangelical Pastors.

The Justice Commission is working with the City of Denver on a model dealing with homelessness, connecting 100 churches with 100 families to help them enter a home and mentoring them for a year to foster stability. They are working with the Greater Denver Metro Ministerial Alliance to establish a MLK Prayer Breakfast in an effort to confront racism and violence. They are also developing a system to disseminate information to the Council congregations regarding legislative issues. The Council raised \$5000.00 for Katrina hurricane victims with the Salvation Army and the Ministerial Alliance and is working with the "Let Justice Role" campaign, a national effort to raise the minimum wage to assist the poorest of the poor.

New officers were voted in: President – Janet Schlenker, Presbyterian; Vice-President – Sandra Boyd, Episcopalian; Secretary – Gordon Kieft, ABC; and Treasurer – David McConico, Disciples.

As your representative on the Executive Committee, I will attempt to stay in touch through the ABCRM newsletter. If you have questions or concerns, contact me or the other representatives.

Gordon J. Kieft
ABCRM Representative to CCC and Council Secretary

General Board Passes Declarations of Importance on War and Federal Budget

Declarations calling for prayer and commitment to the work of peace in Iraq and for restoration of proposed federal budget cuts in social services were adopted by the General Board of ABCUSA in its November meeting at Green Lake.

The first "declaration of importance" calls upon "our churches and their members now to enter into a time of prayer, intercession, and lamentation over the agony of war and of hope for the prospect of peace in Iraq." It asks prayer for U.S. leaders, the people of Iraq, those serving in the military, and their loved ones.

Unity Commission Develops Curriculum

The Unity Commission of the Colorado Council of Churches is in the process of developing a four-session study guide with a video accompaniment to facilitate study and discussion around the topic of Christian unity. The course will be built around three passages of Scripture found in John 17:22-23, Ephesians 4:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 12:20-21.

Unity does not mean or require unanimity, so questions about what it means to be of one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism will be considered. An attempt will be made to understand the diverse roles and contributions various denominations bring to the body of Christ.

When the curriculum is developed, it will be available through the Colorado Council of Churches and will be an enlightening study for any adult Sunday School class. A more challenging approach would be to form an ecumenical group from various churches during the Lenten season to do the four-week study together. Watch for more details in 2006.

Wayne Dvirnak
Ministry and Mission Coach
ABCRM Representative to
CCC/Unity Commission

The second declaration calls on American Baptists to urge their congressional representatives not to pass the pending federal budget unless \$50 billion in cuts are restored for food stamps, Medicaid, child care, and student aid and loans. Addition news from the General Board meeting may be found at www.abc-usa.org.

Fort Lupton Pastor Authors Book

Robert Garcia, pastor of FBC/Fort Lupton, CO, is the author of a soon-to-be-released book (December 15, 2005). *Can Anything Good Come Out of Saguache?* is the story of his mother as told by her children. All of the children were born at home and raised in Saguache, a small town in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. In an interview, Robert shared the story behind the writing of the book.

RMAB: What was your motivation for writing the book?

Garcia: The family was the chief motivating factor. We felt the need to tell her story so others would know what kind of a special person she was. We also wanted to preserve her legacy, the fruit of her leadership, and her teachings and convictions. During her final five years while she ill, we each took turns sitting with her. Much of what is written in the book came from our one-to-one conversations with her.

Another source was our annual family reunions. During those gatherings, Mom would sit in the middle of all of us and say, "Let's sing." And that was just the beginning of precious times together.

RMAB: Tell me more about your family.

Garcia: There are 11 of us: four sisters and seven brothers. We all live nearby, except for one sibling in Salem, OR. We are all parents/grandparents.

RMAB: Your name appears on the cover as the author, but everyone

contributed. How did this work?

Garcia: Everyone fed material to me, and I compiled it. The family unanimously authorized me to write the final version. I began writing her story in 1990. Mom died in October of 1991 at the age of 89.

RMAB: Is the book categorized as biography?

Garcia: Yes. This is Mom's story. She's the central character. She was born in the United States. As a girl, she lived in New Mexico. Her parents were laborers who eventually came to Colorado. She lived in Saguache for 74 years.

But as far as the category noted on the cover, it's listed as Christian Living/Practical Life. Mom's story is practical, yet complicated.

RMAB: Who is your intended readership? Why should someone besides a family member read this book?

Garcia: Because of the vicious attack on the families of America today, America should read it! Church people should read this book. Single moms and grandparents who are raising their grandchildren should read the book. Single fathers and families without fathers need to read this book. It is possible to have successful healthy families today. Mom did it! She was single, uneducated, and quite uninformed. She was a member of a minority group. She raised several teenagers at the same time. Every family member needs to read this book.

RMAB: What did you discover in the process of writing this book?

Garcia: I learned that I was very, very special to my mother and to my family. Ten siblings still think so today. I did not realize how much I love my family, and how much they love me. It wasn't until I began receiving their stories that these feelings of deep love surfaced. As of our last reunion, our family totals 130. We still find it hard to leave each other.

I am very much a family-oriented person. You can't do it on your own. When I am away from my next of kin, my church is my family. My faith and my family are the most important things in my life.

RMAB: Were there any "ahas" about family?

Garcia: Yes. When we were growing up, we were confronted with disturbing, opposing views from two sides of society. First, I discovered that our Spanish culture did not think well of those who break away from traditions. For example, the more I accomplished, the more I was ridiculed and mocked. There was a feeling among my people that I was "better" than they were. Many times, I deliberately stumbled to show my humanity.

Second, our Anglo community did not allow us to speak Spanish in public. We were often disciplined with hate and spite. Yet, at the same time, it was the Anglo community that encouraged me to complete my education and go forward.

My family began to change, slowly, with time. Today I feel honored by my family. I was able to encourage them to read and be informed of the contemporary world in which we lived. Books are bridges that serve to bring us together. Mom's story has certainly accomplished this in our family.

RMAB: Was it easy to find a publisher?

Garcia: Kinda! After making several inquiries, we settled on WinePress (Pleasant Word) located in Enumclaw, Washington. Their price package was affordable. I really wanted Judson Press to have it, but at the time, they were not interested. Pleasant Word seemed the one for our story.

RMAB: Do you have plans to do additional writing for publication?

Garcia: Yes, in fact, I have just finished a second book. This is a children's story about a little boy named Packum who grew up in a small American village. Packum grew up to be a preacher, and he's still preaching today. Some wonderful mysteries here!

Originally I put this story on tape for my grandchildren. They encouraged me to write the story in book form and have it printed. It is written in both Spanish and English. My sister Irene did the Spanish translation on Packum and the editing on Mom's story. I'll be submitting Packum to Judson and Pleasant Word before the end of December 2005.

Pray that Judson will agree to publish this work. It will do us all good.

RMAB: Is there anything else you'd like to tell your ABCRM family?

Garcia: Because I've been in the American Baptist family a long time, I'd like the opportunity to come and encourage single parents and grandparents who are raising children. All we have left is family. Don't let relationships go without making amends.

Can Anything Good Come Out of Saguache?
by Robert Garcia
is available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Borders.

Metro Denver Cluster to Meet on December 3

At the 2005 Gathering in Colorado Springs the Ministry and Mission Clusters met to choose representatives to the Region Board. It was decided that there were not enough churches represented from the Metro Denver Cluster to vote on this important matter at that time. Therefore, the Metro Denver Cluster will meet again on Saturday, December 3, 2005, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon at Calvary Baptist Church, 6500 East Girard Avenue, Denver, CO. The church is located on the corner of Monaco and Hampden Streets.

In addition to electing a board representative, the group will discuss mutual support, joint projects, and others ways to do ministry together. Pastors and two lay representatives from each congregation are encouraged to attend this important meeting.

If you have any questions or need directions to the church, call Kay Farley, Ministry and Mission Coach, at 303-988-3900 or e-mail her at kfarley@abcrm.org.



ABCRM Pastors Share Inspirational Advent Thoughts on Website

With the beginning of Advent, our website is featuring inspirational thoughts written by pastors within our Region. You will find them on the home page in the panel at the right side of your screen. We will continue to upload new submissions throughout the season, so check the site regularly. Go to www.abcrm.org.

Advent is a corporate spiritual journey that calls for expectant waiting and readiness for the coming of Christ.

When the church travels this journey and treats it as a discipline of life and prayer, the joy of Christmas is immeasurably intensified.

Robert Webber, The Services of the Christian Year

Healthy Congregations Leadership Training

For the first time, Facilitator Training is being offered for those interested in building healthy congregations. This experience will enable the trainee to be able to offer this “systems based” approach to congregational dynamics to one’s own congregation or any other group.

This training will give participants an overview of systems processing in a congregational setting, and familiarity with the six study guides. Those six sections include “A Systems Assessment of Healthy Congregations,” “Healthy Congregations Respond to Anxiety and Change,” “Leadership in Healthy Congregations,” “Building Relationships in Healthy Congregations,” “Healthy Congregations Develop Generous People (stewardship),” and “The Spiritual Care of Healthy Congregations.” All include a theological foundation and application.

Dates

February 12-14, 2006. This two-and-a-half day workshop will be held in Colorado Springs, CO.

Leaders

- Gordon J. Kieft, M.Div., M.A., Pastoral Counselor, American Baptist clergy, Licensed Professional Counselor and Congregational Consultant.
- Rod Schofield, Ed.D, LCSW, Evangelical Lutheran, Congregational Consultant. Both have trained with Peter Steinke, developer of this program.

For more information and registration, contact: Gordon Kieft at 303 741-5588, ext. 37 or Rod Schofield at 719 598-9288.

My Journey from Nagaland to Colorado: A Brief Personal Story

I belong to an indigenous Naga nation in Northeast India. Nagas are predominantly Baptists by religious affiliation as a result of ABC mission work among our people since the later part of 19th century. Born into a humble Christian family in a small village in Nagaland, my spiritual life is rooted in the faith tradition of the simple folks who have had a profound impact on my entire faith journey. I owe everything to my upbringing in that small community of faith which nurtured me in the path of love and faith.

When I was 19, I was stricken with sickness, pain, and hopelessness. In desperation I turned to God. The experience of a personal encounter with God led me to rethink all my priorities. Soon I decided to enter full-time Christian ministry. I am a member in good standing of the Marem Khullen Baptist Church of the Tangkhul Baptist Long (TBL) in Nagaland (presently in Manipur State).

I began my theological training in 1985 at the Eastern Theological College which is the centrally sponsored theological college of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) and the first college founded by the American Baptist missionaries in the region. I enrolled in the three-year Bachelor of Theology (B. TH.) degree, and upon graduation in 1988, I went to teach in a Christian mission school at Kangpokpi. At the end of the year I left the mission school to pursue my Bachelor of Divinity (B. D.) degree which is similar to a Master of Divinity degree in the United States, at the

United Theological College, Bangalore. I received my B. D. degree in 1991 and began teaching at Clark Theological College, Nagaland. Clark sponsored me to pursue my Master of Theology degree at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai. I returned to teach at Clark in June 1994 and served in that capacity until October 1996 when I joined the faculty of Eastern Theological College, Jorhat. At Eastern I taught Christian Theology and Tribal Cultures and Religious Traditions. During my teaching years at Clark and Eastern, I not only was able to minister to students on campus, I had the privilege of preaching and teaching in various local churches.

Eastern Theological College is affiliated with the Senate of Serampore College (University). Eastern offers B. D. and M. TH. degree programs. Recently, the college has opened two new study centers in addition to their degree programs. The Tribal Studies Center is concerned with researching tribal cultures, histories and traditions. The Women’s Study Center is focused on issues and concerns specific to tribal women.

In keeping with Eastern’s efforts to improve its faculty’s academic qualifications, I attended Princeton Theological Seminary, in Princeton, NJ, for a year-long Master of Theology (TH. M.) degree during 1999-2000. In September 2000, I began my doctoral studies at the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology Joint Ph. D. Program in Religious and Theological Studies in Denver, CO.



Cluster Christmas Parties Planned for Senior Pastors and Spouses

Western Slope - December 2

11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Dolce Vita, Grand Junction
Contact Person: Mike Oldham



NE Colorado/ SE Wyoming - December 4

5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Mimi's Café, Loveland
Contact Person: Wayne Dvirnak



Metro Denver - December 5

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Embassy Suites, Centennial
Contact Person: Kay Farley



SE Colorado/New Mexico - December 8

12:00 noon - 2:30 p.m.
Pueblo Country Club, Pueblo
Contact Person: Mike Oldham



East and West Wyoming - December 17

12:00 noon - 2:30 p.m.
Poor Boy's Steakhouse, Casper
Contact Person: Wayne Dvirnak

I have come a long way on my theological and faith journey and still have a long way to go. As a result of my being exposed to a variety of theological and faith traditions in both affluent and poverty-stricken communities both at home and away, my faith has been continually challenged and shaped by these experiences.

Since arriving in Denver, I began attending Calvary Baptist Church in 2002 and became a member in 2003. During these years at Calvary I have had the privilege of teaching Sunday school for young adults and being involved with worship services through preaching, speaking, and leading prayers. I have also been serving as the Missionary in Residence since 2002 and helped conduct the community survey in and around Metro Denver as part of the church's Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process.

I am extremely happy to inform my American Baptist family that I have been ordained to full-time Christian ministry on October 30th, 2005 at Calvary Baptist Church of Denver. The ordination service was both humbling and empowering. I am deeply grateful to Calvary and the Region for this privilege.

I sought to be ordained in the Ministry of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountain Region and Calvary Baptist Church because I was born into and raised in the traditions through the missionary efforts of American Baptist Churches. You are considered the Mother Church by Naga Christians; therefore, it seems right and fitting that I look to the Mother Church for my ordination. And further, to be ordained in this church is a great privilege, not only for me, but for my people back home.

My ordination in the Ministry of the American Baptist Churches could very well serve as a testimony to the greater interaction we seek to maintain between and among the Baptist families around the world. Working as a Global Mission Conversation Partner in the Region, it is my desire to challenge everyone of us to remain open to God's leadings as, together, we endeavor to strengthen our global ties and partnerships. I am grateful to Desmond Hoffmeister for this rare and wonderful privilege.

*Ahao Vashum
Global Mission
Conversation Partner*

Christ Comes to the Dry Places

Do you include the desert among the symbols of Advent? John the Baptist, a desert dweller, prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. *“It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’—a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’”* (Mark 1:2-3). Jesus, of course, was born in the desert.

We generally don’t like the desert places of our lives. Rather than thinking of the desert as a place of spiritual encounter, we struggle to find ways to make the desert bloom. We use evergreens to cover the drab brown. Likewise we cast aside the desert motif with beautiful decor, fancy clothes, and lilting music. Our stories and our memories focus on the brilliant facade—the window dressing—that has overpowered the Advent season. After all, it helps produce that elusive “Christmas spirit” within us, doesn’t it?

But think of it another way. Isn’t it possible that the best “Christmas spirit” is produced by admitting those things that the desert symbolizes? In the dead of winter we know life is a challenge. On the longest night of the year we are reminded that there’s a shortage of hope and joy in our world. During the chilly morning, we search diligently for the warmth of peace and love. The desert is a symbol of the way things are for us.

And Christ comes to us in the desert—right here where we really need him. That is Advent. May God come to our dry places this Christmas.

Ingrid Dvirnak, Newsletter Editor

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