

American Baptist Churches of Maine
BOARD REPORT 2022
Rev. Dr Alfred J. Fletcher, Regional Resource Minister

As the COVID pandemic wanes, our churches find themselves in challenging times. The local church, its support, affirmation, and challenge to mission, is the mission of the American Baptist Churches of Maine. The challenges facing our churches are our challenges. The American Baptist Churches of Maine sought to address the emerging challenges and to anticipate challenges that will continue to emerge in the future.

The local church is resilient. Christ as Lord is our hope and stay, and churches that are centered on Christ are confidently facing the challenges of a post-Covid world. The major challenge facing our churches is pastoral leadership. The great resignation has affected every aspect of our American culture and business. This is true for churches seeking pastoral candidates. Old systems have broken down. New systems are yet to emerge. This is a challenge for local churches because pastoral candidates are few and far between and come from a variety of backgrounds, many of which are not American Baptist in training or in practice. When a church calls a pastor that is not familiar with American Baptist polity and practice, conflict ensues.

The ABCOM Board continues to deal with the reality of diminishing numbers of quality pastoral leaders. Seminaries are declining in attendance. The American Baptist Churches of Maine's Institute for Ministry, under the direction of Rev. Joshua Burden, continues to develop American Baptist pastors who have a call to ministry for Maine churches. The Institute for Ministry welcomes those who are exploring a call and those who are certain of a call to develop their calling through education, building of relationships, and through mentoring. As seminaries continue to decline, it is anticipated that the need to develop pastoral leadership will remain an important part of our ABCOM mission.

The Board, therefore, called into being a task force to address this concern. The task force is looking at other venues outside of the American Baptist Personnel Service model (ABPS) for quality pastoral candidates. The ABPS system has changed, and the list of candidates is limited. This task force will seek new ways to help churches with ministry leadership options, namely:

- 1) Helping churches find quality pastoral leadership?
- 2) Supporting local churches that may not be able to afford pastoral leadership.
- 3) Bringing "call" back to local church conversations.

Prayer is the foundation of renewal and hope. ABCOM is entering a season of prayer. It is time for local churches to tend to the practice of prayer making it habitual in our lives. We need to pray for our local church pastors and leaders, for effective witness in serving our neighbors and friends with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for God's empowering of our actions, attitudes, and attestations.

The American Baptist Churches of Maine is also going through personnel changes. Sylvia Brown, ABCOM's Administrative Assistant, announced plans for her retirement after 34 years of service. The ABCOM Board has a transition plan in place to train our new Administrative Assistant, Melissa Dennett, and to train our new mission bookkeeper, Michelle Brown. This transition plan will begin in 2022. Sylvia's history with our mission and familiarity with its various needs will be challenging to our new staff. The American Baptist Churches of Maine thanks Sylvia for her dedication and service to our Board and local churches.

The American Baptist Churches of Maine thanked John Hall for serving as its Treasurer. Sharon Workman is our new ABCOM Treasurer who brings to this office accounting and pastoral experience. We thank John for his dedication and for providing an orientation for Sharon as she began her work as Treasurer.

The Center Vassalboro Community Baptist Church facilities were turned over to the American Baptist Churches of Maine in 2020. The Center Vassalboro Community Baptist Church had a dissolution clause in their by-laws which stated that

upon their closing the physical assets would be given to the American Baptist Churches for the furtherance of their mission. For several years, the properties remained vacant awaiting a plan for their use.

The Office of the American Baptist Churches of Maine which was housed in an office building owned by the Penney Memorial United Baptist Church (PMUBC) became needed for the mission of PMUBC and the ABCOM on April 1st, 2022, gave notice to PMUBC that they would be leaving the office building within six months. The Center Vassalboro Community Baptist Church's fellowship hall would be renovated by the ABCOM and serve as its new office building. The ABCOM moved into its new office on July 22nd, 2022. The efforts of our renovation contractor and our staff made this move both timely and expeditious. The ABCOM is enjoying its new setting and thanks PMUBC for its partnership and supports their new ministry endeavors.

The American Baptist Churches of Maine formed a committee to address on-line donations to its mission. The ABCOM has had several individuals who requested this giving option. Individuals can now give online to the mission of the American Baptist Churches of Maine.

The Christian Nurture Committee and the Mission Support Committee are committees of the ABCOM Board and therefore, bring recommendations to the Board for their implementation and action.

The Christian Nurture Committee was reinvigorated with the responsibility for developing, encouraging, and coordinating ministries in the areas of evangelism and Christian education.

- a. They shall seek to support and enhance evangelism and Christian education at the local church and associational levels through developing training and encouragement opportunities.
- b. They shall provide support and encouragement to current region-wide evangelism and Christian nurture activities.
- c. They will seek to develop new means of supporting evangelism and Christian education throughout the region as needs and opportunities arise.

The Christian Nurture Committee has met regularly and faithfully. They have conducted interviews with pastors, reviewed important resources and reports, and have engaged in conversation.

The Mission Support Committee has also been called into action and tasked with coordinating efforts in establishing and providing helpful resources and education for our local churches to enable their mission. The Mission Support Committee has met regularly and faithfully. They have reviewed important resources and reports and have engaged in meaningful conversation.

ABCUSA GENERAL BOARD REPORT - Bonnie Higgins, representative from ABCOM to the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries, gave a report. They met in November from the 5th to the 7th. Their meeting began with Bonnie presenting a MOXIE to Jeff Woods since he was not in person with us at our Annual Meeting (Moxie has become part of our Annual Meeting Speaker's welcome to Maine). The Board of General Ministries reviewed many reports, did team building exercises, and received the President's report. Jeff Woods was voted unanimously to serve for a two-year term as General Secretary from January 2022 to the end of 2023. Small groups met to discuss the responsibilities of a new General Secretary. They meet again in June. They reviewed financial statements and the Budget. Jeff reported on non-profit Boards. Bonnie is chair of the ABC Identity task group which met over two days.

The founding mission of the American Baptist Churches of Maine remains of vital interest to our churches. The ABCOM exists to support, affirm, and challenge the local church in their mission. Unlike other ecclesiastical structures, the ABCOM's primary responsibility is to provide resources to local churches as they carry out their calling to be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8).

May God bless the American Baptist churches of Maine, and may He use even us to give hope, love, and new life to those who so desperately need it. It is always my privilege to serve as your Executive Minister.