

2015-2016 Executive Minister's Report

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I started in this position on Tuesday, August 4, 2015. The season was hot, but lush with greenery. Now, three months later, crossing the Potomac River Bridge from Virginia into Maryland, I can see clearly the marked change in the color of the foliage. The lush green trees strewn along both the northern and southern banks of the River are now shades of red, orange, yellow and brown. It's early November and I cannot help but compare my external environment to my new professional assignment.

I began somewhat starry-eyed with ideas about what I wanted to do, what ABCOTS ought to look like....WOW- reality is setting in...as I deal with resourcing the region, mission giving among the churches, budgets, staffing of volunteers, unfinished business and personalities. WOW! Paul's words to Timothy, "do thy diligence to come before winter..." (II Timothy 4:21). Let's get our work done before winter comes and before the chilly winds of doubt, fear, uncertainty and a lack of confidence blows. These feelings and emotions blow in all our lives and especially during life transitions such as a change in employment. The winds of winter can be anything from a gentle cool breeze, or sudden gusts, or even furious gales characteristic of its howling whistle. There are also violent twisters and the cold nor'easters which slow progress and often wreak great havoc. Paul's admonishment to Timothy signals an urgency to come to service before the winter winds would impede travel. In my contemporary context the lesson of this passage suggests the urgency is to harness my work assignments before I get bogged down in the many things that would splinter my mind and thoughts away from the real and more pressing issues of missions and the ministry of the Church and denomination.

Thank you to the staff, (Gloria Daisow, Karan Charles, and Paul White), at ABCOTS, and the volunteer officers and leaders, who have worked tirelessly to make my coming aboard comfortable and effective in every way. You have made available to me every tool necessary to be successful in the position of Executive Minister. Especially in light of the unfortunate situation where our retiring Executive

Minister was directed to accept sick leave during this time and for most of the fall (2015). I invite you to continue with me to be in prayer for (Dr. Walter Parrish, II). I have quickly discovered much of the work of the EM is not in the Baltimore office but in the field, the Areas and the local Churches.

Thank you to the Area Moderators, Vice Moderators, and all the Volunteers in each Area for extending to me every courtesy and opportunity for exposure by including space on your annual meeting programs for me to greet, speak or lead your plenary sessions. Not only have you made opportunities and time available to me, but also to our Region's President, Dr. Lacy Speight Alford, who travelled along with her husband to most of the Area meetings. Several Areas expressed excitement about having both the Executive Minister and Region President available to them in the same meeting. The Area meetings began in late August with Area VII (Brackett-Morrell Association) meeting in Charles Town, West Virginia at the Wainwright Baptist Church, with the Reverend Walter Jackson who serves as Pastor.

The meeting of Area VII was a three-day event, August 21-23. The organization of this Association pre-dates the organization of ABCOTS. In its first session in the early 1860's a decision was rendered to ordain recently freed Negroes to the ministry. Many denominations did not hold to such liberal views. During its August 2015 session the delegates elected its first laywomen president, Mrs. Elizabeth A. Robinson. She will serve as Moderator of Area VII. Thanks to all the officers, delegates, and visitors who made this a memorable and effective meeting.

Area V met in a two-day event, September 18-19, with the Church of Our Savior at Cedar Park, Texas. The Reverend Mary Wilson serves as Pastor. She was excited to host the Area meeting as it was her first time hosting such an event with ABCOTS. Former President Dr. Larry Bethune was present in this meeting along with current President Alford. Congratulations to the Reverend Betty Holmes for her tireless efforts in organizing a great and well attended meeting. We are grateful also for Chaplain Ronald Kockcroft, who helped us to recognize the importance and expediency of including the ABCOTS chaplains in our mailings, programming and missions work. They are a vital part of our work and may not be included often times in Area functions. Thanks! This may have been an oversight on our part. We extend congratulations to The Reverend Jacques

Dinkins who was elected Moderator of Area V. Thank you to all who hosted in Church of Our Savior for the hospitality enjoyed by everyone!

Area I was a one-day event held with the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. on September 3rd. This was a rainy day, however over sixty persons were in attendance including the wonderful hosts along with Dr. Clinton Austin who serves as pastor. Thanks to our Moderator, Mr. Robert Henry, Auxiliary Leaders, Mrs. Loretta Speight, AB women, Mr. Keith Gethers, AB men, and Dr. Elmore Warren, president of the Ministers Council. This was a very well planned session which concluded with the Family Reunion Luncheon. Thanks for the opportunity to speak during the luncheon where I shared about the developing Annual Region Meeting to be held in Charlotte, North Carolina in April 2016, and some thoughts about ministry needs in our denomination. Thank you to all the many volunteers serving in each category.

Area II was a two-day event October 9-10, which met in Smithfield, Virginia at Main Street Baptist Church. Dr. Betty Long, Moderator presided over a very successful meeting. At least 49 ministers/pastors were present in this meeting. The members of Main Street were excited about hosting as this was their first time hosting an annual meeting. Among the many presenters was Dr. Richard Wills, who was in pastoral transition. He is relocating to Area III. Thanks to Mrs. Mozelle Parker, AB women president, Mr. Vernon Clement, president AB men, and Dr. Kelvin Turner, Ministers Council president. Thanks to all officers and volunteers for an eventful and substantive meeting. Delegates were treated to a sampling of the famous *Smithfield Ham* before meeting's end.

Area III was a three-day event which began with me preaching at Meyers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina. First Baptist Church-West and the Meyers Park Churches provided music for this service. I sincerely applaud their partnering together to bring to the delegates a very fine service. Dr. Ricky Woods, pastor of First Baptist-West took the lead in developing a program for our delegates around the theme, "Building Bridges and Developing Relationships as an expression of Faith," to answer recent community issues. The Youth were early to rise on Saturday performing a community service project at a local school. I apologized to the youth for not being present with them in this project. Thank you to Moderator, Joseph Hood, for his remarkable leadership and congratulations to Mr. Andrew Ladd who was elected to the office at this

meeting. Thanks also to the many fine leaders and volunteers for ceaseless efforts to bring to the community and delegates a most substantive session.

Area IV was a one-day event which met with the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida. Dr. Robert Spooner serves the Church as pastor. This meeting was well attended with churches travelling as far away as Lakeland and St. Petersburg, Florida. We applaud the efforts of the Moderator, Mrs. Panielius Howell-Foster who has done a great job encouraging participation among our churches. The Moderator gave me an opportunity to lead a round-table discussion around issues of mission support, attendance, the future of ABCOTS in relation to what I see as needs. We were able to have candid conversation which has already proven to be helpful in our developing work. Thanks to officers, Dr. Spooner, and the many volunteers who helped to make this meeting happen. I was able to lead a Communion Service, (The Lord's Memorial), to conclude this meeting.

The Region Board of Directors met in November 2015 and focused primarily on four discussion items. 1) What are ministry priorities for our region? 2) What are leadership gaps in our areas? 3) Do I have passion about approaching service with the board? 4) What can I bring to the board experience? Other presentations by the staff during the two-day meeting included: "Understanding the Budget Process" by Mr. Paul White; "ABC-USA and Affiliates; A Covenant Relationship" by Dr. C. Jeff Woods; "Conversations in History with former president, Alice Grant"; and "Becoming A Board" by James Harrison. It was in this presentation that we focused on the responsibilities of a policy-making board versus the advisory board. Ms. Gloria Dairsow presented information on the upcoming Annual Session to be held in Charlotte, North Carolina in April 2016.

A review of the historical documents from the organizational meeting of ABCOTS in 1970 shows that the leaders took a page out of the history of the "Old Local Associations of Baptist Churches". That is to say its organizational goals and objectives always included some missions objective, (a children's home), support for an educational institution, (historically black college/university), and provisions for training of Church Leaders. Moving forward, it is necessary that we begin to assess, evaluate and re-interpret the three original objectives put forth in the organizational meeting of the region so that we can move successfully, and in an intentional way together into our work as cooperating congregations.

Additionally, we want to determine each objective's appropriateness in focus for our contemporary congregants. **The first objective suggests that we Expand opportunities for racially integrated Christian witness and fellowship. The second objective suggests the support of educational opportunities in the work of the historically black colleges and universities especially those having organizational roots in the mission work of American Baptists. The third objective suggests support for the work of partnering ecclesiastical entities and agencies promoting peace and welfare for the uplifting of humanity. The 1970 list included such agencies and organizations as (National Council of Churches; Southern Inter-Agency Council; Fellowship of Southern Churches).**

Objective 1

- A. Be intentional about including racially diverse participants in ABCOTS programming in the region and in each area, using available mechanisms to assist with overcoming language and cultural barriers.
- B. Create and participate in local opportunities for congregations to worship in racially diverse celebrations and services.
- C. Create and participate in local opportunities for ecumenical worship and witness.

Objective 2

- A. Support and introduce to student members the AB liaison at the AB related schools, universities, and seminaries.
- B. Sponsor college and seminary students of member congregations to ABCOTS annual region and area meetings.
- C. Direct mission giving to AB Schools and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities through AB financial remittance process.

Objective 3

- A. Evaluate and re-identify those ecclesiastical entities to be supported by ABCOTS for contemporary appropriateness in focus and mission.
- B. Create and promote opportunities for partnerships in missions with an expanded list of ecclesiastical entities.

C. Celebrate the incidences of dual and triple denominational alignment among our constituent congregations

Secondly, moving forward let us embark upon an aggressive Seven Area, (Church, School, Chaplain, and Pastor), visitation schedule beginning immediately. The focus of these visits is to meet our pastors, chaplains, and school/seminary leaders in their contexts. We must communicate our support for the local congregations and share the message of available resources within the denomination beyond the more well-known denominational affiliate ministries. We will also work to increase our capacity to communicate electronically with our churches, adding e-mail addresses to the annually published directories. A study and planning committee will be appointed to study and recommend: 1.) ways to improve and increase the efficiency with which we conduct business, 2.) ways to centralize office/administrative resources, making them even more accessible to our churches in the southernmost sections of the region and 3.) ways to create opportunities to strengthen technical and specialized skills of staff, to include executive staff, and volunteers.

Thirdly, moving forward we want to stress the importance of increasing our Christian witness by becoming more aggressive in winning souls for Christ, sharing our stories with people we come in contact with daily while working, shopping, or in leisure. Finally, we must consistently approach the activity of missions giving contributing to United Basics (UMB) and the other offerings of our denomination, namely, America for Christ, (AFC); Retired Ministers & Missionaries Offering, (RMMO); Region Giving; World Mission Offering, (WMO); and One Great Hour of Sharing, (OGHS).

We have an incredible opportunity to share in ministry to the world. There is more ministry, more missions, and more need, than any one Church can accomplish. Together through the denomination we can become more than conquerors. I believe Lord, now teach me to trust you!

