

## ABCNYS- STATE OF THE REGION

September 29, 2018

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*Presented at the ABCNYS Biennial Meeting – Bethany Baptist Church, Syracuse*

New York American Baptists continue to meet and worship together as congregations. They continue to gather to seek guidance and encouragement from studying scripture together. They faithfully pray for one another and the broader world. They care for their fellow church members and reach out to their communities and, through Regional and denomination missions, care for all of God’s creation. By the way they live and care for others, they give witness to the saving, transforming, and unconditional love of God. The Kingdom of God is alive and authentic in upstate New York.

You may be saying: “Wait a minute, you are talking about congregations. What about the state of the Region?” Well, our churches *are* the Region. We are a family of churches; Regional ministry is always embedded in and responding to the life of our individual congregations. To talk about Regional ministry outside of this frame of reference is to talk without a context. So how has the Region been embedded in and responded to the lives of our churches?

### MISSION EXPANSION

Since we last met in 2016, the Region has completed our cycle of 5 mission trips to work with the AMOS health ministry of ABC missionaries Drs. David and Laura Parajon in Nicaragua. A group of ABCNYS Baptists are continuing to work with this ministry, most recently building a self-contained mobile computer center outside Managua, a center powered by solar panels. This is the goal of our mission involvement: to introduce New York State Baptists to mission opportunities and then have them take them up as their own.

In 2018 the Region began a three-year partnership with two ministries in Rwanda. We are capitalizing on a long-term relationship two of our pastors have had with these ministries. In 2019 and beyond we will likely expand that partnership to work with the Siera group of churches.

The Region continues to introduce International Ministries missionaries to our churches and encourage mutually supportive relationships.

In 2018 we sponsored a four-day mission trip to Niagara Falls to serve with Community Missions of Niagara Frontier Inc. We served in variety of ways to some of the most vulnerable people in our State. The Board of Mission has taken on the aspirational goal of two trips to work with this ministry in 2019. They also have laid plans to provide a mission experience with a Native American population in New York State.

These expanding mission enterprises reveal a growing emphasis in our Region. We want to be “doers” of mission, opening ourselves up to the new and stretching experiences God has for us. If we are not challenging our congregations to dare new things for Christ, we as a Region are not being good stewards of the wealth God has invested in our people. In some organizations “mission creep” is seen as bad; with us it is seen as the pull of God’s Spirit.

## CHURCH LEADERSHIP

We have gotten nearly all our Lay Study courses online, both those sponsored by the Region and those sponsored by local Associations, In this way training is now available to everyone interested person in our Region. Some participants are honing their skills for lay leadership. Others are preparing to be a Certified Lay Pastor and lead a congregation. And some start out as the former and end up as the latter. (I love it when a plan comes together.) We are working creatively with church and leaders to match trustworthy, trained, called leaders to congregations who will respond well to their gifts.

We have provided and continue to train pastors in the special skills that make them well suited for interim ministry.

We have completed three of eight sessions of our *Going Deeper into Ministry through Continuing Study*, a program designed to equip pastors and other church leaders. It is funded by a Palmer Grant from the American Baptist Foundation.

An increasing number of our congregations are looking to multi-income stream pastors (I hate to say part time; no pastor gives just a part of themselves to ministry) to lead them. We are working to get people into ministry more quickly, sometimes with close mentoring.

We cannot change the realities of modern church ministry. Our churches need pastoral leadership. Our goal is to partner with them to help them make wise and informed choices, with maximum flexibility as to how that is achieved.

## CHURCH LIFE

We must minister in the world we have, not the world we wish we had or maybe used to have. Our churches struggle with outsized expensive-to-maintain buildings. Region staff help them to set priorities and learn from the experiences of other congregations. Our churches struggle with changing demographics and find themselves in communities that are struggling. Sometimes churches must face questions of viability; this is never an easy conversation. Region staff guide them as they think through their options and help them gain wisdom from the experience of other churches. It is not an easy time to be a Christian congregation in upstate New York. Our congregations are working harder and trusting God more.

Our Burmese Diaspora churches, Karen, Chin, Kachin, and Zomi, are flourishing and bringing new vitality to our family. The Region walks with them as they negotiate organizing themselves, buying buildings, and adapting to a new culture.

Each year we sponsor the American Baptist Youth convention where young people are challenged to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ and are provided with tools to do that. These conventions are also a training ground for future church leadership, both lay and pastoral.

## REGION FINANCES

We finished 2016 with a surplus of \$1,215.00. In 2017 we ended with a surplus of \$843.56. In 2018, as of the end of August, we have a deficit of \$3,236.00. We believe that the generosity of our churches

will cover this deficit by the end of the year. As you can see, in the most recent years, God through the faithfulness of our congregations has seen that Region ministry continues to have what it needs to do what God is calling us to do.

One item of concern is that we have a small number of churches that give an outsized portion of the Region's support. In 2017, we had 162 churches that contributed \$100 or more to the Region through the multiple avenues that churches support the Region: direct gifts, United Mission, ABCNYS Region Offering, America for Christ offering, and directed giving. We had 129 churches that contributed nothing to Region ministry. To provide ministry to 283 churches with support from only 54% of our congregations stretches Regional resources quite thinly.

The Board of Mission has made a commitment to set aside all one-time extraordinary gifts for our endowment. These would be gifts from estates, the dissolution of churches, etc. In this way, we are laying the groundwork so that when we are all gone, there will still be Regional ministry in New York State.

#### STAFF TRANSITIONS

Our ABY Convention Director, Jillene Narraway, is resigning at the end of 2018, having moved to West Virginia to take a job with a camp down there. We will miss her; in particular our young people and those who work with them will miss her leadership and wisdom. We wish Jillene all the best as she moves on to other ministries.

Christy Siau, our long time bookkeeper, webmaster, producer of brochures, and mission and youth enthusiast will be having her second child in October. In order to spend more time with her growing family, she has resigned her bookkeeping responsibilities. She will continue in her other capacities with the Region.

Sharon Argus has joined us as our new bookkeeper. She has a background in business and years of experience in accounting. She is currently the bookkeeper at one of our Syracuse area Baptist churches.

#### CONCLUSION

Our congregations continue to find ways to be faithful in a world they could not have seen 30 years ago. We, as a Regional family of congregations, move forward believing that God is in the change and meets us at every turn. The challenge always is to hear the prophet Isaiah: *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (43:19).*

Blessings,  
Jim Kelsey  
Executive Minister

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*"As American Baptists of New York State, we will embrace God's future with these core operational values: honesty, connectedness and hope. We will uphold our operational values in every aspect of our common ministry."*