

American Baptist Churches of New York State  
Board of Mission Meeting - March 6, 2021 - Minutes

Present:

**Officers**

Wendy Depew Partelow - Pres.  
Lecia Rodriguez - Vice Pres.  
Bruce Aikin - Secretary  
Jim Harriff - Treasurer

**Association Reps**

Keith Griffin AD  
Claudia Little AC  
Marlene Ciranowicz BT  
Phyllis Fox IR  
Michael Dickinson LW  
David Trasoras MH/U  
John Partise MO  
Walter Hargrove NI  
Leon Runner NC  
Francis Gasparri WA

**At-Large**

Jeanne Bennett  
Lillian Cabral  
Gregory Johnson  
Patricia Ludwig (also Min. Council)  
George Stefani

**Staff**

James Kelsey - Exec. Min.  
Mary Schwarz - Admin. Asst.

**Auxiliary Organizations:**

Chris Blackwell (AB Men)  
Grace Kelley-Neal (ABWM)

- 1.0           The Zoom meeting was called to order at 9:36 AM, by the President, Wendy Depew Partelow.  
              There were 22 Board members and 1 Staff person present.  
              She welcomed the members and asked them to share joys and prayer concerns. These will be incorporated in the opening prayer.
- 2.0           Devotions and Opening Prayer – Lecia Rodriguez read John 1: 35 – 42. She then read a devotion called “Come and See.” It was about Jesus calling his first disciples and how Lent is a time to stop and reflect. She then gave the opening prayer and incorporated all the requests made.
- 3.0           Approval of Agenda (Document #1) – There were some changes to the Agenda. Keith Griffin will give his report on VPCCM before the Reports because he has a church commitment. And a report about a pending lawsuit will be given under New Business.  
              The Agenda was unanimously approved with the changes.
- 4.0           The minutes of the December 4, 2020, Board of Mission meeting (Document #2) were approved as submitted.
- 5.0           VPCCM (Document #11) – Keith Griffin – All of the concerns expressed at the December Board meeting have been alleviated. The caretakers left Camp Vick peacefully and turned in all the keys. The locks have all been changed.

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The Governor has said that in-person camping can resume June 1<sup>st</sup>.

On May 14 – 16, the Adirondack Association is planning on having their Spring Youth Retreat in person at Pathfinder.

**Reports**

6.0 Executive Minister - Jim Kelsey (Document #3)

Jim reviewed his written report.

The mentoring program for the Lay Study Team is going very well.

He is discussing a mission trip to the Tuscarora Church in September with their Pastor, Don Robinson.

The Region's Annual (Directory) has been removed from our website due to a "phishing" scam. It happened again this week. After a discussion it was decided to leave the Directory off the website. People will be informed that they can contact the office for a copy.

The American Baptist Foundation is seeking a new Director.

The information about the Organ Donor legislation included in his report was discussed. It was moved by Grace Kelley-Neal and seconded by David Trasoras that the Board does not endorse this legislation. The motion was carried unanimously.

7.0 Associate Executive Minister - Jerrod Hugenot (Document #4)

In Jerrod's absence Jim Kelsey answered questions about his report. Several questions were asked about the number of churches without a pastor. The possibility of sharing a pastor, calling a lay pastor or merging churches was discussed.

8.0 Treasurer - Jim Harriff discussed the financial reports.

8.1 2020 General Fund Profit and Loss (Document #5)

This is the final statement for 2020. United Mission giving is down. We received a Payroll Protection Program (PPP) grant of \$58,252.00. The giving is about \$20,000.00 below the level of 2019. The expenses for the year were normal. Overall, we are in good shape financially.

8.2 2020 General Fund Profit and Loss Snapshot (Document #7)

United Mission giving has been strong in the first part of the year.

Most churches have not taken the America for Christ offering yet.

The Multi-Region distribution was above normal.

The American Baptist Foundation payment to the Region is due this month.

We got a PPP loan of \$48,454.00, which will be converted to a grant later this year.

We are ahead by \$11,534.06.

8.3 2021 Balance Sheet (Document #6)

Line 11524 - PSALM (Pastoral Support and Local Ministry) COVID-19 Relief - a request for support has been received from one church.

Line 11533 – Rwanda Savings – about \$1,500.00 was sent for people who need food and basic necessities and have no government support programs.

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Line 11521 – Nehemiah Leadership Savings – The Nehemiah Leadership Network will be shutting down the middle of the year. It is yet to be determined where the funds will go.

Line 11535 – Tuscarora – The reason the amount, -\$2,675.00, is negative is that a deposit was paid to Stella Niagara for accommodations for the Tuscarora mission trip and is still being held by them for a future trip. There was also money spent for promotional materials.

Line 11560 – Reserve Fund – The amount stated in the report, \$85,608.20, is now about \$134,000.00. This is a low interest yielding account. \$75,000.00 from this account will be moved to our account in the American Baptist Foundation. When the sale of the United Church of Waterford buildings is completed, we will receive about \$150,000.00, which will also be invested with the AB Foundation. He would like to keep about \$50,000.00 in the Reserve Fund.

With the PPP loan/grant and the proceeds from the church sale we are in a good position financially.

Our Total Assets are now \$2,111,388.24.

The motion to accept the Treasurer's reports was seconded and carried unanimously.

9.0 Committee on Ministry - Greg Johnson (Document #8)

The Committee met on January 8, 2021.

Leroy Woodruff has been recognized as a Certified Lay Pastor.

There is one ordination recognition to be reviewed.

**Old Business**

10.0 Tuscarora Mission – As stated above in the Executive Minister's report, Jim Kelsey is discussing this with the pastor.

11.0 Rwanda Update – Jim Harriff said that he hopes that more money can be sent to help people there above the \$1,500.00 which has already been sent.

With all the restrictions on travel there will not be a mission trip this year but hopefully there can be one in 2022.

12.0 Board Training - Wendy Depew Partelow will review the answers from the poll and set a date for training for new Board members.

**New Business**

13.0 The change to the Rules and Procedures about having Board meetings by computer, on Zoom or another platform, recommended by the Executive Committee was presented to the Board. Since this recommendation comes from the Executive Committee it does not require a motion or a second. After a discussion it was decided to postpone this matter to the next Board meeting so that the wording of the proposal can be changed.

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14.0 Pending Lawsuit

On Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, ABCNYS was added as a defendant to a suit filed under the New York State Child Victims Act. A church and a former pastor are being sued under the Act. The actions which resulted in this suit are alleged to have occurred between 1978 to 1980. It is alleged that the Region controlled the church and the alleged perpetrator. We must respond within twenty (20) days to this summons. It appears that at this time the Region was insured by Traveler's Insurance Co. This coverage, however, has not been clearly determined. Heather Sunser, a lawyer who has represented the Region in the past, is familiar with our structure and polity and could respond quickly to this summons. Board members are not to discuss this matter or make any comments to the press or anyone else. All questions should be referred to Jim Kelsey. It was moved by Francis Gasparri and seconded by Jim Harriff that this matter be turned over to Heather Sunser, attorney-at-law, by the Executive Minister to answer the summons. Motion carried unanimously.

The Board was presented with the following plan by Jim Kelsey:

ADDENDUM TO EXECUTIVE MINISTER'S REPORT  
Court Summons

I became aware early last year, I believe, that one of our churches was being sued under the Child Victims Act for incidents that allegedly occurred at the church between 1978 and 1980. This is a law that enables people alleging child sexual abuse to file claims for past offenses going back many decades.

On Thursday of this week, the Region received an amended summons that added the Region as a defendant, in addition to the church and the alleged perpetrator. It is not uncommon for an attorney to name as many defendants as possible in the hope of finding someone with insurance or assets.

1. The allegations that the Region "controlled" the Church and the perpetrator and that the perpetrator was an agent of the Region are unfounded. Given our polity and our practices and our organizing documents and the church's organizing documents, this would be a very tough case to make.
2. Nonetheless, we must make a response via an attorney within 20 days to avoid a default judgment.
3. I have done some research, and to the best of our records, we had insurance through Seaboard Surety Company, which was acquired by Travelers Insurance Company 1/1/2009. We are proceeding on that belief.
4. I have filed a claim with Travelers and have a claim number. I await a response from a claims adjuster.
5. In the absence of an assurance from Travelers Insurance that they will defend this claim, I believe today I need to contact Heather Sunser, an attorney with whom we have worked in the past. She is familiar with our structure and practices. Five years ago or so, she responded to someone who was threatening a slip and fall claim against the Region, asserting that we were not organically connected to party that sponsored the event. I will send Heather an email today asking her to respond on our behalf.
6. The officers of the Region and I will keep you, the board, updated on the progress of this situation.

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Given the nature of this claim and that all suits filed under this stature are in the public domain, it is likely that this will end up on, at least, the local news in the city in which the church is located. It is important that no board member comment on or respond to any question in any way. It is not even appropriate to acknowledge the suit. Simply refer them to me, and I will seek counsel as to the best way to respond.

**Additional Reports**

15.0 Ministers Council - Patricia Ludwig (Document #9)

Since Pat was having trouble with her microphone Wendy summarized her report.

The Ministers Council is having its annual membership campaign. It is hoped that all eligible clergy, educators and lay leaders will consider joining.

Their Annual Retreat will be held September 26, 27, 28, 2021, in Canandaigua. Jim Kelsey will be the main speaker.

16.0 AB Men - Chris Blackwell

He attended his first Executive Board meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The Vice President of the organization needs prayer.

There will be a one-day conference held at Keuka College the second weekend in August. It will be held both in-person and virtually.

They are working on having a virtual prayer time for all AB Men in New York. This may possibly include Pennsylvania.

A coordinator is needed for their Disaster Relief Program. The person should have a background in construction and be a good organizer. They currently have no way to do any relief work.

17.0 AB Women's Ministries - Grace Kelly-Neal (Document #10)

The AB Women and AB Girls will have a virtual conference on Zoom on April 23 and 24. The registration information is not out yet but the fee will be \$60.00. More information is available on their website [www.abwm-nys.org](http://www.abwm-nys.org).

Jim Kelsey is giving the welcoming address. On Thursday before the conference he is conducting some leadership development for their Board. It will be about the Conversation on Racism discussions. On Friday he will be leading a workshop.

18.0 AB Youth - Stephanie Schneider - No report

19.0 ABCUSA Board of General Ministries

Jim Kelsey reported for Judith Christiansen, who is ill.

The current Acting General Secretary, Jeff Woods, cannot serve as Interim beyond 2021. He has been nominated to serve as the General Secretary for two years in 2022 and 2023. During this time, he will help to examine what the future role of the Office of the General Secretary should be.

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The ABCUSA Biennial will be held online June 24 – 26. The Region is allowed four delegates to the Biennial. The Region will pay the \$100.00 per delegate fee. It was moved and seconded that Wendy Depew Partelow, Lecia Rodriguez, Walter Hargrove and Grace Kelley-Neal be appointed as the Region's delegates to the ABCUSA Biennial. Motion carried unanimously.

20.0 Lay Study Program

Jim Kelsey for Leon Oaks-Lee

They are planning the courses one year in advance.

The mentor training for lay pastors will be continued.

They are seeking a more diverse group of teachers.

21.0 The draft of the promotional materials for the 2021 ABCNYS Region Offering was included as Document #12 for the Board members information.

22.0 Future Meeting Dates:

*Executive Committee:* All Fridays on Zoom: May 14, August 20, November 19

*Board of Mission:* Friday, June 4 [Zoom]; Saturday September 11, Friday, December 3.

23.0 Reflection:

Grace Kelley-Neal said she thought the meeting was productive.

Greg Johnson expressed appreciation for the openness in sharing of our thoughts. There was real dialogue in the meeting.

Wendy Depew Partelow said that we should all pray for a kinder and gentler America. She is proud to be a member of this Board.

24.0 The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 AM.

Minutes taken by  
Bruce D. Aikin  
ABCNYS Secretary