

**American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region
REGIONAL MINISTRY BOARD**

Minutes From Meeting Friday, February 2, 2007

Lightbody Conference Center, Lake Springfield Baptist Camp, Chatham, Illinois
George Rosales, President
Roland Sundberg, Recorder

Present:	Ted Awe Sharon Brown Jonathan Heikes PJ Patterson Mary Ellen Sharp Dwight Stinnett	Francis Bartley Rene' Gorbold Paul Langan Gerald Phillips William Steger	Elaine Bolen Jeffrey Hammer Helen Murrell George Rosales Elmer Voudrie (16 of 29 members)
Guests:	John Grisham	Randy McNeely	Roland Sundberg
Regrets:	Lynette Austin Ivan Greuter Patricia Midkiff Charles Reed Hari Smith	Henrietta Brown David Herriott Reg Mills William Schneck	Diane DeSmidt Courtney Jones Leroy Mitchell Geraldine Sirls

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George Rosales called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and gave a scripture reading from Ephesians 5: "Be imitators of God." He then led us in prayer. The Minutes from the October 6, 2006 meeting were reviewed without objection and will be entered into the record.

Just What *Is* the GRR? Dwight Stinnett gave a powerpoint presentation regarding how the Great Rivers Region and the Regional Ministry Board are assembled. American Baptists differ from other denominations in that the churches create the regions, and in turn they create American Baptist Churches in the USA. From a legal perspective, the Regional Ministry Board *is* the Great Rivers Region. The Board is a representative, governing body of the region (not a programming body). The Board governs financial needs, property (assets) and staffing of the Region, not churches or pastors. Our Board

is a ministry of stewardship and empowerment for the churches in the Region. We make decisions based on discernment, consensus, and/or parliamentary rules.

DECISION ITEMS

Request from Godfrey Baptist Church. Godfrey Baptist Church received a loan from ABC sources in 1990 to make improvements to their building. As part of that loan process a “reverter clause” was added to the deed. The loan was satisfied many years ago, but the reverter clause was not removed. The church has requested that the Region endorse a “release of right of reverter” in order to clear the deed for the church. A motion was received and seconded to authorize regional officers to sign the documents that would release our right of reverter, and it passed unanimously.

Church Closings. The following churches have closed:

- Twin Rivers Community Church, St. Charles, MO, December 30, 2006
- Blackberry Creek Community Church, Aurora, IL, November 29, 2006

The Executive Minister certifies that all debts to ABC entities have been satisfied and assets have been distributed in an appropriate manner. A motion was received and seconded to acknowledge these closures and authorize the Executive Minister to remove them from our roll and report the changes to the General Board of ABC/USA, and it passed unanimously.

Official Expression Regarding Homosexuality. The GRR Board is obligated to review the response to its official document regarding homosexuality and report that to GRR churches. Members of the board spent much time in prayer, discernment and discussion groups to contemplate an official expression.

A motion was received and seconded to authorize the Staff of the region to draft an open letter to the General Board and the covenant partners of ABC/USA. At a special meeting of the Board on March 23, the draft will be edited and finalized. In this letter, we will express our appreciation for and approval of the letter from Dr. Medley dated July 17, 2006, and encourage Dr. Medley that both speaking and leading in ways that are consistent with the official position of ABC/USA are essential to denominational integrity. We will also affirm the criteria for ABC/USA reorganization as announced by GEC, and emphasize to both the General Board and the covenant partners that points 6 and 7 of those criteria are absolutely essential to the future life of ABC/USA, and that we continue to be frustrated by the patterns of distortion and disregard for our covenant life together as originally communicated in this Board’s official document on homosexuality. We will furthermore raise our concern over the visible pace of progress in addressing these issues given the crisis in which we find ourselves. After discussion and amending the motion to require the letter to be worded strongly, press on urgency, and bring something to our annual meeting in October, by a vote of 14-Yes and 0-No, the motion passed unanimously.

Another motion was received and seconded to instruct the Executive Minister to cultivate deeper associations and alliances with other ABC/USA regions desiring unhampered fellowship for the purpose of identity, mutual encouragement, and sharing resources while remaining American Baptist. Such associations and alliances, while public, would not engage in political action or promote division within the denomination. The Executive Minister will include these activities in the regular report to the Board. After discussion, by a vote of 11-Yes and 1-No, the motion passed.

Another motion was received and seconded to publicly declare that some regions have defined and pursued autonomy in such a way that they have chosen to be out of covenant with us, that their actions undermine the covenantal life of ABC/USA and confuse our identity, and that the usual collegiality and cooperation of the Great Rivers Region with those regions has been compromised. After discussion, by a vote of 3-Yes and 9-No, the motion failed.

Lake Benton Baptist Camp. Last year, the crisis that had been building in our camping program for many years could no longer be ignored. Camper participation in 2005 dropped by another 17%, which resulted in a \$60,000 deficit for the year. In responding to that crisis, the Board adopted a plan to use \$30,000 from reserves to supplement the camping program for 2006 (almost all of it to Lake Benton), increase camper fees and set numerical goals for camper participation. Unless camper participation turns around in 2006, we cannot continue the regional camping program as we have known it. During 2006, none of the three camps met the numerical goals set for camper participation. Camper participation has fallen to such a level that it questions effectiveness and stewardship. In consultation with the Vice President for Personnel and the Vice President for Finance, the manager at Lake Benton was notified in September that his employment contract would end December 31.

A motion was received and seconded to do and require all of the following:

- Suspend camp operations at Lake Benton for 2007
- Challenge churches to raise \$100,000 by the end of 2007
- Challenge churches to volunteer time and finances for the camp
- Challenge churches to recruit leaders for a shortened 2008 season
- Challenge churches to recruit 250 campers for a shortened 2008 season
- Invite a church or group of churches to form a corporation to assume all legal and financial responsibility for the operation of a camping program at Lake Benton
- Revisit the camping program in Fall 2008 to determine the future of camping

After discussion, by a vote of 5-Yes and 6-No, the motion failed. A new motion was reluctantly received and seconded to celebrate a half-century of Christian camping at Lake Benton with a de-commissioning service, dispose of the property as expeditiously as possible, use proceeds to erase the accumulated deficit and debts of the camp, and possibly create a fund for scholarships, mission trips, and other programs designed for children and youth. After discussion, by a vote of 8-Yes and 3-No, the motion passed.

MONITORING ITEMS

Staff Report. Dwight gave a verbal and written report of staff activity since the last Board meeting. Dwight continues to meet with pastors, churches and church leaders regarding issues in our denomination. He met with the General Executive Council regarding covenant issues and possible reorganization strategies for ABC/USA. Dwight also dealt with emerging financial situations in the region, and implemented the financial “Roadmap” adopted by the Board in our October meeting. He shared with the Board that giving to United Mission was down by 22% for the year, and that overall giving to ABMS was down 16%. Meanwhile, giving to Specifics was up 40%. Our shortfall in United Mission income for 2006 was \$216,938; however a number of churches and individuals made extraordinary designated gifts to the region totaling \$131,874, reducing our net deficit to about \$85,000.

Costa Rica Partnership Update. Randy McNeely gave a powerpoint presentation illustrating the progress of construction projects in Costa Rica. Mission teams from FBC Pontiac, FBC Kansas City, Grace BC Kansas City and churches in the Mattoon cluster all participated in mission trips to Costa Rica in 2006. Phase One of the projects are completed, with the construction of the Fellowship Hall and Parsonage. The Courtyard Roof project is also completed. The Sanctuary will hopefully be constructed by 2010.

Consecration Sunday Update. John Grisham and Max Klinkenborg have visited 34 churches in the region over the past couple years to teach about Consecration, which is “a transfer of all we are and have to Christ for active service.” It covers person and property, talents and opportunities, and accepts of Christ as leader, manager, friend and Savior – present, active and efficient in all the details of life. Of these 34 churches, 15 have held Consecration Sunday programs twice, and one church has had three programs. Feedback from churches was shared with board members.

Mortgage Extension. As directed by the Board during its October 6 meeting, the mortgage on the Regional Resource Center has been extended for five years at a rate just above 7%. The principal balance at the time of extension was about \$120,000. Town and Country Bank is servicing this loan.

Ministry of Financial Stewardship. Treasurer PJ Patterson shared a detailed report of the financial statements for the region and camps for all of 2006. Our Current operating fund showed a deficit of \$88,657 for 2006, mostly due to the dramatic decrease in giving to United Mission and America For Christ. Lake Springfield Baptist Camp had a deficit of \$17,000 for 2006. Lake Benton Baptist Camp’s deficit was about \$34,000, while Blackhawk Baptist Camp had a surplus in 2006 of \$13,000. The Capital Fund showed a surplus of \$138,000 for all of 2006, mostly due to unrealized gain on investments.

The board adjourned with prayer at 5:30 p.m., agreeing to meet at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, March 23 at the Resource Center in Springfield, to review the letter written by the staff. The next regular meeting will be on Friday, April 27, 2007, in Springfield.