

## REPORT TO THE SENATE

October, 2009

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Acting Executive Director

Our focus continues to be strengthening our constituent councils. A primary part of our strategy is the use of workshops that draw from Community of Practice insights. (To be clear, the workshop is about better ministry through better constituent councils. Communities of Practice insights are for that purpose.) Why bother to strengthen the local council? I believe that the constituent Ministers Council can be a vital instrument in attending to the issues of ministry and in caring for ministerial leaders. Why does that matter? Because our ministerial leaders are central to any hope we have that our churches will be effective instruments in proclaiming the gospel and continuing the ministry of Jesus. The consensus is overwhelming. The Ministerial Leader, the Pastor, is a central figure in the effectiveness or failure of the congregation.

Allow me to quote a few paragraphs from my installation sermon for Steve Bills and the ABCO.

I've read a little Baptist history and this is what I have observed about groups like the American Baptist Churches of Oregon. (One might call this an interpretive summary.) Originally, Baptist congregations chose to come together for the purpose of being Barnabas to one another – for mutual encouragement, mutual counsel, and mutual consolation in hard times and to be advocates for the cause. They chose to join together so that they could be Barnabas, children of encouragement, to one another.

It worked. It was a good thing. In fact, it worked so well that they decided that the volunteers were not up to the opportunities before them and they hired coordinators to help them out. This worked well so the coordinators were given full time jobs with titles like Executive Minister or State Secretary. Some even wanted to call them Bishop but that never quite happened.

But somewhere along the line, something else happened. The churches said to the professionals, not out loud mind you but by implication and behavior, "We hired you to be the Barnabas so you take care of it. It's not our responsibility any more. We have other things to do." And there are some among us, now that we have a paid Barnabas in every region, who feel perfectly free to spend their time complaining about the paid Barnabases and belittling the churches who may be different from themselves.

In this season, the paid Barnabas is not enough and, indeed, has never been enough for any season. Our only chance to flourish is that we be Barnabas to one another both within our congregations and among our churches. The call belongs to us all.

<http://www.ministerscouncil.com/JoessWriting/documents/SteveBillsABCORInstallation1009.pdf>

The sermon was written for churches but it applies with equal force to Ministerial Leaders. Our only chance to flourish is that we be Barnabas, encouragers, to one another. The call belongs to us all.

I have accepted 2 new tasks.

The Professional Ministries Team (PMT), ABCUSA has begun to review the ordination standards published by the now defunct Commission on Ministry in 1994. As a member of the PMT, I have agreed to work with Dr. Jeff Woods in the initial review for the team. While not directly a Ministers Council project, it seems so central to our life as a community of Ministerial Leaders that I signed on. Given the nature of PMT meetings, it may be a slow process but I will keep you informed of significant developments.

I have also agreed to a 2 year term as the chairman of the Ministry Development Centers. Three of the centers, Boston, Midwest, and Oakland have long histories of work with the ABCUSA and the others have served our ministers by virtue of geographical proximity. As in my decision to work with ordination

standards, the health of our Ministerial Leaders is so central to our purpose that my participation in that group seems to be appropriate.

Here is a bit of significant information. Sue Sechrist tells us that between January and October of 2009, our website has received more than 25,000 visits! Our newsletter and magazine continue to be well-read though a better system for circulation (the ABC email system is less than optimal) would increase the readership and visibility of the services we provide.

About the email system we are exploring other possibilities but for now, we have what we have!

My October travel schedule was as follows:

1-4	Troy, Michigan	Planning for a possible winter MC workshop FBC Royal Oak, MI 170 <sup>th</sup> anniversary Grandchildren and their parents
5-8	Camp Moses Merrill, NE	ABC Nebraska senior retreat Theme: "On Becoming an Encouraging People"
8	Junction City, KS	Central Region annual Ministers Council meeting
15-17	Portland, OR	Ministers Council workshop Preached the sermon in the service installing Steve Bills as the Region Executive Minister
18-20	Rochester, NY	CRCDs board meetings
26	Valley Forge, PA	PMT meetings
29-31	Peoria, IL	ABC Great Rivers Ministers Gathering and Annual Meeting.

I still try to communicate regularly through the American Baptist Ministers Council Facebook page. We now have 401 members of the facebook group page. I have begun, from time to time, to send a prayer to the members of the group. The initiative has been well received. One person has found it to be a bit intrusive for which I apologize and hope that it will be deleted quickly.

We continue to work towards the "Together in the Lord" conference in Orlando. We have a great, a world class, line up of speakers and workshops and I look forward to wonderful time together. Please register today.

You do what you do because you were called to do it. I pray that you will remember the One who called you, that the God of the Universe is keeping you company in your ministry.