

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT!

“A model for doing and being mission, ABC style.”

American Baptists, under the Lordship of Christ and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, are being led to discern what our future might be. The forces of a rapidly changing culture and world are once more challenging American Baptists to look long and hard at who we really are and how we can best engage the world on behalf of the gospel of Christ. We came into existence as a mission minded people concerned with sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world around us. And, now, in these days of rebirth and refocus, we are seeing the possibilities for a “mission minded” people committed to being the hands and feet of Christ in this new century.

From many quarters and for multiple reasons we have surmised that it is time for us to look at how we are structured nationally as American Baptists, how we relate to one another, and how we focus our strengths and abilities to present an American Baptist mission witness to the world around us. We have done this often in our life together, with our last major revisions occurring in the 1970's. The GEC which is suggesting such an examination of our structure and culture is asking how our present structure and culture can be adapted to more effectively enable our common life and common work to be more flexible and responsive. In effect, can we claim the best of what it means to be a movement and what it means to be an institution in our ABC structures?

The General Executive Council (GEC) has spent several of its recent meetings from 2006-2008 focusing on the model contained in this paper. There was affirmation. There was caution. There was encouragement. There were new ideas. The contributions were positive and uplifting. We are offering the best a unified GEC can offer.

In their fall 2006 meeting, the General Executive Council received a number of proposed models for restructuring the national portion of our denomination. After due deliberation they selected two that seemed to hold the most potential. A Writing Team composed of nine members of the GEC was then appointed to put together a single proposal based upon these two models, as well as the concepts and suggestions that came from other members of the Council. The attached proposal reflects that discussion and subsequent discussions over the last two years. It also reflects previous presentations to the General Board and the Board's response and insight. In June of 2007 the revised overall framework was presented to the General Board and the Biennial delegates for feedback and affirmation on the general direction of the model. Overall it was generally affirmed. It now comes to the General Board as a final recommendation to present to the ABC delegates at the 2009 Biennial in Pasadena. Only ABC delegates gathered at that Biennial have the right to change the bylaws that govern our structure.

The General Board will have a first reading in June 2008 of the proposed bylaw changes required to implement the new structure. The second reading will occur in November 2008 at which time the General Board will vote whether to recommend the bylaw changes to the Biennial delegates.

As it began its work the Writing Team spent considerable time in reflection upon its understanding of the nature of the church and what it means when we say, “the local church is the fundamental unit of mission.” The Writing Team scanned factors found in our culture which are reshaping how we do ministry and mission. They also examined recent developments in organizational theory. Two concepts were especially helpful to the team as it did its work: the concept of “simultaneous loose and tight organizational connections” and the concept of federations.

The federation model, used by many non-profit organizations, including United Way, Habitat for Humanity, and the Salvation Army, allows for the coordination of certain activities by a central office and decentralization of others. Often, a federation’s most valuable asset, namely its sense of mission and identity, is shared throughout the entire organization, and is sometimes referred to as a “brand image.”

The theory of loose and tight organizational connections, further allows for simultaneous, yet diverse outcomes to be achieved within the same organization by varying degrees of interaction among the component parts. High degrees of interaction lead to outcome characterized by control, consistency, and accountability. Low degrees of interaction lead to outcomes characterized by innovation, empowerment, and localized determination. Many local congregations have successfully implemented such a strategy to foster creativity in their ministry teams, while maintaining accountability in its financial and governing policies. The concepts underlying federations as well as the theory of simultaneous loose and tight connections undergird the proposed model.

As we consider possible new directions in our structure, a summary of the implications of such changes is offered:

WHAT WOULD END?

There are number of things that would end:

- Legislation as a primary emphasis in our governance
- Large numbers in our Board structure
- Interlocking Board structure
- The concept of a General Board

WHAT WOULD REMAIN THE SAME?

There are a number of things that would remain the same:

- The ABC commitment to a gospel based mission
- The ABC commitment to the local church
- Representation is still important in this proposed structure, although not in the same ways
- A desire to support vital, thriving, healthy churches
- National Boards: NM, IM, and MMBB

WHAT WOULD BE NEW?

There are a number of things that would be new for us:

- The Mission Summit and Mission Table (Discussion, research, mission centered)
- Mission as the primary emphasis
- Board of General Ministries
- Smaller boards chosen for skills and diversity and greater use of technology to facilitate meetings, therefore more affordable
- Ability to respond more quickly to mission opportunities
- Development of a diverse leadership pool

PRIMARY CHANGE IN ABC CULTURE

The restructure known as SCODS which created our present national structure in the seventies, sought to create stronger representation by the churches and greater coordination among the mission societies by creating a General Board. It had become evident that the annual meeting of the convention could not provide the consistent guidance and oversight that was needed for the expansive ministries of American Baptists in a fast-paced culture. The intent was that the General Board would identify mission priorities and coordinate their implementation, and that it would express the mind of Christ on important issues.

However, the SCODS structure has its shortcomings that have become increasingly evident. First, it involves an extremely large number of people that makes for high costs in a time when every church body is seeking to reduce costs. Secondly, board members are elected primarily for their ability to serve as representatives of the churches and not for the skills needed on the boards. Thirdly, the fact that General Board members also serve as directors of the program boards creates confusion among the board members as to their primary role and the duty of loyalty. And fourthly, the focus on legislation, by which we mean its statements in the forms of policy statements and resolutions, has proven problematic.

Therefore, a key proposal to what is being placed before you is the recommendation that national focus shift from legislation to mission.

MISSION SUMMIT AND MISSION TABLE.

The proposal recommends the creation of the Mission Summit to be held at the time of the Biennial and a Mission Table which will meet following the Biennial.

WHAT IS THE MISSION SUMMIT AND WHAT WILL IT DO?

The Mission Summit will capture the input of the Biennial, the largest number of American Baptists gathered in one place, as it provides a venue for examining the world landscape for those issues and concerns calling for a mission response from American Baptists as we seek to be healthy missional congregations engaged with God's mission in the world. The Mission Summit will become the place and the time when American Baptists of varied color, gender, age and economic status will sit together, reflecting and discussing what this people of God can do in Christ's name in our world.

In the Mission Summit, Biennial participants would learn of critical trends impacting the mission and ministry of the church within and without the United States; would participate in mission reflection and workshops based on the best practices of congregations, regions and boards; and experience opportunities to network with people and congregations sharing similar mission contexts and emphases.

The Mission Summit would have at its very heart the local church and how to strengthen healthy missional congregations who could join with other local churches, as well as Regions and National bodies, to impact our ABC global mission. One of the great values of this way of working is that a large number of ideas and programs will surface. Consequently, there could be a wide breadth of mission efforts being worked upon by this family. This is an exciting concept which holds great promise for our denomination.

This effort to bring to the Biennial the possibilities for mission could give focus to our American Baptist-wide mission for years to come. Local churches, Regions, affiliated organizations, National Boards, seminaries, and colleges, could look at what is being proposed and determine where and how they can join the common effort.

FUNDING THE MISSION SUMMIT

Those attending the Summit would be delegates and visitors participating in the Biennial. Therefore, they would pay their own travel to and from the Biennial site.

WHAT IS THE MISSION TABLE AND WHAT WILL IT DO?

The Mission Table is a focused group of American Baptist clergy, laity and staff persons charged with receiving the input from the Mission Summit as they work as a

substantive missional think tank on behalf of the denomination. The Mission Table will be composed of 108 people representing the broad spectrum of American Baptist mission partners. It would include: 34 local church members and pastors (one per Region); the President of the ABCUSA; the General Secretary and 3 others from General Ministries; the executive directors plus 3 others each from NM and IM; the executive director plus 1 from MMBB; the 34 Regional executive ministers; 7 persons from the caucus network; one each from the American Baptist Men, American Baptist Historical Society, American Baptist Homes and Caring Ministries and the American Baptist Assembly; the President and executive director of American Baptist Women's Ministries and the Ministers Council; 3 representative from ABC seminaries and 3 from ABC colleges, and 1 from American Baptist Homes and Caring Ministries.

The 34 Region representatives would come from nominations by each of the Regions. Each Region will suggest 5 people to the National Nominating Committee which would, in turn, select one from the five provided by the Region in order to provide a group which is representative of the denomination. (The National Nominating Committee consists of the ABCUSA President and Immediate Past President, 3 appointed by the REMC, the intercaucus president and 6 representatives from the Board of General Ministries—3 clergy and 3 laity.)

At the Mission Table the key mission partners of the denomination, together with the representative pastors and laity, can further refine and pursue areas of common mission emphasis making recommendations for areas of action. This table will go a long way toward breaking down mission silos so that staff of the mission partners can effectively network around shared responsibilities and priorities. This table's sole focus will be the furtherance of God's mission through American Baptists, not the institutional life of the denomination. One present example of how this might work is the taskforce called together by the General Secretary, working on that issue. It is composed of OGS, International Ministries, National Ministries and regions and congregations to address the immigration of Burmese refugees from Thailand.

General Ministries, through the Office of the General Secretary, would be responsible for administering and resourcing the Mission Table. However, because the denomination's mission partners are a part of the Mission Table, the mission partners will be responsible for carrying back to their boards and agencies for implementation the implications of the Table's work for them.

It is the opinion of the GEC that the Mission Summit and Mission Table could become the guiding light for this denomination as a missional body. The work of the Summit and Table should have impact on the denomination—national and regional, and the local churches.

Though not a specific part of these recommendations, it is possible that Regions across our ABCUSA might want to sponsor area Mission Summits, challenging their churches and church members to look at mission opportunities around them. The result of such gatherings could be the expansion of mission networks forming all across our denomination. The potential for mission engagement by ABC church members is potentially enormous as well as exciting.

BIENNIAL

We are recommending that the Biennial remain a staple in American Baptist life. The purpose of the Biennial is to celebrate our ABC mission; to provide training for the support of that mission; to experience renewing and life-giving worship; and to care for necessary governance tasks. Delegates will receive mission reports; be offered training and encouraged to work faithfully as partners in mission; and through surveys and other methodologies offer recommendations of mission priorities. In addition, delegates will continue to elect ABCUSA officers, members of the Board of General Ministries, and have final authority over the bylaws of the ABCUSA. The Board of General Ministries will bring legislative and business items from time to time to the Biennial.

The enhanced significance of the Biennial will be its relationship to the Mission Summit and Mission Table. All Biennial delegates and guests who desire to do so will become participants of the Mission Summit. We would have large numbers of American Baptists bringing their voices and insights to the discernment of what God is calling American Baptists to be and to do.

In addition to these basic and governing actions, we envision the Biennial providing some or all of the following:

- Dealing with and deciding upon broad priorities for the ABC
- Celebrating our ABC identity
- Building energy for our vision and mission
- Offering support for pastors and all clergy
- Providing significant worship and fellowship
- Giving hands on resources for local churches and their ministry
- Providing workshops and forums for education in the best practices for ministry and mission
- Showcasing preaching
- Promoting emerging talents for the Leadership Pool
- Create a significant place for the youth of our denomination
- Celebrating Mission Achievements and Baptist heroes
- Receiving honored guests from our mission partners, from Baptist and other denominational bodies, and from ecumenical and mission agencies.
- Training events for the leadership recruitment pool.
- Discussion and discourse from a theological perspective dealing with

current and relevant issues.

The Biennial is still the one event that brings together in one place the largest number of American Baptists. In that place we can worship, learn, celebrate God's work through us, grow in our insights, inform our opinions through learning experiences and stand arm in arm together as American Baptists in the United States of America. Going forth, educated and challenged to the call to mission that comes from our Lord, we can give witness to our faith and how our faith impacts lives through the local church and the American Baptist Churches in the USA to which we belong.

The planning for the Biennial would be led by the ABCUSA officers and staff. Representatives from the National Boards and Regions would be asked to participate in this effort.

GENERAL MINISTRIES BOARD (ABCUSA)

The statement of purpose for the ABCUSA as set forth in the prologue of the current bylaws does not change.

Rather than a General Board, we are proposing that a smaller entity of 30 people be created to be known as the Board of General Ministries (ABCUSA). It would have responsibility for the welfare of the denomination as a whole and would oversee the work of the ABCUSA through the Office of the General Secretary. As such it would have the following functions:

- Seek the welfare of the whole denomination (cooperating churches, regional boards, national boards, AMOs and covenanting organizations) through vision, leadership, and coordination.
- Formation and celebration of ABC identity
- Responsible for legal matters for the ABCUSA
- Support for stewardship and fund raising
- Evaluation of performance of the Office of the General Secretary
- Leading and staffing the Mission Summit and Mission Table including coordinating research
- Election of the General Secretary
- Provision of Biennial meetings of the denomination
- Such other services and programs as the board shall decide
- Convene and chair meetings of the National Leadership Council, and the Covenanting Partners
- Oversee the development and maintenance of the Leadership Pool
- Have responsibility for envisioning and staffing the Biennial meeting of cooperating churches
- Have the unique role of presenting an overall picture of ABC life, of

interpreting our Baptist distinctives and American Baptist core values, as well as our mission future

- Coordinate denominational services necessary for the maintenance of the professional ministry in the denomination
- Review and assess the performance of denominational functions carried out by other entities
- Be responsible for the policies regarding and the representation of American Baptists in relationship to other Christian bodies and faith traditions
- Perform such treasury and other internal administrative functions as required for the effective functioning of the denomination
- Provide resources to the regional offices and their executives in the areas of executive search committee guidance, executive orientation and evaluation, and staff and board development

(Please note the attached Accountability Grid and Structure Matrix for additional responsibilities of this Board.)

The 30 member Board of General Ministries shall consist of the following:

- Three shall be officers elected by the Biennial
(President, Vice President, Budget Review Officer)
- Three ex-officio with full rights: past president, the General Secretary, and the president of the Intercaucus Group
- Another 18 shall be elected by the Biennial
- Another 5 shall be elected by the Board of General Ministries to obtain diversity and skill set needed
- A director elected jointly by ABC International Ministries, National Ministries and the MMBB boards, and
- All shall be members of cooperating American Baptist churches

The National Nominating Committee shall bring to the Biennial delegates a slate for 3 designated ABC officers and the 18 persons to be elected by the Biennial to the Board of General Ministries. Each nominee would serve a four-year term with the opportunity for an additional term, for a maximum of eight years of service. A nominating petition endorsed by at least 50 congregations may be used to bring a name before the Biennial for any elected officer in addition to the slate brought by the National Nominating Committee.

AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

As stated earlier, the denomination is described best as a federation. Federations are associations of autonomous entities that voluntarily relate to one another and are committed to one another, in our instance, by a covenant of relationships. This model at work in our ABC setting provides assurances that ABC relationships will appropriately

reflect the autonomy and interdependence which is central to our polity. The proposed structure will clarify some of the misconceptions of the SCODS restructure as a hierarchical model which gave some boards authority over others.

At the same time, assurances are built into the current proposal that will safeguard the ABC identity of each of the national boards. This is achieved, on the one hand, through the election by the ABCUSA (as authorized by its Board of General Ministries) of special board members to the boards of National Ministries, International Ministries and MMBB. On the other hand, National Ministries, International Ministries, and MMBB shall together elect one special member to the Board of General Ministries. The presence of these directors, together with special limited voting rights given to ABCUSA, on the one hand, and to each of the National Boards, on the other hand, prevents any of the individual boards from changing their bylaws in a way that significantly alters their ABC identity or their relationship to the denomination without the approval of the other respective boards. With respect to the ABCUSA bylaws, no changes to those bylaws may be approved without the final approval of the delegates to the Biennial meeting.

PUBLIC WITNESS STATEMENTS

Policy Statements or Resolutions, here forward in this proposal, will be referred to as Public Witness Statements. Public Witness Statements may be developed and come from any of the National and Regional Boards provided they have been adopted by their Board of Directors as statements of those entities. For a public witness statement to become an American Baptist statement, three-fourths ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the covenanting Regional and National Boards (with the exception of MMBB) must approve the statement. The Board of General Ministries would be responsible for conducting the voting process leading to an official ABCUSA statement and publishing those statements that are approved by the covenanting partners. Current policy statements and resolutions remain as official ABCUSA statements. Public Witness Statements will represent the spiritual discernment of the covenanting partners as they seek to educate, activate, and advocate the teachings of Jesus.

LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT: A NEW PROPOSAL

The selection of people to serve and fulfill the leadership functions in the denomination is a critical task. Therefore, we propose that General Ministries create and be accountable for a leadership recruitment effort. This effort through partnerships with National Boards, Regions and local churches would identify present and emerging leaders and build a pool of prospective leaders. The overall purpose of the leadership recruitment effort would be to (1) build a repository of proven leaders for this denomination, and (2) have the opportunity to develop leaders for future service in the denomination. This pool of names would reflect the quality and gifts of leadership needed in denominational service. The pool would identify the skills that persons have to

offer. This data base would be a source for suggestions to fill vacancies on boards, task forces, etc. for the denomination. However, they would not be limited to the pool as the only source for names to consider in their organization.

Further, the leadership recruitment effort would carry the responsibility of providing on-going training, orientation and development of leadership skills for those whose names are added to the pool. As an example those in charge of the leadership recruitment effort could plan a major leadership training event at the time of the Biennial. Those whose names were in the Leadership Pool would be invited to attend the event where the focus would be on skill development and ABC identity.

GENERAL SECRETARY

We are recommending that the present office of General Secretary will continue to be known as the Office of the General Secretary. Such a title reflects not only the tradition of this position, but also the common language among Baptist bodies around the world. This person would be “head of communion” for the denomination, carrying broad responsibilities for leadership and vision for the denomination as a whole. The General Secretary and staff are responsible for managing the implementation of the responsibilities of the Board of General Ministries listed above.

The General Secretary shall be elected by the Board of General Ministries upon the nomination by the National Nominating Committee, augmented by a member chosen by National Ministries, International Ministries, and MMBB. The General Secretary, like other national and regional shall serve with no set term of office.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

This body is the present General Executive Council. It is proposed that the National Leadership Council (NLC) include:

- President of the ABCUSA
- The General Secretary + up to 3 other staff from OGS
- Representatives of the National Boards (Exec. Dir + up to 3 others)
- Regional Executive Ministers
- Executive Directors of the following organizations:
 - AB Women’s Ministries
 - Minister’s Council
 - American Baptist Assembly
 - ABEC
 - Interim Ministries
 - Historical Society
 - Foundation

The minimum threshold criteria for membership in the NLC will be:

- Have an autonomous board and be financially viable
- Have a paid Executive
- Is a national ABCUSA organization that indicates its willingness:
 - To support the statement of purpose in the bylaws of the ABCUSA
 - To cooperate wholeheartedly in such relationships and projects at all levels of denominational life which seem advisable.
 - To be identified as an organization related to and participating in the life of the ABCUSA by use of the name and/or logo.
 - Is primarily devoted to providing programs and/or services to the ABCUSA.
 - Is accountable to the ABCUSA Policy Statements and Resolutions, and internal covenants within the GEC/NLC where applicable.

The final determination about membership for organizations, having met these threshold criteria, will rest with the National Leadership Council.

The National Leadership Council would meet once in the Biennial year and twice in the off-year. Its purposes would include to:

- Build and foster authentic relationships
- Participate in continuing education related to their executive roles
- Facilitate implementation of denominational priorities
- Demonstrate progress on those priorities in their respective boards
- Conduct trend analysis
- Suggest means of improving the functioning of the denomination
- Participate in theological reflection

The General Secretary along with the President of the ABCUSA also may convene a meeting of the Covenanting Partners to discuss issues pertaining to them.

THE NATIONAL BOARDS

National Ministries, International Ministries, and MMBB will continue to be autonomous and interdependent boards of the denomination and faithful to their charters, providing leadership and resources for the mission of the denomination. The Board membership of each would be reflective of the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in our denomination. These Boards would be faithful to their charters. They would remain in a committed partnership with the Office of General Ministries and Regions. Their focus, like all of the ABC, would be helping and supporting the local church in its mission. These bodies would have representation on the Mission Summit and Table so that communication between these bodies could go both ways in order promote common goals.

The selection of the Chief Executive Officer of each of these Boards would be handled within each autonomous Board. When a candidate is selected, said candidate would be presented to the Board of General Ministries for election as a national secretary of the denomination.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE MINISTERS COUNCIL

Regions continue to be valued partners in our denomination. Regional Executive Ministers serve as CEO's representing their Regions and together they form the Regional Executive Ministers Council (REMC). In this staff forum they would continue to focus on mutual regional concerns reflecting the home base where each Executive serves. In addition, they would blend their perspectives from the Regions to give the denomination a view point which is needed to be able to serve the local church faithfully. They would be a part of the Mission Summit and Table in such a way as to reflect the concerns and needs of their Regions. At the same time they would be there in a committed partnership to further and strengthen the mission of the ABCUSA.

FUNDING THE ABCUSA MISSION

It is clear that one of the major issues driving the consideration of a new ABC structure on the national level is the funding of the ABCUSA mission. We have experienced a serious decline in United Mission and other specific opportunities to help fund our mission effort. Therefore, this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The GEC in consultation with the ABC Treasurers Council has sought to create a financially sustainable structure. The proposed new model reduces costs to the representative process by \$117,601 or 43%.

The assumptions that were used for the financial model are as follows:

Mission Table: The Mission Table is held every two years as a post-biennial event and structured as a 3-day, 2 –night meeting. 100% of expenses are covered for local church, Caucus, and General Ministries participants. 50% of room and board costs are covered for REMC, National Boards, covenanting AMOs and college and seminary participants. A \$17,000 travel pool is made available each year to help local church representatives attend interim meetings as needed.

NLC: The National Leadership Council meets two times a year and each meeting is structured as a 3-day, 2-night event. 100% of expenses are covered for the ABC president and General Ministries participants. 50% of expenses (including travel and room and board), are covered for REMC, National Boards and covenanting AMO participants.

CRITICAL ISSUES TO THIS NEW MODEL

In all the deliberations over this proposal that have occurred in the General Board and General Executive Council, two issues have been consistently raised. They are critical to this proposal because they are critical to American Baptists. The issues are REPRESENTATION and DIVERSITY.

REPRESENTATION

When SCODs was adopted in the early 1970's representation was a central issue to the structure that was put into place. Representation was important to Program Boards, the Nominating Committee, Caucuses, the AMOs, and all appointed Committees, Commissions, and Task Groups. But as important as representation was to these bodies, it became the hallmark for the General Board. Members of the General Board were chosen by Election Districts in each of the Regions and the National Nominating Committee to be sure that the General Board reflected who we were as a denomination. Gender, race, rural, urban, young, old, geography became important. We wanted our American Baptists who represented these groups to be present through their representatives at the meetings of the General Board.

As the General Executive Council and the General Board have worked on this proposal, we have said representation is still important and critical. What we have in this proposal is a different approach to representation, but it is still there and it is still central. When we count those who will participate in the Mission Summit and those designated to be part of the Mission Table, as well as the Board of General Ministries and the National Boards, we will have a large part of our constituency participating in the governing and mission efforts of our denomination. We think there could be even more representation in this model. Therefore, we continue to celebrate representation and make it a hallmark of who we are. The leadership pool will be a resource bank of names gathered from across the country which will greatly help us in seeking representation.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is an ABC core value. It defines who we are. We are the most diverse denomination in America today. We celebrate our diversity. It gives us strength. It gives us direction. It gives community to us. This proposal calls for all bodies, the Summit, the Table, the Board of General Ministries, the Program Boards, the NLC, appointed committees, commissions, task groups to reflect the diversity of this denomination in its membership composition. A Joint Board Nominating Review Committee will regularly examine the make up of the national boards and the Mission Table to determine if they

reflect the makeup of the denomination. This body will make recommendations to the various nominating committees to redress under-representation. This committee shall be composed of the President of the ABCUSA, the presidents of the national boards, the chair of the REMC, the presidents of the Ministers Council and American Baptist Women's Ministries, and the chair of the Intercaucus. Regions will be encouraged to submit diverse names based upon the following: urban, suburban, rural, large, small and mega churches, race, gender, age, geography, language, culture, clergy/lay, physical ability, and economic class.

In addition, the National Nominating Committee will be mandated to ensure that the diversity of the Mission Table accurately reflects or mirrors the diversity of the ABCUSA.

The National Nominating Committee will review the names sent by the Regions to ensure diversity and will report back to each Region and the NLC if names submitted do not meet the level of diversity needed to enable mutual accountability.

We will be intentional about building and strengthening leadership capacity as "mature respondents" so that we move beyond representation to actually accessing the gifts of diversity as evidenced by the meaningful engagement by all to fulfill our mission and purpose.

SUMMARY

Approximately every 35 years, or once every generation, American Baptists have significantly reshaped our denominational life to more adequately respond to the challenges of a new era. Each has built upon the past while also significantly diverging from it.

In this first part of the 21st Century, the GEC is making its best recommendation to the General Board and the Biennial for a structure that builds upon the best of SCODS while also offering significant changes to create a more nimble and streamlined structure. We believe it offers several significant advances over our current system. At the same time, given the ever increasing pace of change, we anticipate that we will continue to build upon and refine this model as we live with it. Our goal has been to enable us to more effectively serve as the hands and feet of Christ in this era and to see our local churches and denominational bodies excitedly engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ to the world.