



AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

*Rev. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary*

October 3, 2005

Dear Colleagues in Christ:

Grace, mercy and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As I write this letter regarding the state of affairs in our American Baptist family, I am drawn to the classic story of Jesus, the disciples and the storm in Matthew 8:24-27:

A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but He was asleep. And they went and woke Him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

This passage comes to mind because in our denominational family our boat is in a storm. *Master, the tempest is raging.*

What does it mean to look into the face of Jesus in the midst of the storm and discover how He leads us? By God's grace, we find the answer in our identity. We are a people who seek to be centered in Christ with prayer, purpose and passion.

The leadership of ABCUSA is unified as never before in mission. We are committed with passion and purpose to encourage and enable radical discipleship—rooted in radical love, expressed in radical servanthood, and nurtured in missional communities of faith. To quote Brian McLaren in his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, we are ... *to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ in authentic community for the good of the world.* I pledge to you to continue pursuing this reality with every ounce of energy that God gives me.

Your American Baptist leaders are focused. The General Board embraced a new Mission Statement in June 2005, the results of a nationwide, intensive, grassroots *Seek It!* process. [A copy of the statement, *Centered in Christ – A People of Prayer, Purpose and Passion*, is enclosed.] We have five clear ministry priorities: Church Planting, Healthy Missional Congregations, Radical Discipleship, Leadership and Youth. We are uniting around the social problems of children in poverty in America and the global evil of human trafficking—the 21st century form of slavery. As staff, we will concentrate on these ministries with laser-like focus. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we will relentlessly and tenaciously focus on life-changing, church-growing, world-impacting initiatives in these areas.

I know the deep division and am aware of the many opinions expressed by a number of voices. Because of this I need to speak clearly about our positions around the issue of homosexuality. Here are five affirmations from our General Board for which I am spokesperson and to which I am accountable:

1. Our Family Life Policy Statement (1984) says, “We affirm that God intends marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, one-flesh union of a man and a woman.”
2. A General Board resolution (1992) says, “We affirm that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”
3. A General Board resolution (1993) calls for continuing dialogue on human sexuality.
4. As Baptists we affirm the long-held insistence on local church autonomy and priesthood of believers. The denomination submits to churches and individuals in matters of doctrinal determination. This foundation has been in place for 98 years. (Bylaws of Northern Baptist Convention, 1907)
5. The principle of voluntary association in mission calls us together to accomplish Kingdom tasks that are better done together than apart. It declares that we need each other if we are to accomplish God’s purposes for us. (Autonomy and Interdependence Within the American Baptist Denomination: A Declaration, 1982)

As General Secretary, I abide by the policies and resolutions of the General Board, and encourage the National Boards and the Regions to honor those decisions. I will continue to be faithful in identifying the positions the General Board has taken on issues of our day.

In these changing times, we can expect to go through changes in the denomination. For that reason I have sought and received the input of American Baptists in gatherings such as *Seek It!*, the Biennial, prayer meetings in the regions and the Mission and Ministry Consultations. With God’s direction, here is how I intend to lead us forward.

1. We are fully committed to the freedom, autonomy and primacy of the local church. It is the fundamental and essential unit of God’s mission in the world.
2. American Baptists are not going to stop being Baptists. We will move forward with our current vision, mission, policies and resolutions. We recognize that we will always have dissenters among us. We will engage in ongoing dialogue on the issues on which we disagree, but we will be clear about our policies. We will encourage local churches and regions to go on record with their dissent and passionately forge ahead with our mission and ministry.
3. There is nothing sacred about our organizational structure. We will not engage in a “feeding frenzy” over power or resources. We will continue to adapt as required by missional priorities.

4. I believe that as General Secretary I am the “keeper” of the covenants. My role is to serve as the “head of communion” for our American Baptist family in the ecumenical community. I am not a presiding bishop; I am the denominational pastor. My task is to lift up the mission and vision of the family and to oversee each partner’s participation in moving the mission toward the vision.

I am encouraged by the many statements of support I have received regarding my decision to remain focused on our mission and vision. A Kansas City pastor wrote the following:

We are American Baptists, a beautiful tapestry of Christ’s disciples who highly treasure our freedom in matters of faith and conscience, and we will never surrender this gift. As we move ahead during these difficult times, I believe we will celebrate that freedom and share our story with greater passion and inspiration. As we engage in ministry and mission, we will continue to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be strengthened by our differences, and to choose the high road of radical love. The mandate of Christ’s Commission is too urgent; the call for justice and social action is too loud; the spiritual needs of the world are too compelling; and the challenges to respond responsibly to the violence of poverty and the cry of our children are too clear to be sidetracked by one, though important, issue. We are a family that understands and defines our identity in a variety of ways, but we are one ABC family.

Tony Campolo sent me the following note:

I pray for you regularly because your task is to hold together a denomination that has tendencies toward schism at a time when denominational unity is incredibly important. Christ called us to be one, to listen to each other, to learn from each other, and to grow because of the interaction, as we discuss the issues that trouble us.

Let us keep thinking and talking together. Let us reason together. Let us recognize that in spite of our differences, we all have an allegiance to salvation through Christ that expresses itself in evangelism and efforts for social justice. We’ve walked together too long to go our separate ways in these difficult days. I pray that all of us will get behind you and your dream for a progressive, evangelical denomination that is cutting-edge on social justice issues.

We yearn for radical discipleship—rooted in radical love, expressed in radical servanthood, and nurtured in missional communities of faith for God’s radically needy world. That is God’s vision for ABCUSA, affirmed by the General Board, and that is where, with God’s guidance, I pledge to lead the denomination.

Jesus brought His disciples through the storm. If we center in Christ, we will also weather the storm, and by His grace bring honor and glory to His name. If you resonate with this vision of mission, please recommit yourself to the ministry that God has given to American Baptists. I doubt that, being Baptists, we will ever attain “a dead calm” as reported on the Sea of Galilee, but by faith I envision a sea in which the waves and the wind work for us—not against us.

I pray that the faithfulness of a radical God and the love of a radical Savior will lead us through our disagreements and enable us to radically love the world around us. I also pray for you and your ministry. It is not an easy time, but I believe there is truth in the saying, *Fear not the winds of adversity. A kite rises only against the wind, never with it.*

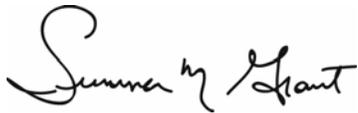
May the power of the Holy Spirit be with you as you seek to be centered in Christ with prayer, purpose and passion in service to the Living God.

In Christ's love,



A. Roy Medley
General Secretary

PS: I have shared this letter with my colleagues on the National Executive Council, and they have agreed to sign it as an affirmation of what has been said.



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