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To: The ABCCR Family  
From: Dr. John S. Williams

This letter serves as official notification of my intention to complete my service as Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region on December 31, 2017 and enter into retirement on January 1, 2018. It has been an incredible honor and privilege to serve the Central Region in this capacity these past nine and one half years.

When I moved to Kansas 43 years ago to begin my first pastorate and engage my formal seminary education I could not have imagined how wonderful the years of service among the churches and people of the ABCCR would be. The opportunity to serve three congregations over 25 years has been rewarding and satisfying in every way. During that time I was able to grow in my love and understanding of the wider American Baptist family and was privileged to serve in various capacities across the Region, including service on the ABCCR Board of Directors and as ABCCR President. The eight years of ministry as Western Area Minister were years of joy and growth as I was given opportunity to relate to a number of churches and pastors, offering support and encouragement in the ministry challenges we all face. And now, these past years as Executive Minister have given me opportunity to use the gifts God has given me, the skills God has enabled me to develop, the friendships we have nurtured over the years and an incredible staff of colleagues and partners to do exceptionally meaningful work among our churches and our wider denominational family. Without a doubt, I have been blessed beyond measure.

I believe it is important for you to know that my decision to retire has been made, not because I am ill, tired, "burned out," frustrated or in any way dissatisfied with the work we share together. This decision has been made because I truly believe it is the right time. On December 31<sup>st</sup> I will have completed 10 years as Executive Minister and believe I have mostly accomplished the primary purposes for which I was called to this position: to build bridges and bring reconciliation to a Region that had experienced significant conflict and splintering. I believe the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region is now in a very healthy place; perhaps more healthy than in many years, and better equipped to engage this time of transition in healthy and

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*Growing Healthy Churches to Fulfill Christ's Mission*

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productive ways. I sense a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit within our Region as we have been listening and responding to the needs of our churches in meaningful ways. The leadership team we have assembled is second to none and is poised to do even greater things. Our Board strength and capacity is exceptionally good. We have strong, gifted and capable leaders who have a firm commitment to our shared ministries and those things that will promote vital ministry and unity among our churches. Our fiscal state is stable. While we have worked hard to live within our means God continues to supply our needs. We remain one of the strongest Regions in terms of giving to United Mission and the churches of the Central Region provide substantial support for our American Baptist missionaries around the world, making the ABCCR a favorite place for many of our missionaries to visit and share the story of what God is doing through their work.

The timing for this announcement is also intentional. We now have 5 ½ months to prepare for this time of transition. Dr. Marsh, Rev. Justice, Rev. Robinson and I have been giving special attention to what is needed during this transition. We will continue to work to address concerns and needs revealed through the 2016 Listening Conversations. This has been important work and will not be set aside or lost in the transition. Adjustments are being made to search and call assignments so that work can move forward with minimal disruption. Additionally, I have been in contact with Dr. Jeff Woods, Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries. He will be working with the Board and Search Task Force providing guidance and resources as you begin to engage the search process. Each Area will need to recommend at least three individuals who might serve on the search task force. The Executive Committee will appoint the search task force, selecting one representative from each Area to serve. You should be able to have the Search Task Force in place well before the end of the year. An announcement at this time also provides the Board time to identify and select one who will serve as Interim Executive Minister. Dr. Woods will be able to provide more information on this matter. As a strong proponent of interim ministry, I believe it is essential that the Board give prayerful thought to this role, providing a clear job description and selecting someone with suitable background and experience for this task.

As I enter into retirement Connie and I plan to remain in Topeka. While we will be able to invest ourselves into our home church, we will be intentional about providing distance between ourselves and the work of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region. I will be available to answer questions and provide whatever assistance is necessary for healthy transition and ongoing ministry, but I will be especially careful to honor our code of ethics and *sever my ministerial relations with my former constituents.*

As I close, let me offer my deepest gratitude and thanks for the privilege of serving as Executive Minister of this great Region. I have always felt there were those better qualified and better suited to hold this position. But for reasons known only to God, I was Called and have been honored to stand in a long line of dedicated servants who have served in this role, not simply by personal choice, but by God's will. For what has gone undone, I apologize. For what good has been accomplished, I give God glory; and for the great things God is yet to do, let us all say "Amen. So let it be."

Humbled by God's Call and grateful for the opportunity to serve, I remain faithfully yours,



Rev. Dr. John S. Williams