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Letter of Introduction

“Congrats, Michael-Ray!” I received an alert from the professional social media platform LinkedIn just as Paula Clayton Dempsey reminded me that I was overdue in writing up this opening letter to the 2019 Book of Reports. It was a message from a cousin. I had to click on the alert in order see more details. LinkedIn was announcing that I was “celebrating one year at Alliance of Baptists.”

Initially, I was confused. I’ve been a part of the Alliance since 2002. Then I remembered that one year ago I proudly announced that I had been elected president of the board of directors of the Alliance of Baptists. So LinkedIn was doing what it was programmed to do: announce to a network of professional (and, in this case, familial) colleagues news that is obscure to most of the people in that network.

My cousin had no idea who the Alliance is. Neither did several others who offered their congratulations that week. Indeed, I’ve spent a good portion of this year telling the story of the Alliance to a community that has never heard of us. And I’ve done my best. Framing us as “a theological home for progressive Baptists in pursuit of God’s justice and partnership in mission” still begs for more context, dimension and story. I am humbled and blessed to serve this Alliance for such a time as this.

We live in a time when our identities, alliances, rhetoric and frames are all up for re-examination. What does it mean to be progressive or Baptist? What does God’s justice look like, and to whom? How do we define mission, let alone the quality of partnership? Denominations, faith networks and alliances are redefining their purposes and missions. The public square is ablaze with conflicting visions of justice, family, community and faith. And those who historically sought to bring good news to faraway lands are in need of good news from and for the whole globe.

I believe this is the right time for the Alliance of Baptists to be alive in the exploration and engagement of our mission to be a theological home and a global partner in pursuit of Beloved Community. In the past year our board, staff, congregations, members, communities and partners have engaged in a robust exploration of our shared mission.

We have developed a revised covenant which will be discerned by the Alliance membership over the next year. Our board has embodied its commitment to anti-racism and racial justice through anti-racism training, the convenening of a subcommittee which will lead our efforts to engage an audit of our organizational culture and systems, and our continued support of
resources and leadership that keep us on the prophetic edge of this critical work.

We held a first-of-its-kind gathering on sex, gender and sexuality last fall, deepening our capacity to hold space for critical conversations, spiritual formation and advocacy for all our kindred. And our members in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas (MALT) gathered to imagine the power of prophetic witness in the south and southwest. a theme which the CAIRN retreat will explore with James Forbes this fall. The thematic foci of our upcoming Annual Gatherings reflect our growing capacity to create space for theo-ethical reflection, collective action and liberative practice.

In these communal commitments and collective work we enflesh our vision to be theological home, seekers of God’s justice and partners in global mission. In these endeavors we find resources for an ongoing and unfolding journey towards Beloved Community together. In this work we are learning to discern on the road, to be accompanied by the One who warms our hearts with good news for the world. May we find new ways to enflesh the vision of the Alliance in our communities, partnerships and even on social media.

Blessings & Peace
Michael-Ray Mathews, president, Alliance of Baptists

Board of Directors
2018-2019

Jo Ann Alley, West Monroe, La.
Aaron Austin, Lexington, Ky.
John Ballenger, Baltimore, Md.
Kevin Brown, Minneapolis, Minn., UCC representative
Ben Curry, Sacramento, Calif.
Tammerie Day, Hillsborough, N.C.
Malu Fairley-Collins, Davidson, N.C.
Melinda Huff, Boerne, Texas
Ken Brooker Langston, Annapolis, Md., Christian Church (DOC) representative
Jessica Lynd, Washington, D.C.
Rob Marus, Washington, D.C.
Daniel Miles, Charlotte, N.C.
Tim Moore, Charlotte, N.C.
Terryn Nelson, Woodbridge, Va.
Tiffany Pittman, St. Louis, Mo.
Ben Sanders, St. Louis, Mo.
Doug Washington, Dallas, Texas
Covenant

In a time when historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions need a clear voice, and in our personal and corporate response to the call of God in Jesus Christ to be disciples and servants in the world, we commit ourselves to:

The freedom of the individual, led by God’s Spirit within the family of faith, to read and interpret the Scriptures, relying on the historical understanding by the church and on the best methods of modern biblical study;

The freedom of the local church under the authority of Jesus Christ to shape its own life and mission, call its own leadership, and ordain whom it perceives as gifted for ministry, male or female;

The larger body of Jesus Christ, expressed in various Christian traditions, and to a cooperation with believers everywhere in giving full expression to the Gospel;

The servant role of leadership within the church, following the model of our Servant Lord, and to full partnership of all of God's people in mission and ministry;

Theological education in congregations, colleges, and seminaries characterized by reverence for biblical authority and respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship;

The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the calling of God to all peoples to repentance and faith, reconciliation and hope, social and economic justice;

The principle of a free church in a free state and the opposition to any effort either by church or state to use the other for its own purposes.
Mission

To keep faith with the covenant the Alliance of Baptists body will:

● Make the worship of God primary in all our gatherings.
● Foster relationships within the Alliance and with other people of faith.
● Create places of refuge and renewal for those who are wounded or ignored by the church.
● Side with those who are poor.
● Pursue justice with and for those who are oppressed.
● Care for the earth.
● Work for peace.
● Honor wisdom and lifelong learning.
● Hold ourselves accountable for equity, collegiality, and diversity.

Agenda of the Annual Meeting
April 26-27, 2019

Friday, April 26, 3:45 - 5:15 p.m.

1. Call to Order - Michael-Ray Mathews, president
2. Adoption of Minutes of 2018 Annual Meeting - Allan Burton, secretary
4. Report of the Board of Directors Actions- Allan Burton
5. Report on the Audit - Doug Washington
6. Presentation of the Nominating Committee - Paul Hayes
7. Presentation of Proposed Statements
   a. Sex, Gender and Sexuality
   b. Children in Detention
8. Covenant Revisioning Team Report
9. Recess Annual Meeting until Saturday, April 27 at 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 27, 2:30 - 4:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order - Cathy Tamsberg, vice-president
2. Decision-Making Model - Cathy Tamsberg, vice-president
3. Discernment on Nominating Committee Report
4. Discernment/Action on Statements
   a. Sex, Gender and Sexuality
   b. Children in Detention
5. Call for New Business
6. Staff Report
   a. Recognition of Congregational Partners
   b. Recognition of Endorsed Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors
c. Heart of the Alliance Award
d. Recognition of Board members rotating off
7. Justice and Advocacy Update
8. Good News of the Alliance
9. Invitation to the 2020 Annual Gathering - Dan Freemyer, Aretha Flucker and Tim Moore
10. Adjourn

Alliance of Baptists
Annual Meeting Minutes
Friday, April 27, 2018, 2:00pm
Harmony Creek Church, Dayton, OH

Agenda
1. Call to Order – Mike Castle, President
2. Adoption of Minutes of 2017 Annual Meeting – Allan Burton, Secretary
3. Presentation of Nominating Committee Report – Ashlee Wiest Laird
4. Presentation of Statements and Clarifying Questions
   a. Earth Justice Statement – Betsy Sowers
   b. HP Free Churches – Leslie Withers
   c. Sexualized Violence – Jorene Swift
   d. Cultivating Peace, Proclaiming Hope for Korea – Carol Blythe
   e. Young Adult Statement on Welcome – Benjamin Smith
   f. Letter from Harmony Creek Youth – Alan Kobs
5. Covenant Re-visioning Team – World Cafe Conversation
   a. Join us for table conversations about the Alliance Covenant. As the Alliance begins a year-long process of reviewing our covenant, we want to hear your stories, your hopes, and your concerns about our historic and living covenant.
6. Recess Annual Meeting until Saturday, April 28 at 2:00-3:30pm

Minutes
1. Mike Castle called the meeting to order and welcomed the gathered.
2. Following the call to order, Mike called on Allan Burton, Secretary of the Board of Directors, to present the minutes from the previous Annual Meeting in April of 2017.
   a. Allan highlighted the Book of Reports in front of each attendee and extras were passed to each person who did not already have one.
   b. He then presented the April 2017 Minutes and asked for any questions or comments.
      i. Receiving none, he asked if there was anyone who would like to block consensus among the gathered.
ii. When no one signifying a desire to block consensus, he asked if there was anyone who would like to stand aside of consensus.

iii. When no one signified a desire to stand aside, he declared the minutes consensed and turned the meeting back over to Mike.

3. Mike then called on Ashlee Wiest Laird to present the slate of Directors and Officers for the coming year, prepared by the Nominating Committee.
   a. After Ashlee read their names and positions, including those being presented for endorsement, the individuals were asked to stand and be recognized.
   b. Members present were then asked to discern the slate’s approval through the recess from Friday’s to Saturday’s Annual Meeting session so that each would be ready to participate in the slate’s approval process by consensus at that time.

4. Mike then called on each person in charge of presenting a Statement to come to the front and be ready to speak as each statement was recognized. Each statement can be found in the Book of Reports referred to earlier.
   a. The “Earth Justice” statement was addressed first and Betsy Sowers was called upon to describe it.
      i. Betsy highlighted the laundry list of climate issues on page 1 of the statement. The length of the list, she indicated, demonstrates a thorough intersection with our lives. She also described how the statement calls for us to address these things theologically, with pastoral care, in the living our lives, through action, and by divesting/re-investing our invested funds.
   b. The “HP Free” statement was taken next, and Leslie Withers was called upon to describe it.
      i. The statement encouraged individuals and churches to cease from buying Hewlett Packard made equipment because the hardware and software they produce is being used by Israel in their illegal occupation of Palestine and their control of non-Jewish citizens and Palestinians.
   c. The “Sexualized Violence” statement was addressed next, and Jorene Taylor Swift was called upon to describe it.
      i. Jorene highlighted the process this statement went through to be addressed at this meeting.
         1. She was presented it as an option and was asked to write it.
         2. It passed through the Board of Directors
         3. It was presented to several women in leadership roles among the Alliance membership for feedback.
         4. All suggestions were then used in crafting the statement now before the membership.
ii. The statement covers what sexualized violence is and what churches can do such as calling for the church to establish policies and procedures that address sexualized violence.

d. The “Cultivate Peace, Proclaiming Hope for Korea” statement was addressed next, and Carol Blythe was called upon to describe it.
   i. Carol described how it was based on statements already in circulation by the World Council of Churches and the Korean Council of Churches.
   ii. Carol commended the statement to the gathered and encouraged its passing.

e. The “Young Adult Statement on Welcome” was taken next and Benjamin Smith, currently an Intern on the Alliance staff, described it.
   i. Ben invited one of the co-creators of the statement, Erica Saunders, to aid in the description.
   ii. Together, Erica and Ben described the statement as an expansion of the current statement on inclusion to include, more specifically, youth and young adults who are LGBTQ.
   iii. Erica commented on the process and theological considerations that went into the statement – to welcome youth and young adults into full covenantal fellowship with affirmation of their inclusion in full leadership.

f. The “Letter from Harmony Creek Youth” was addressed next, and Alan Kobs was called upon to describe it.
   i. Alan highlighted how the statement was the result of listening to the youth at Harmony Creek and the things, like violence in school, that were important to them.

5. Mike then called upon Tim Moore, the chair of the task force in charge of the Covenant Re-visioning Process to come forward and take the gathered through an exercise of receiving input on their task.
   a. Tim introduced the process that has already taken place within the Board and that will take place between now and the Annual Gathering in 2019.
   b. Tim introduced the committee members:
      i. Tim Moore, Chair
      ii. Sally Sarratt
      iii. Christina Garcia-Alfonso
      iv. Malu Fairley-Collins
      v. Andrew Gardner
      vi. Nancy Sehested
      vii. Ned Parker
   c. Tim then described how the Board had already discussed and decided by consensus the addition of new non-binary gender language to #2 and the addition of racial inclusion, specifically, to #7.
d. Next, Tim introduced Malu Fairley-Collins to describe the idea discovering process that would be used at this point during the Annual Meeting to invite ideas from all present today.
   i. Malu walked everyone through all of the details of the process.
   ii. She then described how she would give everyone information, as participation would be encouraged through the 3 rounds of conversations in a World Café Style.
   iii. The results will be complied by the recorders at each table and then by the committee as a whole.

6. The remainder of the meeting was spent in conversation around the tables dreaming about next steps for the document that has defined the Alliance as an organization and as partners in ministry together over the first 30 years of existence.
   a. “Real time” reports on the top ideas heard were provided at the end by individuals who were gatherers of the notes during the Café.
   b. At the end of the 3rd round, Tim stepped back to the microphone and provided the gathered with 5 opportunities to continue the discussion. Individuals can:
      i. Take a piece of paper, record further ideas, and leave it in a chair or on a table after any of the large group meetings still to come.
      ii. Email any ideas going forward to Tim Moore at ftimothymoore@me.com.
      iii. Read the Alliance newsletters and provide feedback as it is requested over the next several months.
      iv. Take a sticker (or more) and put it on one of the sheets of ideas to emphasize an idea you agree with.
      v. Attend the workshop during the Gathering.

7. The meeting was then recessed by Allan Burton, Secretary, to be re-called to order the following day at the continuation of the Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 28th at 2 p.m.

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Alliance of Baptists
Annual Meeting Minutes
Saturday, April 28, 2018, 2:00pm
Harmony Creek Church, Dayton, OH

Agenda
1. Call to Order – Mike Castle, president
2. Report of the Treasurer – Leslie Withers, treasurer
3. Report on the Audit – Lisa Davis Brownlee, vice-president
4. Report of the Board of Directors – Allan Burton, secretary
5. Decision-Making Model of Consensus – Leslie Withers, treasurer
6. Discernment Regarding the Statements Presented
a. Earth Justice Statement  
b. HP Free Churches  
c. Sexualized Violence  
d. Cultivating Peace, Proclaiming Hope for Korea  
e. Young Adult Statement on Welcome  
f. Letter from Harmony Creek Youth  
7. Discernment Regarding Nominating Committee Report  
8. Insurance Board – Timothy Harris, president and chief executive officer  
9. Recognition of Congregational Partners and New Churches – Jason Smith  
10. Introduction of New Business  
11. Invitation to the 2019 Annual Gathering – Brent Newberry  
12. Adjourn

Minutes

1. Mike called the meeting back from recess, re-introduced himself, and called on Sarah Macias as the co-chair of the Gathering to say a few words.  
   a. After several words of general thanks, Sarah thanked the caterers Andrew, Nick, Maya, and Marco, in specific, and the gathered responded in kind.  
2. Mike then introduced the Alliance Staff, highlighting Toya as the newest member, who was attending her 1st Annual Gathering.  
3. Mike then called on Tim Moore to give an update about the Covenant Re-visioning Process. Tim asked for continued feedback on the process, highlighting all the ways a person could choose to submit responses.  
4. Mike then called on Leslie Withers to make the Treasurer’s report. Leslie highlighted the following.  
   a. The Alliance is in the black, financially.  
   b. The organization has no mortgage and no utilities, as the virtual office operates across 5 states.  
   c. Leslie then thanked the Staff for being efficient, highly-skilled, and intentional.  
   d. She then described the Alliance process of supporting ministry partners instead of traditional missionaries by informing the gathered that approximately 20% of every undesignated dollar given goes to supporting these ministry partners.  
   e. In the Fall of 2016 there was a long and passionate debate about the budget because the organization needed to invest further, about $25,000, in our virtual home.  
   f. As a result of the commitment of its members, the Alliance set several records in congregational, individual, and foundation giving in 2017.  
   g. 2018 is also going well financially, so Leslie encouraged the gathered to keep up the good work.  
5. Leslie continued by giving the Audit Report for Lisa Davis-Brownlee, who had to leave the meeting early.  
6. Mike then called on Allan to report on the actions of the Board.
a. Allan highlighting pages 21 and 22 in the book of reports, and specifically #’s 10 and 11.
b. As a part of the report, Allan then presented the anti-racism and white privilege commitment of the Board and Staff. See attachment.

7. Mike then moved the discussion to the Statements. Each Statement had been presented online, in the first part of the Annual Meeting the previous day, and in a workshop during the Gathering.
   a. Earth Justice Statement
      i. Betsy Sowers reminded the gathered that the statement centers on the concerns and leadership of the indigenous community, communities of color, and impoverished communities.
      ii. With opportunities for discussion, the consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus or to stand aside.
   b. HP Free Churches Statement
      i. This statement would be binding on Alliance staff and a recommendation to the rest of the organization.
      ii. Laurie Sweigard raised the following concerns:
         1. The statement seems different than the others.
         2. There is no scriptural reference.
         3. There is no covenant reference.
         4. She described receiving by personal email a number of HP boycott possibilities and this statement seems just like those.
         5. The process for accepting this statement seems quick and unconnected.
      iii. Mike responded that the statement followed the organization process for statements, in the same manner as all the other statements.
      iv. Laurie replied that her main concern was that there was no faith connection to the statement.
      v. Several others responded or asked questions, both for and against the statement.
         1. It was pointed out that a spiritual connection has been contained in a previous and similar statement and, therefore it was not felt that a spiritual component was needed in this statement.
         2. Some felt that their concerns were not being heard accurately or taken as seriously as they were intended.
         3. Another pointed out that he felt that the statement was too narrowly construed and did not challenge the body to enough action.
         4. Mike tried to answer all questions and concerns.
      vi. Malu Fairley-Collins urged the gathered to consider the words they are using as well as the tone because these conversations on statements and actions of the
organization are too important to say anything that might offend someone.

vii. The consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus. However, several chose to stand aside. Their names are recorded below:

1. David Gooch
2. Nathan Powers
3. Susan Morris
4. Davis Smith
5. Emily Stewart
6. Randall Mixon
7. Laurie Swiegard
8. Richard Hinchman
9. Cherie Smith
10. Ann Charlescraft
11. Zach Bay

c. Statement on Sexualized Violence
   i. Mike reported that no questions had been received concerning this statement.
   ii. With opportunities for discussion, the consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus or to stand aside.

d. Statement on Cultivating Peace, Proclaiming Hope for Korea
   i. Carol Blythe reported that no questions had been received concerning this statement.
   ii. With opportunities for discussion, the consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus or to stand aside.

e. Young Adult Statement on Welcome
   i. Ben Smith reported that no questions had been received concerning this statement.
   ii. With opportunities for discussion, the consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus or to stand aside.

f. Letter from Harmony Creek Youth was presented by Alan Cobs who summarized the statement created by the youth of the host church.
   i. Leslie called on Alan to report anything else about the statement that he felt was significant.
      1. Alan asked for participants to share the letter with their churches and to continue to listen to God speaking through the youth around them and across Alliance churches.
      2. Adam Gray asked if the Alliance could provide a digital copy of the statement.
      3. Paula reminded the gathered that all of the statements could be accessed digitally on the Alliance website.

8. Discernment Regarding Nominating Committee Report
a. Mike asked for any questions or concerns to be voiced.
b. Nominees were requested to come to the front.
c. With opportunities for discussion, the consensus process ensued, resulting in consensus being received. No one chose to block consensus or to stand aside.

9. Heart of the Alliance award
   a. Description of the award was provided to the Alliance, including the highlighting of past recipients.
   b. This year, the Heart of the Alliance award is presented to a congregational partner, Baptist Church of the Covenant.
   c. The members of Baptist Church of the Covenant who were present were asked to come to the front to accept the award while Paula presented some prepared remarks and read the inscription on the award.
   d. The award was accepted by Valerie Burton, associate pastor for Christian formation.

10. Insurance Board – Timothy Harris, president and chief executive officer
   a. Mike introduced Timothy and asked him to say a few words.
   b. Timothy described the formula for inclusion in the program they offer.
      i. “We desire to be an extension of the ministry of any church that comes to us for help with their insurance.”
   c. Mike thanked Timothy for his hard work and partnership to the Alliance and our churches.

11. Recognition of congregational partners and new churches – Jason Smith
   a. Mike called on Jason to come and recognize some of the organizations who have been so supportive.
   b. Jason began by thanking those organizations who supported this Alliance Gathering specifically.
   c. He then recognized the 95 congregational partners by pointing out the list in the Annual Report.
      i. He further recognized 8 new congregational partners.
      ii. Jason then thanked the individuals donors of the Alliance, without who the ministry of the organization could not occur.

12. Mike then recognized several individuals to bring particular announcements to the gathered:
   a. Mike called on Paul Hayes to speak a word about the Global Baptist Peace Conference being planned for July of 2019.
      i. Paul described 2 conferences that are upcoming by pointing out the literature available on the tables in front of the gathered.
         1. A national conference – the 2018 summer Peace Camp of BPFNA, Bautistas pour la Paz
         2. An international conference – the Global Baptist Peace Conference in Cali, Colombia in July 2019
            a. Registration will begin in early Fall.
            b. Sponsorship opportunities are available for individuals and churches.
c. Questions for both conferences can be directed to the BPFNA website.

b. Mike called on Laura Mayo to say a word.
   i. Laura thanked everyone for the time and effort, prayers, and money sent to support their church, and others, in Houston.

c. Ken Meyers then stepped forward to highlight the opportunities for ministers to interact through the CARIN program.

d. Paula called everyone’s attention to the flyers on the tables concerning the “Poor People’s Campaign.”
   i. Paula reminded everyone of our connection to William Barber last year at the Annual Gathering and encouraged each person to support the PPC individually and to take the call back to each church. Feet on the ground is what is needed...action and effort!

e. Carol Blythe highlighted the Ecumenical Advocacy Days by telling a story about one of the advocates coming from the Philippines who was detained as he entered the US in California. Even though he had a visa, he was detained for 20 hours...was searched, denied entrance, and sent home.
   i. Carol further described her efforts on behalf of the Alliance as an advocate during this and other efforts.
   ii. She then encouraged everyone to vote for individuals who care about all individuals in this country, both the native born as well as the sojourner and refugee, and their well-being.

f. Finally, John Ballenger expressed deep gratitude for the individual and church support of the ministry partners of the Alliance.

13. Invitation to the 2019 Annual Gathering
   a. Having no other business, Mike turned the mic over to Sally Sarratt and Maria Swearingen who invited the gathered to attend the 2019 Alliance Gathering next year at their church, Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, DC.
      i. Several members of their church joined them at the podium.

14. In closing, Sarah Macias offered a few words about the schedule for the rest of the afternoon’s activities.

15. Adjourn
   a. Mike then adjourned the meeting with a blessing.

Respectfully submitted, Allan Burton, Alliance of Baptists’ Secretary

........................
Attachment

**Statement of Commitment to Racial Justice**

Systemic racism has been a part of the history of the United States of America and continues to exist. We, the Alliance Board of Directors and Staff, recognize that our organization was born out of white privilege and white supremacy. In addition to acknowledging our own racism, we must work toward its elimination systemically within the Alliance of Baptists – as individuals, and as an organization – to maintain our integrity and live into the values we hold dear as the Alliance.

We as a Board and Staff are committed to continuing this life-long journey of work and healing by creating a sub-committee of the Board to spearhead our continued work on white privilege and toward racial justice.

Therefore, we make the following commitments:

- To learn and share the work that has been done and is being done by the Alliance on white privilege and toward racial justice.

- To implement ongoing training for staff and board members on white privilege and dismantling racism.

- To evaluate and identify needed changes to the structure and operating practices, including budgeting, of the Board of Directors.

- To educate all Alliance partners (individuals, congregations, and ministry partners) in the need for working on white privilege and toward racial justice, and provide educational resources.

And we share the following hopes:

- For the Alliance to create and experience cultural change resulting in more diversity and equality in the breadth of all partnerships (chaplains, congregations, ministry partners, other organizations, etc.).

- For individuals in the Alliance to commit to recognize the impact of white privilege and white supremacy, to work toward racial justice, and to change behaviors and hearts.

**Report on Board Actions between the 2018 and 2019 Annual Gatherings**

Introduction:

Board members are volunteers. They are not staff or employees. However, because they are often engaged with a group that they feel passionately about, as it is with the Alliance of Baptists, they are often challenged to be more than they would be otherwise. Such as it is with your Board of Directors.
As a reminder of our general duties, each Board Member has been asked:

1. To be cheerful givers to the Alliance of Baptists,
2. To be ambassadors of the mission, ministry, and program of the Alliance,
3. To be a connector to needed resources,
4. To carry the fiduciary responsibility of the organization,
5. And to offer their energy, experience, and expertise in ways that fulfill their callings and the calling of the Alliance.

More specifically, since we last gathered, the Board has worked diligently on your behalf on the following things:

1. Supported the work of continuing to review and reform the Alliance Covenant into an active and vibrant document to carry us into and through the next segment of our organizational existence.
   a. The membership-wide committee, formed by the Executive Committee of Board just prior to the 2018 Gathering, has worked diligently over the past year to create a new Covenant and to curate the original one.
   b. The results are being discussed and celebrated at this 2019 Annual Gathering, considered over the next year, with final acceptance during the 2020 Annual Gathering.
2. Participated in further Dismantling Racism Training during the September 2018 Board Meeting at Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas, TX.
   a. The training was equal to or greater than one-third or the entire agenda.
   b. Working toward being increasingly anti-racist is now an active and ongoing process within the Board.
3. As a result of our commitment to ongoing Racial Reconciliation and Dismantling Racism work within the Alliance as a whole, created a Task Group of Board and general Alliance members to challenge the organization, to plan all work on this subject going forward, and to hold the Alliance accountable in the arena of Racial Justice.
4. Put the new directors, that you approved last April, to work on specific committees that match their abilities and experience
5. Followed the progression of the Staff, encouraging them, and supporting them where needed through the personnel processes in place
6. Monitored the finances – both expenses and income of the organization
7. Begun to plan future gatherings, enlisting Alliance members to bring them to fruition
8. Supported the continued development of CAIRN and the Just Sex Conference as vital resources for ever progressing churches and church leaders in this Alliance network
9. Supported and participated in the endorsement of new chaplains
10. Through the hard work of the Nominating Committee, are bringing to you, at this meeting, a new slate of directors to take the place of the
wonderfully talented folks who will be rotating off at the end of this Gathering.

Respectfully Submitted by Allan Burton, Secretary of the Board of the Alliance of Baptists. Any questions or concerns may be directed to Allan at allan@hopemanifest.org or in person at the 2019 Annual Gathering.

Alliance of Baptists’ Staff Report

Progress is born of seemingly insignificant actions
--the sum of the collective rather than heroics of a handful of individuals--
and it cannot be stopped.
-Asheville Citizen Times, Jan. 20, 2019

Our Collective Years of Service
Collectively, the staff of the Alliance have been tending and cultivating the landscape of the Alliance for approximately 40 years. Co-directors Carole Collins and Paula Clayton Dempsey began serving ten years ago. Operations specialist, Cathy McGaughey, joined the staff as part-time in 2012 and now serves in a full-time capacity. Jason Smith, Kenneth Meyers and Kristy Pullen all began representing and spreading the good news of the Alliance’s mission and ministry 5 years ago. In 2017 Toya Richards joined the team. And in December 2018 we accepted Ken Meyers resignation. The sum of our shared work and ministry has empowered and continues to empower a movement that is generative and strong.

Our Collective Work
The staff gives its energies to overseeing and tending the day-to-day operations of the Alliance in ways small and large. The significance of representing the Alliance with our ministry partners and congregational partners is tangible. During this past year the staff have spoken and/or visited in almost 50 of our congregational partners in 18 different states.

In the past year the staff has represented the Alliance among our international ministry partners in Kenya, Mexico, Cuba and the Republic of Georgia sharing with our partners’ grief for the pain in the world and joining them in mission and ministry to give birth to God’s dream for tomorrow. In the past year we also committed time joining hearts and hands with ecumenical, interfaith and advocacy partners, growing hope for a better tomorrow.

Executing the programs of the Alliance takes considerable amount of staff attention including Annual Gathering, CAIRN retreats, regional gatherings, special conferences, Summer Communities of Service, chaplain retreats, board meetings, committee meetings, trainings, etc. Creating and distributing
print and electronic news and materials, maintaining the website, maintaining the database, asking you to give, thanking you for giving, auditing our finances, sharing resources, responding to clergy and congregational needs—the staff executes an amazing amount of work from the various geographic locations we call home.

Our Efforts to Address Racism
The quote at the top is a paraphrase from the keynote address made this past January at a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration by Ernest Green, the first of the Little Rock Nine to graduate from Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. Over 60 years ago Green led the way for students who have followed in his footsteps seeking educational equality, and he spoke about doing so with actions that at the time seemed insignificant. As someone who asked “Why not?” when confronted with Jim Crow and unequal access, Green said, “Progress… is a result of small, mundane, everyday activity. Progress,” he said, “has to continue; there is no finish line.”

With the finish line far beyond our sight, the staff of the Alliance has been acting on a commitment made in 2015 to address systemic racism within the Alliance. As a staff we’ve been taking steps, meeting bi-weekly, doing our personal work and our work as a staff. Well aware that before we can challenge the Alliance or Alliance congregational partners to awaken to the reality of racism, we must first examine our own.

The staff approach this sacred work from a place of gratitude for:
— those in our congregations and membership who have sacrificed in the cause for racial equity and justice;
— the work to dismantle racism begun by our board in the early 2000’s;
— the Racial Justice and Multicultural Community in providing resources and leadership in the 2017 publication of Trouble the Water;
— the addition of Toya Richards to our staff, a person of color whose courage is extraordinary;
— the board of the Alliance in calling the entire organization to examine ways we can more fully embrace the breadth of community God is calling us to experience by dismantling systemic racism found in our organizational structure, programming and operations.

What we can report as a staff is progress—not so much the result of the heroic efforts or actions of any one individual. We can report the steady seemingly insignificant incremental work that over time becomes movement and momentum—that takes root and bears fruit. Thanks be to God!
Report of the Covenant Revisioning Team

Proposed Covenant and Mission

We are a people formed from a long tradition of dissent and historic Baptist freedoms. Celebrating this heritage, we seek to cultivate beloved community, claiming our identity within the body of Christ in the world. We welcome all persons with full respect to gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic identities. We value all voices and hold space for all persons with varying abilities, social standing, or economic status.

We lament and confess that historically many of us have benefited from and contributed to systems of racial, social, political, economic, and ecological injustice. As Baptists we have cherished independence from one another more than responsibility to one another, and we have allowed systemic injustices to flourish under the banner of individual freedom. We repent.

Transformed through baptismal waters, we freely gather to follow the way of Jesus. As disciples and congregations we openly respect and wrestle together with scripture, practice shared leadership, and promote religious liberty.

Guided by the Spirit, we commit ourselves to:

- Make the worship of God primary in our gatherings
- Cultivate relationships of mutual respect and accountability
- Establish spaces of refuge and renewal with those who are wounded
- Act to dismantle systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, and abusive power
- Listen to and follow voices that have been silenced
- Work to eradicate poverty in all its forms
- Hold the earth sacred and practice sustainability
- Support theological education for all ages
- Develop ecumenical and interfaith partnerships
- Pursue God’s peace and love
- Break down barriers that divide humanity
- Raise prophetic voices for liberation and justice

We seek to live in joy, humility, and gratitude, nurturing the realm of God.
Covenant Team Process Memo

Included in this report is a review of our process, our recommendation, and our reasoning behind the recommendation. This recommendation is a consensus decision by the group.

Our Process

We met monthly, via video conferencing, from March through our November, and weekly from November 19 through January 7 with a break for the holidays.

We reviewed the work the covenant board committee did last year under Daniel Miles’ leadership.

We held a “Table Conversations” session during the Annual Gathering, modifying the World Café model, with roughly 150 persons in attendance. This yielded 19 pages of typed comments in addition to the collective summaries produced at the event. We studied and analyzed this information individually and in groups.

We contacted Alliance of Baptists members, churches, partners, and chaplains through the communication emails used by the staff. We asked the same questions of the larger Alliance body that were asked in April during the Table Conversations. We received over a dozen written responses. Kristy Pullen did the legwork to get this out to Alliance folks, and we are indebted to her.

All former Alliance staff were contacted either by phone or email, which led to extended conversations with Stan Hastey, Jeannette Holt, and Leah Grundset Davis. Paula, on behalf of the group, had conversations with leaders of some of our international partners. Alliance founders, who participated at various levels in developing the first covenant, were contacted by email.

In preparation for our initial in-person meeting September 14-15, which was cancelled because Hurricane Florence, we created three different types of drafts to codify our thinking and feeling about the covenant. One was an “amended” version, which was closely linked to the current covenant. A second, more creative version, utilized the Alliance mission statement to design a new vision of our covenant together. A third option was not tethered to any previous document.

We held an in-person meeting at The Oratory, a Catholic retreat center, in Rock Hill, South Carolina on November 2nd & 3rd. We realized the most energy revolved around a fresh rendering of our covenant. We left Rock Hill with a workable draft and began refining it.
During our refining process in November and December, we shared our thinking with a few strategic persons for their feedback. Paula shared a draft with the Alliance staff during their fall retreat. We had a particular concern about a sentence on ecological justice, and I reached out to Sarah Macias, who leads the ecology community group. We asked three persons with editing skills – Toya Richards, Guy Sayles, and Relma Hargus – to review our draft-in-progress in regards to grammar, clarity, and brevity along with any content concerns. Each of these persons provided helpful feedback in regards to our general direction and with specific issues. Our recommendation is a collaborative creation.

Our Reasoning
The new document reimagines our Alliance covenant while combining the intent of the 1997 mission statement – hence, the name, “The Alliance of Baptists’ Covenant and Mission.” The statement has four movements and a closing sentence.

In our first few conversations each of us stated in one form or another that we only imagined amending the original covenant. By summer, however, a number in the group began expressing the idea that a new covenant should be as fresh and bold as the first covenant. We also began talking about the mission statement – which was the Alliance’s first step to update the covenant – and what was its relationship to the covenant. We also noticed there was a fair number of responses from the Table Conversations that addressed the mission statement; some which desired a clearer connection between the covenant and mission documents.

With various ideas about the shape of the covenant being discussed by the group, we decided to work on different formats so that we could see something on paper. Three small groups worked on creating different drafts of a covenant – an amended version, a version tethered to the mission statement, and an untethered version. The group liked the amended version for what it was. But it was only after we saw it and read it that we realized it felt like warmed over ideas from three decades ago. That did not feel true to the Alliance.

The overwhelming feeling of the group at that point was that we should work to create a fresh word that would aim to express relating to and through the Alliance for the next generation. The section below lays out our thinking in creating this covenant and mission.

1) The covenant and mission opens with a declarative statement of who we are and whom we welcome. By claiming our tradition of dissent, we are not only recognizing the genesis of the Alliance, but also affirming the origins
and history of Baptist life. We wanted to celebrate this history of dissent, because it is one of the Alliance’s strengths. When the Alliance resists empire, it is repeating an old Baptist practice. This practice of dissent, however, has often triggered separatism, and we wanted to pair this piece of our DNA to the Alliance’s desire to be connected within the body of Christ.

It felt natural to follow naming our desire to cultivate beloved community with sentences about whom we welcome. Often times people use the phrase “without respect” to certain identities when making inclusive statements. We concluded that it was better to be inclusive with “full respect to gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic identities,” because we want to honor the identities that make people who they are.

2) The second paragraph moves us from celebrating our heritage to lamenting the pain that heritage has caused. Keeping in mind the directive by the board to include racial justice in a new covenant and the board’s decision to seek to operate as a racial justice organization we felt it imperative to include a section of lament and confession in the new covenant.

In particular we talked long and in circles, into a maze and returning by breadcrumbs about the ways in which our Baptist independence and autonomy has particularly contributed to the injustices of our nation. Too often Baptists have used our respect for autonomy and freedom as a cowardly cover when we did not want to address injustice. At such times we gave sanctuary to the worst among us and left the marginalized alone to fend for themselves – all in the name of freedom. We felt that if we want to claim and celebrate Baptist history and freedoms, we must also repent from the ways it has cut off relationships to the detriment of those harmed by racism, sexism, and homophobia.

3) The third paragraph became known as our “Baptist” paragraph. Here, we tried to briefly speak of the core fixtures in the original covenant using ordinary language. We wanted to begin with baptism. First, this ties us to the beginnings of the Christian movement and not just to a European group four hundred years ago. Secondly, our call as followers of Jesus is rooted in baptism. Finally, the way we practice believer’s baptism is fundamental to our particular identity.

Repentance is a transformative act. We chose the preposition “through” instead of “by” because we did not want to insinuate that the waters do the transforming. Nevertheless, our tradition claims that somehow through baptismal waters – individuals can fill in the particulars – change occurs. This paragraph tries to name core ideals of what it means to practice this faith as Baptists, understood in an Alliance of Baptists way. Metaphorically, think of
this paragraph as the baptismal robe we wear through the waters of baptism on our way to following Jesus.

We freely gather as the Alliance of Baptists, and in all our other embodiments: congregations, ministries, and advocacy, ecumenical, and educational partners. In this section, we wanted to honor the following ideas in the original covenant: freedom of the individual to read and interpret Scripture, freedom of the local church, the servant role of leadership, and religious liberty along with historic Baptist ideas about congregational polity and priesthood of the believers.

4) Repentance is a movement from and a movement to. We repent from the actions we lamented and confessed in paragraph number two. We repent to the actions we name as commitments in the fourth paragraph and thus embody our announced transformation.

Our twelve commitments begin with guidance by the Spirit. Each commitment, therefore, begins through the guidance of the Spirit. Guided by the Spirit we commit to hold the earth sacred and practice sustainability. Guided by the Spirit we commit to listen to and follow voices that have been silenced.

Most of these commitments are either a reframing of lines from the 1997 mission statement along with a couple of ideas in the original covenant. The order was reworked a number of times till we settled on one we thought flowed well in capturing these diverse commitments.

The fourth and fifth commitments are new. We added the fourth in part due to the board’s mandate that we speak to racial justice, but also as continuation of our repentance paragraph (this would be the turning to part). The commitment to listen and follow silenced voices came partly out of our conversations about lifelong learning or spiritual formation. We ended up shifting our language about lifelong learning, which was in the mission statement, into a commitment to theological education, but wanted to keep this phrase. Part of justice work is learning from voices that have been silenced, and is much healthier than speaking up for them.

The other new commitments are the eleventh and twelfth ones. Along with the other new ones they speak to aspects of justice work. In a society that is increasingly polarized, we commit to breaking down barriers that divide. We specifically chose the words “raise prophetic voices” instead of the simpler “speak prophetically” because we wanted to get beyond ourselves. We commit to be a platform for prophets, whether they are among our group or beyond us.
5) We wanted to end the covenant and mission with a sentence that tries to get at being beloved community, which we mention in the opening paragraph. We seek to live in joy in order to celebrate the bounty of God even in the midst of the injustices of the world. We seek to live in humility in order to be more unassuming about our role in what God is doing in the world. We seek to live in gratitude in order to give thanks for what has been and to embrace what is to be. And our prayer is that in living this way we will be incarnationally nurturing the realm of God.

We were intentional in saying that we would be guided by the Spirit, follow in the way of Jesus, claim identity within the body of Christ and speak of the realm of God. We were also deliberate about centering the document in baptism (though we did test beginning the covenant in baptism). Finally, we wanted to use touchstone words such as justice, peace, liberation, joy, and love.

We believe the new covenant and mission reinforces the identity work in conjunction with our new logo. The covenant and mission speaks to being a welcoming theological home, our pursuit of justice, and our desire to be in partnership in mission.

Epilogue
This report concludes our work for the Board. We leave this recommendation in your hands. While we love the statement as is, we know it is the Alliance way to make any recommendation its own. So, we offer it not as an end in itself, but as the beginning of a process for the body to wrestle with.

As we mentioned in our September report to the Board, there may be wisdom in lengthening the process between announcing a new recommended covenant and taking a vote to approve it. Maybe the Annual Gathering in DC begins a public conversation about a proposed new covenant rather than ending it.

Finally, we did hear from several persons a concern for preserving the original covenant in some form in our official documents. Maybe we should rename it as the founding covenant of the Alliance. Maybe we preserve it as a historical document in our by-laws. We will leave that to the Board, but we did want to mention it.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve the Alliance in this small way.

Grace and peace to you.

Covenant Revisioning Team:
Tim Moore, chairperson, Charlotte, N.C.
Proposed Statements

Statement on Sex, Gender and Sexuality

We, the Alliance of Baptists, have been on a journey of deepening acceptance, understanding and accommodation regarding sex, gender and sexuality.¹ Our congregations and members have long been involved in generating movement toward affirmation and justice for people of all sexual and gender identities. We assert that we are a sex-positive people and view sex, gender and sexuality as life-giving, life-fulfilling graces that are central to our humanity, offering an intimate glimpse into God’s image and a means by which the Sacred is experienced in our midst. We expressly reject the “Nashville Statement”² on sexuality that was adopted by some evangelical religious leaders in August of 2017 and declare it to be immoral, irresponsible and a gross distortion of the Gospel of Jesus. We are steadfast in our commitment to the highest values of our faith and all enduring faith traditions: love, justice, healing, liberation, reconciliation and peace.

We value all bodies as intrinsically good and made in God’s image. We resist any theological or rhetorical framework that would identify human bodies as inherently depraved and sinful. We embrace without fear or shame the complexity and diversity by which humans made in God’s image experience sex, gender and sexuality, and we embrace the multiple ways we express sexual lives marked by love, justice, mutual consent and pleasure. We acknowledge that sexual and gender diversity defy binary categories and are intrinsically a part of the divine beauty and wonder of creation. We affirm diverse and vibrant relationships of integrity and commitment as well as strong families in which all members are respected, secure, enjoy adequate material and emotional support, and are honored as persons created in God’s image. We affirm our experience that people in multiple kinds of loving relationships can live faithful and responsible lives as sexual persons. We acknowledge that people of all gender identities and all sexual orientations have sacred worth and dignity.

We lament that religion, instead of being an agent of transformation, has too frequently been the source of so much pain and wounding, and that so many
people of faith refuse to hear the cries and sufferings of sexual and gender minorities.\textsuperscript{3} We grieve the misuses of power that take God’s gift of sexual intimacy and distort it into experiences of abuse, brokenness, violence, and oppression. Heeding God’s call to justice and advocacy for those harmed and hated, especially when the harm and hatred has come in the name of God, we confront and denounce the suffering, injustice, or violence caused by sexual prejudice and ignorance that:

- Diminishes the worth and equity of women in church, in families, and in society;
- Devalues the Sacred worth of all people regardless of their sexuality and gender;
- Neglects the full inclusion of transgender and gender-non-binary persons;
- Refuses to accept the full inclusion of intersex persons and all people regardless of biological or developmental differences;
- Denies full access to comprehensive sexual healthcare, prevention, and treatment for sexually transmitted illnesses;
- Stands in the way of complete access to voluntary contraception, abortion and prophylactics;
- Creates double standards or ethics for different people groups based on their sex, or their sexual or gender identity;
- Targets sex, sexuality or gender for violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of any kind;

We commit to respond to this suffering, injustice, and violence by being:

- Spiritual guides who say “no” to the way of fear and “yes” to the way of love;
- Healers who promote life and health where there is sexual woundedness and trauma;
- Educators who promote lifelong, age-appropriate sexuality education in faith communities, schools, seminaries and the wider community;
- Prophets who challenge sexual injustice and oppression wherever it is found; and
- Leaders who seek to put an end to the harm and violence done to sexual and gender minorities in the name of God.

We appeal to faith communities everywhere to address matters of sex, gender and sexuality with compassion, truth-telling, openness and courage. We call for Christian sexual ethics that are guided by a theological astuteness that integrates:

- The witness of the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus;
- The lived wisdom of those who have been excluded or silenced because of their sexual and gender identities;
- And insightful scholarship about sex, gender, and sexuality derived from the fields of medicine, social science, the arts and humanities.

We commit to work toward a world where all people are free to celebrate their sex, gender and sexuality in faith communities that are rooted in the
liberating love and justice of God and in societies that value and practice freedom and justice for all.

Submitted by: Michael D. Castle, Centerville, Ohio
Shawn Warner-Garcia, Goleta, Calif.
Jennifer Wilder, Baltimore, Md.
Micah Bucey, New York, N. Y.
Malu Fairley-Collins, Davidson, N.C.
Rob Marus, Washington, D.C.

For almost three decades the Alliance of Baptists journey toward acceptance and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities has been shaped by:

a. The work of the Alliance Task Force on Human Sexuality appointed in 1992 by the courageous leadership of President Ann Quattlebaum of Greenville, SC and chaired by Priscilla Asbury of Monroe, LA. The Task Force presented its “Report of the Task Force on Human Sexuality: A Document for Dialogue and Study” to the Alliance Board of Directors in 1994, who received it “with profound gratitude” and committed to “engage in an ongoing discussion of the issues raised in the report” and called its action “an occasion for recommitting ourselves to a fellowship and ministry of inclusion.” In 1995, “The Report” was “received with gratitude” by the Alliance membership, meeting in Annual Gathering in Vienna, Virginia.

b. The co-development of Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth with the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America as a resource to assist clergy and lay leaders in leading a healthy and respectful congregational dialogue around issues of sexual orientation. (Edited by LeDayne McLeese Polaski & Millard Eiland, 2000; Second Edition edited by Cody J. Sanders, 2013)

c. The Statement on Same Sex Marriage which was affirmed by the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering meeting in Dayton, Ohio in 2004. (https://allianceofbaptists.org/assets/uploads/congregations/SameSexMarriage2004.pdf)

d. Joining with the United Church of Christ in suing the state of North Carolina (2014) for violating the principle of religious freedom in regards to its law regarding marriage. The lawsuit was made moot in 2015 when the Supreme Court of the United States of America made marriage equality the law of the land.

e. A significant Arcus Foundation grant that seeded the resources needed to conduct two retreats in 2015 for lay leaders and clergy from Baptist congregations in the south with the aim to help them discern how best to enter into dialogue with their congregations on matters of sexual orientation and gender identity.

an intersectionality framework for making the connection between work on LGBTQ justice, racial justice and justice for other embodiments of human difference, and was funded as part of the Arcus Foundation grant mentioned in footnote “e” above.

g. At the request of President Mike Castle, the Board of Directors participated in an intensive training on sex, gender and sexuality in the fall of 2015 led by Rev. Dr. William Stayton, an ordained Baptist minister, a licensed counselor, and a certified sexologist. In response to this training, the board of directors set in motion the JUSTSEX conference, held in Nashville, Tenn. on October 18-20, 2018, in order to foster honest, open, faithful, conversations about sex, gender and sexuality. In addition, JUSTSEX was also designed to spark those conversations across the country and beyond in families, faith communities and any groups who are willing to engage this subject by making the videos of the conference and a discussion guide available to any individual or group free of charge by making them available at allianceofbaptists.org.

2 The Nashville Statement is an evangelical Christian statement of faith relating to human sexuality and gender roles promoted by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in Nashville, Tenn., which expresses support for marriage between one man and one woman as the only appropriate context for sexual behavior, for chastity outside marriage, and that opposes LGBT sexuality and equality.

3 “Sexual and gender minorities” is used to refer to people who identify as other than heterosexual or cisgender, including but not necessarily limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual.

NOTE: We give thanks for the Religious Institute’s Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, (2000; Updated 2015) as well as their Statement on the Divine Gift of Sexual and Gender Diversity (2017) which has served as inspiration and guide to this statement. We commend the work of the Religious Institute (religiousinstitute.org) to your attention and as a helpful ministry resource.

Children in Detention

The Justice in Palestine and Israel (JPI) Community proposes that the Alliance join with other U.S. religious communities1 and support the rights of Palestinian children and children at the U.S.-Mexico border. As background for this proposal, our Community points to the following:

- Numerous human rights reports, including Human Rights Watch and UNICEF, have documented the prevalence of torture and ill treatment of Palestinian children2. In addition, the U.S. State department’s annual

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reports have consistently found the prevalence of this ill treatment, torture and the denial of fair trials in the Israeli military detention system.

- UNICEF reported in 2013 that the "ill treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic, and institutionalized throughout the process." The JPI Community also notes that Palestinian children are separated from their families. A recent report found that in 2018, 54 Palestinian children were killed, and 900 were detained.

- The Alliance of Baptists has spoken out against the atrocious US policy of separating children from their families at the US border. This immoral practice has led to hundreds of children and youth being torn from their families. The recent Inspector General Report of HHS establishes that this immoral practice started in 2017, well before it came to light in the summer of 2018. That report also establishes that a large number of children remain separated from their families and are still in U.S. detention.

- The JPI Community notes many similarities between families and children on our southern border and families and children in Palestine.
  
  - Families in Central America form and participate in Migrant Caravans; families and children in Palestine form and participate in the Great March of Return. In both cases, US- policies have caused great hardship and impacted the peoples, including children. Families in both Central America and in Palestine have joined movements of nonviolent protest. In one place, the movement of people is to flee great hardship in their native land while in another place, the movement of people is to reclaim native land from occupation.
  
  - At the U.S. border, children are asked to sign documents in English, which is not their native language and in Palestine and Israel, children are asked to sign documents in Hebrew, which is not their native language.

In response, the Alliance of Baptists:

1) Calls on our individual members and Alliance of Baptist congregations to learn about the plight of children in Palestine-Israel and the plight of children at the US-Mexico border;

2) Calls on the United States Senate to join with 194 other nations in ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular

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Articles 37 and 40 of the Convention governing the treatment of children held in detention:

3) Calls on the State of Israel and the U.S. government to guarantee basic due process rights and absolutely prohibit the separation of detained children from their parents and legal counselors;

4) Encourages continued partnership with ecumenical, interfaith and other non-governmental partners that advocate for the rights of children and those that provide educational, social, and psychological support for the children and families adversely affected by the occupation in Israel and adversely affected by the humanitarian crisis at the US-Mexico border;

5) Encourages members and Alliance churches to advocate for federal legislation that will ensure that U.S. foreign assistance funds do not support the military detention, interrogation, abuse, ill-treatment of children in Palestine or their separation from their families, and the U.S. domestic funds do not support the detention, interrogation, abuse, ill-treatment of children at the US-Mexico border or their separation from their families.

Board Committee Reports

Finance Committee

As I reflect back on the year 2018 in the life of the Alliance, the word that comes to mind is faithfulness. In the midst of financial uncertainty caused, in part, by the Tax Reform bill, the faithfulness of individuals, congregations, and even foundations that believe in and are committed to the work of God in the world through the Alliance is remarkable. We struggled at times to bring in the level of support needed to continue all that we have committed to do, yet we have persevered and remained faithful to our call. We had a budgeted shortfall of <$8639> for the year and ended with an actual shortfall of <$8968.> Due to the good fiscal management of staff and the Board, the Alliance, however, still ended the year in a stable financial position. An important part of the fiscal health of the organization is the diversification of sources of revenue. In 2018 we had a 71% increase of funding from Foundations.

We are grateful for the faithful support and contributions from each individual and congregation and foundation. We are also grateful for the faithful work of

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7 https://www.unicef.org/crc/
https://www.aclu.org/blog/human-rights/treaty-ratification/theres-only-one-country-hasnt-ratified-convention-childrens
each of our ministry partners who proclaim the Good News in real and tangible ways. And we are grateful for the faithfulness of God who sustains each of us every day.

Finance Committee: Nancy Flippin, Treasurer; Jo Anne Alley, Jim Dant, Tim Moore, Carole Collins, staff

### Alliance of Baptists

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### EXPENSES

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* includes $17,467 temporarily restricted during 2018 to be spent in 2019

### Mission and Ministry Partnerships Committee

The Mission and Ministry Partnerships Committee’s task is to oversee the partnership mission priorities, the allocation of partnership mission funds and
provide vision and guidance for establishing and nurturing ministry and mission partnerships.

In the fall of 2018, after reviewing renewal forms and partnership requests, the committee recommended to the board the following list of 36 funded ministry partners for 2019 along with percentage allocations.

**Mutual Partners**

- African Baptist Churches in Zimbabwe
- Aliança de Batistas do Brasil
- Baptist Seminary of Mexico
- Fraternidad de Iglesías Bautistas de Cuba
- Peace Cathedral, Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia
- Seminario Intercultural Mayanese
- Zimbabwe Theological Seminary

**Ecumenical and Advocacy Partners**

- Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
- BPFNA
- Churches for Middle East Peace
- Church World Service
- Creation Justice Ministries
- Equity for Women in the Church
- Latin American Working Group
- National Farmworker Ministry
- National Council of Churches
- 2019 Global Baptist Peace Conference

**Ministry Service Partners**

- AMOS Health and Hope, Nicaragua
- Bright Stars of Bethlehem, Palestine
- Calvary Latino Ministry, Washington, D.C.
- Crossing Lines, Uganda
- Emmaus House, Raleigh, N.C.
- Hope Center at Pullen, Raleigh, N.C.
- Interfaith Chaplaincy, Al Akawayn University, Morocco
- Jitokese Wamama Wafrika, Kenya
- JourneyPartners, Franklinton, N.C.
- Just Bakery, Atlanta, Ga.
- Oakhurst Recovery Program, Decatur, Ga.
- QC Family Tree, Charlotte, N.C.
- Rauschenbush Metro Ministries, New York City
- Samaritan Neighborhood Center, Oakland, Ca.
- Seeds of Hope Publishers, Waco, Texas
- Shalom Children's Center, Ghana
Shekinah, El Salvador
Stewart Center, Atlanta, Ga.
Strive, Chicago, Ill.

The committee also allocated undesignated funds to support the partnership ministry of Stan Dotson and Kim Christman volunteering and ministering among the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba. A portion of their time and energy in Cuba is dedicated to facilitating and accompanying U.S. groups on partnership pilgrimages, as well as nurturing the 30 year long partnership between the Fraternity and the Alliance.

The total amount received and disbursed to ministry partners in 2018 was $97,056. The sources of these funds included designated gifts from congregations and individuals for mission and ministry partners, undesignated gifts from congregational partners a percentage of which is committed to ministry partners, as well as foundations.

Because of the generosity of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, an additional grant was given to the First Baptist Church of Bultrins, Pernambuco, Brazil for the Orquestra de Câmara do Alto da Mina. This chamber orchestra creates hope for 50 young people and their families who reside in the slums outside of Recifé, Brazil, as they learn discipline, music and faith. We celebrate this orchestra, its director, Israel de Franca, and the sponsoring church that is a part of the Aliança de Batistas do Brasil.

The Mission and Ministry Partnerships Committee holds responsibility for reviewing and recommending programmatic partnerships with institutions and ministries which align with the Alliance’s covenant and mission. The Alliance is made stronger by our program partners whose mission and witness intersects and overlaps our calling to embrace God’s loving justice. Our sharing of resources, collaborative efforts and programs makes our collective witness stronger. We are blessed to join hearts and hands with these organizations. For a full list of partnerships—those funded and those supported with energy—see allianceofbaptists.org/partners.

The Alliance model of partnership in ministry works to build lasting relationships that offer the world hope while working for justice. With profound gratitude for the privilege and the responsibility of sharing with our partners in both grief at the pain in the world and in effective ministry, our partnerships make a difference and bring God’s dream for tomorrow here and now and around the world.

Submitted by:
John Ballenger, chair
Terryn Nelson
Rob Marus
Elijah Zehyoue
Kevin Brown, UCC representative
Ken Booker Langston, Christian Church/DOC representative
Paula Clayton Dempsey, staff liaison

Endorsement Committee

The endorsement council in conjunction with the endorsement board committee have endorsed one chaplain educator and five chaplains since we met in Dayton one year ago. We are excited to present these folks to you. Please take a moment to welcome them to Alliance endorsement if you see them during this Annual Gathering.

The newest Alliance of Baptists endorsees are:

Lisa Jeffcoat, Concord, NC
Lisa Jeffcoat is the Assistant Director for Spiritual Care and Education at Carolinas HealthCare System NorthEast, where she manages the Clinical Pastoral Education program. She is a Certified Educator with the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education and a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains. She brings particular passions for music that can ground the spirit, creativity that makes life vibrant, and laughter that connects.

Chris Mason, Mansfield, OH
Rev. Chris Mason is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains serving at the OhioHealth Mansfield Hospital as Staff Chaplain assigned to Palliative Care and the Intensive Care Units. He is finishing up a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling from the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary where his focus was on the subject of spiritual identity based resiliency. Chris also speaks on the topics related to spiritual identity and resiliency at conferences, workshops, and lectures in various forums. In addition to being an active member and endorsed by the Alliance of Baptist, he is also a practitioner of Zen Buddhism. Chris is married to Trudy and they have one adult daughter, Hannah, a dog, and a cat.

Jared Neal, Avondale Estates, GA
Jared Neal lives in Avondale Estates, Georgia, with his spouse and 10 year old son. He is a graduate of the McAfee School of Theology and has served as a healthcare chaplain in various settings from hospice, hospitals, and long-term care facilities since 2008. Currently, Jared works as the chaplain on the inpatient palliative care team for Kaiser Permanente in Atlanta, where he just celebrated his fifth work anniversary in March.
Rachel Revelle, Denver, CO
Rev. Rachel Revelle is a staff chaplain at the University of Colorado Hospital. She completed CPE Residency at University of Colorado Hospital, as well as a second year CPE Palliative Care Fellowship. Current duties include clinical coverage of the bone marrow transplant unit, teaching and writing for the Masters of Science in Palliative Care program, and cultivating resilience among hospital staff. A native of North Carolina, she received a Master of Divinity from Wake Forest University School of Divinity and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Duke University. She was ordained in 2016 by Alliance partner congregation Knollwood Baptist Church, and is currently active at Calvary Baptist Church in Denver. Rachel lives in Denver with her soon-to-be husband, and enjoys reading, reflective writing, traveling, exploring the Rockies through hiking and skiing, and spending time with family.

Joanna Sowards, Waco, TX
Joanna recently began serving as staff chaplain for the Women’s and Children’s and Oncology units at Baylor Scott & White Medical Center - Hillcrest in Waco, TX. She is hopeful she will be board certified with the Association of Professional Chaplains this summer. Following her graduation from Truett Seminary at Baylor in 2015, Joanna completed two years of residency at Children’s Medical Center in Dallas. She served as a hospice chaplain prior to arriving at her current assignment. When not working, Joanna loves coffee dates with her husband, Spencer, spending time outside with their dog, Remy, reading, and running.

Jaclyn Williams, Pearland, TX
Jaclyn is currently serving as a solo chaplain at Memorial Hermann Pearland Hospital in Pearland, TX, a growing community just south of downtown Houston. She is also a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham (UK), as a distance learning student. Her thesis topic is “The Christian Preacher as Artist: An Embodied Approach to Homiletics.” Having graduated in 2012 from Fuller Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity, she was ordained in the fall of 2012 at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, TX. Jaclyn also performs as an actor, director, and playwright, having completed a BA in Theatre from the University of Houston, as well as an MFA in Acting from the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington. As adjunct faculty, teaching homiletics, she also serves at the Houston campus of Fuller Theological Seminary. She feels fortunate and blessed to be a part of the Alliance community.

Submitted by:
Benjamin Curry, Chair, Endorsement Board Committee
Malu Fairley-Collins
Daniel Miles
Endorsement Council members:
Benjamin Curry
Russell Davis
Liz Harris-Lamkin
Robert Renix
Peggy Sanderford Ponder
Teresa Sanders

Development Committee

2018 was another year of growth in key areas of the Alliance’s fundraising and development plans. We particularly excelled at growing our individual and foundation giving in 2018, and will continue to develop these areas to make the Alliance more sustainable and vibrant in supporting our movement and partnerships rooted on justice and peace around the world.

Special Projects

1. In the fall of 2018, Jason, Paula, and Allen met with a group of major donors and developed plans and strategies for creating a legacy giving program, expanding our relationship with key foundations, and approaching select donors about increasing their support for the Alliance. Parts of these plans have begun and will continue through 2019.

2. For the month of November, we launched the #AoBGivesThanks Campaign as a build up to “Giving Tuesday,” November 27. While our giving on “Giving Tuesday” was lower than previous years, we did see an increase in donations for the month of November, 2018 compared to previous years. We will continue to incorporate “Giving Tuesday” into our plans for reaching individual donors and are constantly trying to shift our strategy to keep donors’ attention and interest at the end of the year.

3. During Advent 2018, we conducted the “Light a Candle” campaign through a physical “give” letter and weekly “give” emails. The physical mailing was an experiment to see if a letter campaign would be attractive to donors at the end of the year—the campaign was beautiful but it did not seem to impact December donations. We will move back to the annual December “Advent card” in the future but continue being creative in reaching donors at all times of the year.

4. The Alliance had a strong fourth quarter in 2018. The December email campaign with the theme “Light A Candle,” was distributed to our combined email list. In 2018 we raised $223,529 during the fourth quarter ($213,205 in 2017, and $205,034 in 2016).
5. In February, 2019, we sent a physical mailing to approximately 770 donors from 2016 to the present.

6. During the spring, we sent a letter to DC congregations requesting sponsors for the Annual Gathering. So far, three congregations have offered special gifts of sponsorship totaling $750.

7. The 2018 Annual Report (beautifully designed and executed by Michael Jefferson and Toya Richards) displays some remarkable numbers displaying growth and energy within the Alliance of Baptists. Here are some of the figures from last year.
   - $263,972 raised from 463 individual partners/households ($256,594 from 545 in 2017, $232,701 from 519 in 2016).
   - $293,785 raised from 101 congregational partners ($313,133 raised from 95 in 2017, $273,313 from 99 in 2016).
   - $105,500 in foundation support from the The Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and The Richard D. Huff Foundation.

8. At the Annual Gathering, we will launch a special development campaign to focus on the theme of liberation. Here’s the following challenge we will make to participants at AG:

   **Flames of Liberation**
   At the 2019 Annual Gathering, the Alliance is considering the ways in which each of us is a point of liberation in the world, molding and shaping ourselves, our churches, and our institutions into channels for the Spirit of Liberation. To keep the flame of liberation burning brightly with our financial resources, find Jason Smith and make a special gift. You will receive an Alliance “flame” sticker to be added to your nametag and on a public display to show your support of the Alliance of Baptists and our struggle toward Liberation. Any gift gets a flame and lights a spark for our movement! Our goal is to have a majority of AG registrants make a special gift at any level toward the campaign—make a gift today!

9. We are hosting a special “Annual Gathering DC Celebration” dinner for individuals who have donated significant amount of time, financial resources, and energy to the Alliance on April 27, 2019 at Riverside Baptist Church on the waterfront. We hope this will be a fabulous evening for celebrating our individual partners!

   **Jason Smith Partner/Potential Partner Visits (May 2018-April 2019)**
   Forest Park Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va. (July, 2018)
   University Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Va. (July, 2018)
   Church for the Highlands, Shreveport La. (August, 2018)
   New Millennium Church, Little Rock Ark. (August, 2018)
   University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Miss. (September, 2018)
   Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas (September, 2018)
Communications Committee

The following report of the communications committee of the Alliance board of directors is based largely on the work of Alliance staff, and specifically the web and communications specialists. Their work, supported by the committee, flows across all aspects of Alliance life and is done in tandem with the other staff. Highlights since the board last met in fall 2018 include:

- The creation in October of a brochure to promote the Alliance’s endorsement efforts.
- Work to support the October JUSTSEX conference via the website, electronic promotions, coordination of video and photography vendors, on-site support and post-conference work on resources.
- The promotions rollout in October of the book Believe the Women, written by Leah Grundset Davis and supported by the Alliance. Efforts include the creation of a Facebook event page and a page on the Alliance website.
- The creation in October/November of a banner and Alliance-themed giveaway items (pens, candles, matches) for Alliance promotions and presentations.
- The completion of a 31-day social media and web-based “Give Thanks” campaign in November, in conjunction with development staff.
- The creation in November of a promo video for the 2019 Annual Gathering.
- A November visit to Pullen Memorial Baptist Church for Alliance Sunday.
- Participation in the December staff retreat, which included focused anti-racism training in support of the board’s commitment to the Alliance becoming an anti-racist organization.
- The creation of a Christmas/New Year printed piece in December that was sent to Alliance members and friends.
- Attendance at the January “Gathering First Fruits” development conference.
- A January presentation at Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala.
- Attendance at the February Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference.
- Updates in March to the Alliance Active Hope brochure.
● Production in March of the Alliance annual report, in conjunction with development.

● Continuous support to the April 2019 Annual Gathering planning committee, including researching and securing our first-ever event app.

● Ongoing support of the second CAIRN clergy retreat, specifically prior to it being rescheduled, and of planned Our Whole Lives trainings.

● Ongoing production and the enhanced quality of connections, our bi-weekly e-newsletter.

● Ongoing production of prayers with the people, our monthly electronic communication of concerns and joys throughout the Alliance.

● Ongoing posting to and maintenance of the Alliance’s social media platforms.

● Ongoing updates to the Alliance’s website, including the posting of resources onto Alliance Connect and open positions on our Ministry Opportunities page, as well as archiving connections and prayers with the people.

● Ongoing work with our technology vendor to improve the functionality of our website.

**Personnel Committee**

Personnel Committee (Personnel) members: Melinda Huff, Nancy Flippin, and Jess Lynd. Committee members and the Chair serve for one year; and this term is renewable.

During 2018-19, Personnel welcomed the opportunity to work with Paula Dempsey and Carole Collins on behalf of the entire Board to:

- support the Board with personnel related tasks, questions and concerns
- conduct a survey among the staff in order to assess preferred benefits and personnel strategies
- assess health care benefit options and begin conducting a living, just wage analysis
- prepare the staff salary portion of the 2018 Alliance budget

Thanks to everyone who worked on these tasks with us. The Alliance is fortunate to not only have outstanding professional staff, but also a staff and Board who are creative and unafraid to try new arrangements and try-on new solutions.

We are happy to share that the Alliance will begin providing funding for each employee to help with the costs of health insurance and other related expenses in 2019. Each employee is receiving a benefit which is available as a reimbursement for health insurance premiums, co-pays and other out of pocket expenses, and the reimbursements for qualified expenses are tax free.

We hope that the future personnel committee can carry on the work of Board in seeking to dismantle racism in the world and in our own organization; if
necessary, in our personnel policies as well. We also hope to conduct a full assessment and set guidelines for compensation packages in a revised personnel manual.

Finally, please note our sincere thanks to the incredibly dedicated Alliance staff. Well done, team.

Submitted by:
Jess Lynd
Nancy Flippin
Melinda Huff

**Endowment Committee**

During 2018 the Creation Justice Community requested and the board approved that all of the endowment money be moved from the Moderate Balanced Fund to the Beyond Fossil Fuels Balanced Fund. Both of these funds are with UCFunds where we have had our endowment money invested for a few years. The total of the endowment fund is approximately $65,000. The move to the Beyond Fossil Fuels Balanced funds was to divest funds from fossil fuels investments.

Submitted by:
Doug Washington, Chair
Mike Castle
JoAnn Alley

**Nominating Committee Report**

The following individuals are recommended for service on the Alliance of Baptists Board of Directors and Endorsement Council:

To a three-year term on the board
- Ashley Ash, Oakland, Calif. (L)
- Melanie Nogalski, Waco, Texas (L)
- Brent Newberry, Worcester, Mass. (C)
- Robert Renix, Capital Heights, Md. (C)
- John Rohde, Nashville Tenn. (L)

To a second three-year term on the board
- Tiffany Pittman, St. Louis, Mo. (C)

To a two-year term on the Endorsement Council
- Teresa Sanders, Mustang, Ok. (C)
• Russell Davis, Richmond, Va. (C)

Respectfully submitted,
Russell Davis, Richmond, Va.
David Gooch, Nashville, Tenn.
Stephanie Hamilton, Richmond, Va.
Paul C. Hayes, Groton, Conn., chairperson
Claire Helton, Monroe, La.
Judith Myers, Columbia, S.C.
Paula Clayton Dempsey, staff liaison

Biographical notes on those being nominated:

Ashley Ash was born and raised in Oakland, Calif., and has been a member of Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church (LABC) since birth. At LABC, she’s on the audit and hospitality committees. Throughout the year, she volunteers with the LABC hunger task force. She attended Hampton University in Virginia and received a B.A. in advertising with a minor in marketing. She has worked in retail managing stores and is a tax preparer at her father’s CPA firm. Presently, she is a graduate student earning a double masters in business administration in marketing and leadership management. She’s a proud member of the Tohono O’odham Nation of Sells, Arizona. She enjoys volunteering at the American Cancer Society of Oakland, playing intramural soccer, and spending time with friends and family.

Russell Davis is an Alliance of Baptists endorsed CPE Educator at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va. Russell has already served one term on the endorsement council and is being nominated for a second term.

Melanie Nogalski received her Bachelor of Arts in English and Religion from Western Kentucky University followed by her M.Div. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and then a D. Min. in Christian Spirituality from Columbia Theological Seminary. Her areas of interest include Christian spirituality and spiritual formation, vocation, church history, and Biblical studies. She is an avid reader and loves Harry Potter. Her husband teaches in the religion department and she has two daughters (one graduated with BIC) and a dog named Denver. Melanie wrote and administered the Lilly Grant at Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, N.C. She is a member of congregational partner Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco Texas.

Brent Newberry has been serving as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Worcester, Mass., since 2015. He earned his M.Div. from Baylor’s Truett Seminary in 2013, after which he completed a two-year pastoral residency at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. He was also ordained into ministry by Wilshire in 2014. Brent is originally from Mississippi and Florida, with time also spent in Kansas, Missouri, and Texas. He aspires to be a ramen connoisseur,
and he enjoys writing, reading, preaching, cooking, palling around with his dog Zooey, and binge-watching Queer Eye. Enneagram 4w3. ENFP. He is also serving as co-chair of the 2019 Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering planning committee.

**Tiffany Pittman** is the pastor of Good Shepherd UCC, St. Charles and Emmanuel UCC, Weldon Springs in the St. Louis area. She has served as the Director of Admissions at Eden Theological Seminary. A native of Texas, Tiffany earned her undergraduate degree from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio. She received her M.Div. from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, VA, where she also served as Director of Admissions and Recruitment. Tiffany is nominated for a second three-year term on the board.

**Robert Renix** serves as chaplain and certified educator at Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. He has standing with the UCC and has been endorsed by the Alliance of Baptists since August, 2011, where he currently serves on the endorsement council. He holds a B.A in psychology from the University of Memphis, a M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary, and is pursuing a D.Min in educational leadership at Virginia Theological Seminary. As a commissioned officer in the United States Army he served in the Persian Gulf War and was awarded a Bronze Star Medal for his wartime service. Robert is passionate about education and helping others discover and uncover their own divinity lived out through their humanity.

**John Rohde** is a lay person and member of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. He is an M.D. and Medical Director of the Emergency Department of Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He is married and has four children ages ranging from 19 to 9 months. He grew up in Guyana where his parents were missionaries with the former FMB of the SBC, now the IMB. He currently serves as director of the Dr. Carmen Gannon Guyana Healthcare Development Project, which supports a collaboration of Vanderbilt University, Georgetown Public Hospital, and the University of Guyana in the creation of the GPHC’s Masters Degree Program in Emergency Medicine, among other health systems development projects in that country.

**Teresa Sanders** is an Alliance of Baptists endorsed chaplain living in Mustang, OK. Teresa is retired from the Federal Prison System and has served on the Endorsement Council for the last 5 years. She first completed a term and now is willing to serve for a second term.
Peace & Justice Advocacy Report

The Alliance of Baptists (AoB) makes a difference at the federal level of our nation. The AoB advocates on issues on which the membership has adopted statements or on issues lifted up in our Covenant and Mission Statement.

**Letters and Statements** -- The AoB participates in the Washington Interfaith Staff Community (WISC), a coalition of dozens of religious groups. The AoB signs onto letters to Congress or public statements organized by the WISC coalition, WISC working groups focused on particular issues or by our advocacy partners. The AoB is also represented in Hill meetings including several recent Congressional meetings on Cuba which were organized by the Cuba Working Group of WISC. These actions are all part of our effort to change U.S. policy to love God's beloved children, cherish God's creation and to make a better world.

The letters and statements the AoB signed-onto were proposed by a wide variety of groups whose values we share. The groups work on issues around immigration/refugees/asylum seekers, environment, anti-racism, nuclear disarmament, military spending, worker justice and a host of other matters. Here are a few examples of some of the letters or statements we in the AoB supported this year:

- **The Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition** – AoB signed on to a number of letters this year as the ICJC worked on issues of mass incarceration and fair sentencing.

- **The Faith Forum and Churches for Middle East Peace** – AoB signed on to public statements that challenged the current administration's policies organized by these two coalitions that advocate for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine.

- **Interfaith Worker Justice Coalition** organized a letter to Congress calling for protection for workers from unjust company policies requiring arbitration regardless of the legal violation of the company.

- The AoB signed on to a statement in support of democracy, human rights and the environment in Brazil, shared through the Latin America Working Group.

- **The Cuba Working Group of WISC** organized a letter to the Administration on concerning changes in Cuba policy taken by the current Administration.

- Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey signed on to an Open Letter to Wendy's urging Wendy's to join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program which was organized by the National Farm Worker Ministry.

- The AoB signed on to a number of letters organized by Church World Service and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition on issues related to
immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, separation of children from their families and, most recently, an Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope.

**Ecumenical Advocacy Days** (EAD) – The AoB is a partner of Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice. EAD is a movement of the ecumenical Christian community grounded in biblical witness and our shared traditions of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Once a year, in a conference in the spring, through worship, theological reflection and opportunities for learning and witness, people attending EAD learn how to lift their faith-filled voice and advocate on a variety of U.S. domestic and international policy issues.

The theme of EAD in 2019 was Troubling the Water for the Healing of the World. The “ask” which the attendees used in lobbying Congress on Monday, April 8, 2019 was:

> We urge Congress to strengthen the voices of all Americans in our democracy, and the voices of human rights defenders around the world by working to eliminate violent conflict and all threats to civic engagement and human dignity.

**Good news! We are winning!** The House of Representatives passed the bill to strengthen democracy, protect voting rights and more. Please join our ecumenical partners & advocacy partners and contact your Senators and advocate against suppression of voting rights, for lifting barriers to voting and ending infiltration of big money in campaign finance. **We can and must force the Senate to take action!**

In addition, advocate for Congress to act to reduce violent conflict and strengthen respect for human rights and protection of human rights defenders abroad by supporting both the Global Fragility Act and S. Res. 80 creating a Human Rights Commission in the Senate.

Learn more on the EAD website at: [https://advocacydays.org/](https://advocacydays.org/)

**Our goals in 2019-2020**

1. Find better ways to share advocacy information with AoB congregations and members and generate counter-hegemonic waves of resistance throughout the AoB congregations and members.

2. Encourage AoB to attend EAD 2020. Please come and join the resistance!

3. Encourage AoB members to run for office and use the power of the elected position to work for global peace with justice. Please come and be the resistance.

4. Continue to sign-on to letters and statements provided by WISC and our advocacy partners that address issues about which the AoB has adopted a
statement and/or lifted up as our passion and commitment in our Covenant and Mission Statement.

In closing, the AoB is making a difference at the national federal level, both on domestic and international matters. Along with our allies, the AoB is constantly advocating for a kind of society and world commensurate with AoB mission and values!

**List of Advocacy Statements, Letters and Endorsements by the Alliance of Baptists - Fall Board Meeting 2018 to Spring Annual Meeting 2019**

October 17, 2018 – Signed on to the Joint Civil Society Statement on Drones which was delivered to UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security. Organized by Article 36.org.

October 2018 – Agreed to support the Texas Coalition for Human Rights (TXCHR) campaign for Texas textbook accuracy. The TSCHR is a broad coalition representing organizations who believe that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a human rights issue that requires an open and free debate. TXCHR objects to efforts to forestall this debate by placing limits on free speech and academic freedom.

October 2018 – Agreed to endorse the Restoring Justice for Workers Act (H.R. 7109) which was a response to the Supreme Courts Epic Systems decision, which held that arbitration clauses in employment contracts are enforceable regardless of that person's position or the legal violation of the company. Many employees are not even aware that they have signed away their right to sue in court for violations the company has made.

October 2018 – Signed on to a faith letter pushing back on the administration's continuous and dangerous rollback of environmental safeguards organized by the Washington Interfaith Staffing Community (WISC) Energy and Ecology working group.

October 2018 – Signed on to a faith letter to the U.N. General Assembly First Committee about nuclear weapons and disarmament organized by Soka Gakkai International-USA, Washington DC Buddhist Center shared with the Alliance through WISC.

October 2018 – Signed on to a letter in support of keeping the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) to Secretary Mattis and Asst. Secretary Owen West, organized by Church of the Brethren. The PKSOI is based at the U.S Army War College in Carlisle, PA, and develops doctrine, training, and research that addresses important concerns like protection of civilians, foreign humanitarian assistance, and stability operations.

October 2018 – Signed on to a letter organized by the Interfaith Immigration Coalition affirming the dignity of the sojourner and declaring welcome for vulnerable families and individuals seeking protection. The letter noted it is a
human right to seek asylum and stated that asylum seekers, families and children should never be separated or locked up.

October 30, 2018 – Signed on to a letter to Members of the House of Representatives which was shared with the Alliance of Baptists through Faiths United Against Gun Violence. The letter encourages members to co-sponsor the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2018 (H.R. 6545) organized by the Interfaith Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence.

November 14, 2018 – Paula Dempsey for the Alliance of Baptists signed on to a “faith leader letter’ that discussed current U.S. Policy, Israel/Palestine and challenged the current administration’s sweeping and coordinated set of policies designed to punish Palestinians and take away their human rights, dignity, and hope and a called people of all faiths to stand up in support of human rights for both Palestinians and Israelis, including the right to self-determination. The letter urged the current administration to restore humanitarian funding to Palestinians through bilateral assistance and UNRWA, and to pursue engagement in honest, credible, and serious efforts with Palestinians, Israelis, regional parties, and the international community, to seek a just resolution to the conflict. The letter was organized by the Faith Forum.

November 15, 2018 – Signed on to a letter to Congress organized by WISC sharing five urgent priorities to address: 1) Reduce funding and reject any increases in immigrant detention, enforcement personnel and border walls and fencing; 2) Pass a final farm bill with a nutrition title; 3) Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act; 4) Ensure any criminal justice legislation includes real sentencing reform; and 5) Support robust funding for life-saving humanitarian, peace-building and poverty-focused international programs.

November 2018 – Paula Clayton Dempsey signed on to an Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope organized by National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service.

December 4, 2018 – Signed onto a letter to U.S. Senate with conditional support for the revised First Step Act (S.3649), organized by the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition.

December 2018- Signed on to a statement in support of democracy, human rights and the environment in Brazil. Organized by Center for Economic and Policy Research and shared with the Alliance of Baptists through the Latin America Working Group.

January 10, 2019 – Signed onto a letter to the Administration on changes in Cuba policy organized by the Cuba Working Group of WISC.

January 2019 – Signed on to a statement opposing “Project Blitz,” an effort by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation to enshrine Christian nationalism in state laws. The letter was organized by Americans United For Separation of
Church and State and shared with Alliance of Baptists by National Council of Churches of Christ.

February 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Senator Charles Grassley, chair Senate Finance Committee and Senator Richard Neal, chair House Ways and Means Committee, urging protection of the Johnson amendment. The letter was organized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

February 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Congress urging co-sponsorship of bipartisan legislation, the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act, that would reform the 1033 program which enables the Department of Defense to transfer surplus military equipment to federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement. The letter was organized by WISC.

February 1, 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Representative Rashida Tlaib organized by the Faith Forum supporting her Congressional delegation trip to Israel and the West Bank.

February 5, 2019 – Paula Clayton Dempsey signed on to a letter to U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives Leadership, and members of the Department of Homeland Security appropriations conference committee from faith leaders urging Congress to avert another shutdown and implement responsible spending practices for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) before February 15.

February 5, 2019 – Signed on to a letter organized by NETWORK, a Catholic-Social Justice lobby, calling on Congress to secure back pay for employees of federal contractors who were unpaid during the recent government shutdown.

February 13, 2019 – Signed on to a letter on refugee policy organized by Church World Service.

February 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Congress organized by the Coalition on Human Needs in support of the “Raise the Wage Act of 2019.”

February 2019 – Signed on to a Statement organized by Church World Service on the Morality of a Border Wall.

February 2019 – Paula Clayton Dempsey signed on to an Open Letter to Wendy’s from National Faith Leaders, organized by the National Farm Worker Ministry, urging Wendy’s to join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ Fair Food Program.

February 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Health & Human Services (HHS) Secretary Azar challenging the decision by HHS to exempt federally funded foster care and adoption agencies in South Carolina from the religious nondiscrimination protections provided under 45 CFT §75.300(c). The exemption uses the concept of religious freedom as a justification for tax-payer funded religious discrimination.
March 2019 – Signed on to a letter to Members of Congress organized by Value our Families Coalition and shared with the Alliance of Baptists by Church World Service and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition. The letter encourages Congress to preserve and protect the family-based immigration system and calls on Congress to pass the Reuniting Families Act.

List of Advocacy Statements and Letters the Alliance of Baptists signed onto - Spring Meeting 2018 to Fall Board Meeting 2018

May 2018 – AoB signed onto a statement “70 Years On: Seeking A Hopeful Future in a Time of Yearning” reflecting on the 70th anniversary of the founding of Israel and the Nakba Day for Palestinians. The statement was organized by the Faith Forum. Leslie Withers is the AoB representative to the Faith Forum. The statement says, in part, “We will continue to raise our voices in the halls of our government to change our government’s policies and to end injustices so that there is freedom, justice, equality, and security for both Palestinians and Israelis. We will remain steadfast in calling for an end to violent acts by individuals, groups, and states. We will reinforce our leadership in support of solutions that consider the peace and well-being of all peoples.”

May 2018 – AoB signed on to a letter to the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies asking for funding for federal innocence and forensic science programs in FY 19 budget. Organized by the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition.

May 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter to Senator Charles Grassley, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thanking him for his leadership in advancing the Second Chance Reauthorization Act. Organized by the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition.

May 2018 – AoB signed onto an “International Sanctuary Declaration” statement which sets out basic principles of sanctuary necessary to respond to the global escalation of displacement which will be presented petition to the UN to be included in its deliberations on refugee settlement at the 74th Session convening of the General Assembly in September 2018. Organized by a group of faith-based organizations in the United States, Germany and Canada, shared with AoB by Susan Smith, Muslim Peace Fellowship & Community of Living Traditions at Stoney Point, NY.

June 2018 – AoB signed on to a letter Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, Department of Homeland Security, respectfully urging her to extend TPS (Temporary Protected Status) for Yemini people in the US. Shared with AoB through Church World Service and Interfaith Immigration Coalition -- organized by Catholic Legal Immigration Network.

June 2018 – AoB signed on to a letter to Members of Congress encouraging them to reject any “Round 2” tax cuts which would benefit wealthy Americans. The letter was organized by Coalition on Human Needs and Americans for Tax Fairness.
June 2018 – AoB signed onto a statement regarding Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s use of the Bible as justification for forcibly separating families seeking asylum at our border. The letter begins, “Let us be clear: the Administration’s border enforcement tactics are inhumane and unnecessary. And it is an affront to religious faith that Administration officials are using the Bible to rationalize and validate these immoral actions. As it was in the eras of slavery and legal segregation, this perverse misuse of sacred scripture once again appears to be designed specifically to single out people of color.” Organized by the Washington Interfaith Staffing Community (WISC).

June 12, 2018 – AoB is on a letter sent in June on Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. The letter was sent to Sen. Mitch McConnell and Sen. Charles Schumer as leadership in the Senate. The letter was also sent to all senators. AoB Exec. Committee had agreed to this letter last February, but it was sent in June following Judiciary Committee passage of the legislation and states the organizations’ support for this legislation coming to a Senate floor vote. Organized by the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition.

June 26, 2017 – AoB signed on to a letter to Members of the House Judiciary Committee opposing HR 2851, the Stop Importation and Trafficking of Synthetic Analogues Act of 2017 which would greatly expand the penalties for drug offenses, add mandatory minimum sentences to the federal code, and give the Attorney General unchecked power to schedule drugs and set criminal penalties. Organized by Drug Policy Alliance and shared with us through the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition.

July 9, 2018 – AoB signed onto a Joint non-governmental organization Letter to the House-Senate Conference Committee on the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act encouraging the conference committee to include language adopted in the House of Representatives that enables targeted sanctions on Burmese military officials implicated in gross human rights abuses and other atrocities against ethnic minorities in Burma, especially those Burmese military officials implicated in gross human rights abuses and other atrocities against the Rohingya and other communities. Organized by American Jewish World Service. Story about the letter.

July 16, 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter (by virtue of an Executive Committee decision earlier in 2018) to Mr. Pete Sessions, Chair and Mr. James McGovern, Ranking Member on the House Committee on Appropriations supporting amendments that would strike language in the House 2019 Financial Service and General Government Appropriations bill that would make it impossible for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to enforce a long-standing federal law, sometimes referred to as the Johnson Amendment, insofar as it applies to houses of worship (the Johnson Amendment insures that houses of worship do not endorse or oppose candidates). Organized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

July 19, 2018 – AoB signed on to a faith letter (signed by 500 faith leaders and 11 faith communities) urging Congress to reject family incarceration and family
July 26, 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter to opposing the Aderholt Amendment to the House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill for FY 2019 because it would harm children in the child welfare system and authorize taxpayer-funded discrimination. The amendment would allow taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to discriminate against prospective parents on the basis of religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Organized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

September, 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter to Farm Bill Conferees urging them to protect and strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and consider ways to improve SNAP benefits adequacy.

September, 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter to Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State, encouraging him to keep the State Department’s Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA) and Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) separate as they serve separate but complementary entities. The letter was organized by Washington Interfaith Staff Community.

September, 2018 – AoB signed onto a letter to President Trump asking him to restore U.S. funding for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Cuts to UNRWA funds would affect the education of over 515,000 children and threaten millions who rely on the UNRWA 43 health centers, 15 community rehabilitation centers, and 19 women's program centers. The letter also encouraged restoration of funds to U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to support humanitarian projects through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Catholic Relief Services, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, and CARE which provide supplemental food, health care, youth programs and vocational training for Palestinians. The letter was organized by Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP).

Submitted by: Carol Blythe

JUSTSEX
honest. faithful. conversation.
set in motion by the Alliance of Baptists

The first ever JUSTSEX conference, set in motion by the Alliance of Baptists, took place Oct. 18-20, 2018 at the Scarritt Bennett Center, Nashville, Tenn. Fifty Attendees participated in worship, learned from professionals, engaged in honest conversation, and took part in breakout sessions that explored:

- How our understanding of sexuality has changed over time;
- How cultures, institutions and faith traditions approach sexuality – both in the past and in our current moment;
● Guiding principles for developing a contemporary sexual ethic; and
● How people of faith reclaim sex as a gift from God and support healthy sexuality in our communities.

The speakers for the event included Kelly Brown Douglas, William Stayton, Marvin Ellison. Overwhelmingly, those present were interested in encouraging congregations and faith communities to engage in more conversation about human sexuality.

The conference was sponsored by both the Carpenter and the Huff Foundations. Because of their generosity, resources and videos of the presentations at the conference are available to interested individuals and faith communities.

The Carpenter Foundation has granted additional funds to the Alliance which will enable the Alliance to provide training in the future to use the Our Whole Lives sexuality education curriculum. Plans will be announced soon.

Conference planning team members were:
Mike Castle, chair, Centerville, Ohio
Shawn Warner-Garcia, Goleta, Calif.
Micah Bucey, New York, N.Y.
Jennifer Wilder, Baltimore, Md.

Clergy Affiliate Information & Resource Network (CAIRN)
Leadership Group

CAIRN is a network of Alliance-affiliated clergy who believe that together, in a Spirit-led community, we have everything we need to become and remain healthy, resilient, and prophetic leaders.

Workshops at the Alliance Annual Gatherings
During the 2018 Annual Gathering in Dayton, Ohio, CAIRN sponsored two sessions of a workshop on “Becoming a Teaching Congregation.” This workshop was designed to help clergy and lay leaders think about ways to nurture a teaching model, through various ways, in their congregations and ministry settings. Mike Gregg and Eric Cain were the presenters/facilitators.

Planning & Development
The leadership group has worked with the Alliance staff to make sure CAIRN has sustainable funding and support. In addition to Alliance-budgeted funds for CAIRN, the leadership group, staff, and other volunteers, have worked to identify (and apply for) grant funding opportunities, as well as gifts from individuals and organizations. This work will continue into the year ahead--and beyond.
CAIRN Clergy Retreat
The second annual CAIRN Clergy Retreat will be held September 8-11, 2019, at the Roslyn Retreat Center in Richmond, Virginia (https://www.roslyncenter.org). For more information on the retreat, and to register, visit https://allianceofbaptists.org/calendar/event/cairn-retreat. We look forward to welcoming Alliance clergy, ministry leaders, and friends to this gathering.

Other Programs & Initiatives
The CAIRN leadership team is continuing to identify partnerships, programs, and resources for the benefit of Alliance clergy. As more information is available, it will be shared with CAIRN members and the Alliance. The leadership group welcomes ideas and feedback, as well as volunteers!

CAIRN Leadership Group Members
Eric Cain, Greenville, S.C., chair
Beth Jackson-Jordan, Decatur, Ga.
Jon Singletary, Waco, Texas
Mimi Walker, Atlanta, Ga.
Christine Wiley, Washington, D.C.
Paula Dempsey, Alliance Staff Liaison

Summer Communities of Service
Summer Communities of Service (SCOS) 2018 was a great success in nurturing vocation in young adults and in providing helpful service to Alliance and UCC ministry partners. The summer looked as follows:

- 12 college and graduate students from around the country
- 11 weeks of service
- 5 Sites: Metro Baptist (NYC), Church of the Living Hope (NYC), Ellis Avenue Church (Chicago), QC Family Tree (Charlotte), UCC Camping Ministries (Minnesota).
- Students trained and prepared for their summer terms at Metro Baptist.
- Students debriefed and reflected at a Lutheran camp near Minneapolis.
- Jennifer Helms Jarrell and Greg Jarrell of QC Family Tree served as coordinators for the program.
- Funds from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation provided stipends for the student participants.
- The 2019 program has filled most positions, though we are still accepting applications for a few slots. Locations include regular
Equity for Women in the Church Community

Equity for Women in the Church continues to move forward to facilitate equal representation of clergywomen as pastors of multicultural churches in order to transform church and society. Birthed as a community in the Alliance of Baptists, Equity is an ecumenical, intercultural movement.

In October, 2018, Equity held a second conference in collaboration with Memphis Theological Seminary, highlighting our “Calling in the Key of She” project, created and organized by board member Rev. Andrea Clark Chambers. Funding for this conference and another scheduled for the fall of 2019 came from our collaboration with MTS on a Lilly grant. Equity has expanded collaboration with seminaries to include Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest. Equity partnered with Austin Presbyterian and Seminary of the Southwest on a “Calling in the Key of She” ecowomanist conference, April 5-6, 2019.

Equity co-chairs, Rev. Sheila Sholes-Ross and Rev. Jann Aldredge-Clanton, continue to seek funding for Equity’s other projects: “The Church Pastors Initiative,” created by board member Rev. Christine Smith to enlist pastors to prepare congregations to consider women pastoral candidates, and “The Lydia Project” to provide financial support to clergywomen who create new and renewed multicultural, welcoming and affirming Christian communities who practice inclusivity in language, gender, and race.

We are delighted with the diversity of our Board of Directors, recently adding Rev. Dr. Irie Session, Rev. Dr. Alfie Wines, and Rev. Dr. Abraham Smith. We are grateful for all the support from the Alliance of Baptists.

Submitted by: Jann Aldredge-Clanton
Community for Justice in Palestine and Israel

The Community for Justice in Palestine and Israel works to strengthen the work that Alliance member churches and individuals are doing to bring justice and peace to the Holy Land. We support Palestinians’ struggles for self-determination and equal rights and oppose United States aid to Israel which is used to suppress Palestinians’ basic rights, including the right to self-determination. Responding to the Kairos statement drawn up by Palestinian Christians, we participate in the world-wide movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions as a nonviolent means to compel Israel to recognize Palestinians’ rights.

The Alliance is a member of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), a diverse representation of US Christians--including most of the mainline denominations, Catholic, Evangelical, and Orthodox traditions. Together, we organize visits to Palestine and Israel, sponsor lobbying days on Capitol Hill, and sign on to various statements to government officials.

Members of the Palestine/Israel Community stay in touch regularly through email and with lunches together at Alliance gatherings. If you would like to be on our email list, please contact Mark Reeve: mark@ML1945.com.

The Alliance and the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba

Kim and I have had a full year of learning and growing in our work with the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba. We are blessed to be able to see the wide spectrum of work across the island as we visit and worship with various communities: in the past year we were in 13 of the FIBAC churches, including a moving celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Kairos Baptist Church in Bayamo, on the far eastern end of Cuba. This community is now re-kindling its partnership with the Williamsburg Baptist Church in Virginia. We also were blessed to accompany and help host 10 different church groups who came to explore or deepen their partnerships.

We also spend a good deal of time working on Cuba’s prison chaplaincy training program. While it is officially part of the Cuban Council of Churches and not the Fraternity, many of the Fraternity members are in leadership of the chaplaincy training and accreditation program. Francisco “Paco” Rodés, one of the FIBAC founders, is the head of this program, and his leadership team includes several FIBAC members. This past year we participated in three of the training events in different regions of the island. Also, Nancy Hastings Sehested came and led the first ever national all-women’s retreat for prison
chaplains. The chaplaincy program is now expanding to include hospital settings, and this will provide a great opportunity for Alliance-connected chaplains to engage with Cuba. They would love to have people help them collect Spanish-language curriculum materials, and to help design a CPE-like program that would fit within the Cuban context, which is an all-volunteer, part-time program.

Another highlight of the year was FIBAC’s annual Assembly in February, in which they celebrated their 30th anniversary as a denomination and 30 years of partnership with the Alliance. It was held in the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Marianaño, where FIBAC was founded, and among the key presenters and worship leaders were Stan Hastey and Paula Dempsey, as well as FIBAC founders Raúl Suárez and Paco Rodés. The Martin Luther King Memorial Center in Marianaño has committed to publishing a booklet of all the presentations at the Assembly.

Two things have made it both an interesting and challenging time to be in Cuba over the past year. First, the challenge: Many in Cuba are beginning to speak of a second “Special Period,” with growing concern over scarcities of basic needs. There was a flour crisis in the fall, and we went several months with no bread. Other shortages include cooking oil, eggs, chicken and pork (for lack of feed), and laundry detergent. The first Special Period came as the Soviet Union fell; this one is due to a convergence of global politics that includes Venezuela’s internal crisis, Brazil’s cutting ties to Cuba after its turn to the extreme right, and the tightening of the US economic blockade. All this means that one of the important pieces of partnership development will be to educate our congregations on the situation and be engaged in advocacy work to end the blockade.

That is what made it a challenging year. What made it an interesting year was the country’s four-month-long public debate over a proposed new constitution, which they voted on in February. It passed overwhelmingly, with 87% voting sí. It is an incredibly progressive document, as far as human rights protections are concerned. There was concern over its passage, as its provision for making marriage equality a possibility stirred up great resistance among the fundamentalist churches. For the first time in the Revolution’s history, there were public manifestations of protest organized by churches. As there is no public polling data in Cuba, no one knew how widespread the resistance to LGBTQ protections really was, but as it turns out, it was minimal.

In the middle of all this public debate, our home-base church, First Baptist of Matanzas, underwent a six-month long process of reviewing and revising its identity and mission statement. I helped facilitate the process, and we made use of the resources from the Alliance and the Baptist Peace Fellowship to create conversations around issues of inclusion and identity. The dialogues
proved quite useful, and led to the adoption of one of the first welcoming and affirming statements of any mainline church in Cuba (with the exception of the newly formed MCC church in Matanzas).

First Baptist Matanzas, along with other churches who are beginning to dialogue around LGBTQ inclusion, can credit the Alliance and its resources that have come from many years of work around the issue. As we always place a premium on mutuality of sharing, the Alliance churches can look to the Fraternity for wisdom and resources as they work on racial justice and white privilege issues, as well as issues of economic justice and communitarian ethics.

Submitted by Stan Dotson

Brazil Partnership Community

For Brazil the past year has been another one of upheaval and we find our friends in the Aliança de Batistas do Brasil (Alliance of Baptists of Brazil) learning to resist in new ways and continuing their powerful work in applying the gospel. The people of Brazil elected Jair Balsonaro president in an election resembling the last U.S. presidential election. On a recent visit to meet his new friend in the White House, Balsonaro announced that his country will no longer require a visa of U.S. citizens visiting Brazil.

The Aliança met for its general assembly in Porto Calvo in Alagoas state. The assembly completely filled the church in Porto Calvo and spilled out onto the street under a large tent with video and audio feed from inside the church. The closing of the street for the Friday evening session no doubt elevated the church’s recognition in the town. Moving speakers and dramatic presentations highlighted the worship at the meeting. Concluding his term as president, Joel Zefferino, pastor of Nazareth Baptist Church in Salvador, Bahia state, presided over the election of his successor, Paulo César Pereira, who also serves as pastor of First Baptist Church, Bultrins, Olinda, Pernambuca state near Recifé.

The executive committee of the Aliança has recently taken a bold step to strengthen the organization’s work by hiring a part-time executive secretary, Flavio Conrado of Brasilia. (He joins us at this Annual Gathering.)

We continue to seek U.S. churches interested in partnering with congregations in Brazil. Current church partnership updates:

- Cullowhee Baptist Church in Cullowhee, N.C., became an answer to prayer when they gave $10,000 from a bequest to their church to build
a church for the Alegria Baptist Church in Maceio, Alagoas. Construction is underway.

- Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., continues to support their church partner Pinheiro Baptist Church in Maceio, which was expelled from the Brazilian Baptist Convention. The church is located in a part of Maceio which experienced earth tremors in January which damaged streets and buildings in the neighborhood and could become a threat to the church itself.

- Northside Baptist Church in Clinton, Miss., also continues its partnership with the First Baptist Church in Bultrins, Olinda, Pernambuco.

The Eula Mae & John Baugh Foundation of Texas renewed its support for the Youth Orchestra of Alta de Mina, a program of the First Baptist Church of Bultrins which offers involvement in a program of music to nurturing discipline, commitment and confidence in a favela (Brazilian slum) which is marked by poverty, unemployment, drug use, and violence.

Please join us in prayers of solidarity with our partners in the Aliança.

Submitted by: David Gooch, volunteer coordinator, Brazil Partnership Community
Upcoming Events

**CAIRN Retreat**
This is the second clergy retreat for the Alliance’s Clergy Affiliate Information & Resource Network (CAIRN). Join us for a time of connection, relaxation, learning together, and renewal at Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond, Va.

Presenters: James Forbes, senior minister emeritus, Riverside Church, New York City and Russell Siler Jones, pastoral counselor and practitioner of internal family systems theory

Date: September 8-11, 2019 (Sunday afternoon through Wednesday morning)

**OWL Training**
Through the generosity of the Carpenter Foundation, the Alliance has funds available to provide training for Alliance congregational partners in Our Whole Lives (OWL), the sexuality education curriculum for parents, teachers and pastors created by the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalists.

Date: November 1-2, 2019
Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
More details to come!

Contact Carole Collins (carole@allianceofbaptists.org) for more information.

**Pre-Gathering Event**
This one-day interactive event will focus on the atonement. Participants will critically examine the substitutionary theory of atonement and explore alternative theories. Sessions will include discussions on worship, liturgy and hymnody, as well as implications for justice work, and for pastoral care.
April 23, 2020
Broadway Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas

**Annual Gathering 2020**
April 24-26, 2020
Broadway Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas