

August 9, 2010

Dear ABC/Ohio Pastors, Churches, and Friends:

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13.15-16

When ABC/Ohio gathers in Columbus October 7-9, 2010 for the Annual Gathering, delegates and attendees will celebrate 185 years of Baptist witness and ministry in the State of Ohio. Throughout the Region's 185 years there have been countless pastors, church leaders, Associations, and congregations who have sacrificed their time, talent, and treasure to do what is pleasing to God. There have also been changes in ministry styles, staffing, governance, and even a name change to facilitate the ministry. This year's gathering will usher in a number of changes that are the result of a season of prayer, study, discernment, and extended conversations within the Region.

ABC/Ohio has been in a transformation journey to discover how the Region's vision and mission to "help build healthy churches that impact the world for Christ" can best serve the ministries of the churches. Using the consultation services of Mark L. Vincent from Design Group International, the ABC/Ohio staff and Region Board, a Board-appointed Transformation Team met in various settings, including a staff retreat in January, a Board retreat in February, and Transformation Team meetings to discuss the needs of congregations and pastors in fulfilling God's vision in their settings.

Additionally we addressed the financial realities of decreased mission giving, deficit spending in recent years, including the present operating budget, and openly talked about how it would be possible to do the needed ministries with fewer people. All agreed that sacrifices would need to be made to move forward and be good stewards of the generous resources provided by ABC/Ohio churches.

An important part of the discernment process included eight Focus Group meetings held in the month of June to provide opportunities for ABC/Ohio constituents to see what a new ministry and governance model might look like. Each Focus Group included time for feedback and suggestions before the Board would vote on a proposal at its July 16 meeting. We are grateful for the 150 persons who attended the Focus Groups and affirmed the new direction and provided valuable ideas. This process has truly been inclusive of the entire ABC/Ohio family.

On July 16 the ABC/Ohio Board of Regional Ministries received a proposal from the Transformation Team for new governance and ministry models that will position ABC/Ohio to fulfill its mission and passion to serve its member churches. The proposal for a new governance model requires the ABC/Ohio Constitution to be amended by the delegates to the Annual Gathering October 7-9 in Columbus. The new ministry plan provides for three Regional Ministers, formerly called Ministers of Congregational Development, along with the Executive Minister to serve as the Staff Team. The plan also calls for the reduction of the support (office) staff to one full-time person who will serve as the Core Services Administrator. The Board approved the proposal unanimously.

Following the Board's decision two members of the Personnel Committee and I interviewed the four Ministers of Congregational Development for the new ministry positions. A prayerful decision was made to name Rev. Bob Cassady, Rev. Mark Click, and Rev. Jane Gibbons, as Regional Ministers. Additionally Leslie Hoskinson has been named as the new Core Services Administrator.

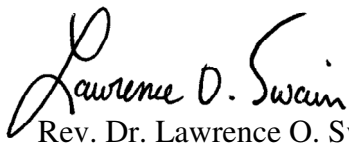
Leaving our staff will be Rev. Dan Taylor, Donna West, and Sue Buckenberger. Dan came to ABC/Ohio in 1997 and served as the Minister of Mission Support until 2006 when the staff was re-deployed and he began serving the churches of Southeast Ohio as Minister of Congregational Development. As Dan, along with Donna and Sue, leaves the Region staff and transitions to new ministry or employment opportunities, be assured that they will be receiving adequate severance packages as encouraged by the Board and Personnel Committee.

Dan will be concluding his ministry with ABC/Ohio September 30. Donna and Sue will conclude their employment August 31. No decision involving staff members is easy to make. This has been one of the most difficult decisions I have ever had to be a part of in 35 years of ministry. Each person leaving has sacrificed over 10 years of their lives to serve ABC/Ohio. There are friendships that go beyond work and these decisions affect every aspect of life for all of us. So you may want to express your thanks to Dan, Sue, and Donna by using the ABC/Ohio mailing address 136 Galway Drive N., Granville, OH, 43023.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership in ministry as together we *"help build healthy churches that impact the world for Christ."*

We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.
Proverbs 16.9

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence O. Swain". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Rev. Dr. Lawrence O. Swain
Executive Minister