

REPORT OF THE ABCORI/TABCOM TASK FORCE ON EXECUTIVE MINISTER SYNERGY POSSIBILITIES

This revision reflects learnings obtained from the 6 listening sessions.

Rationale

By significantly increasing the collaboration between the two regions we could achieve more effective, efficient, creative ministry, leading to healthier, growing and more vibrant churches.

Concept

We would develop a unique pattern of functioning. Specifically, a Bi-Regional Staff Team (BIRST) will be formed. ABCORI and TABCOM would continue to be autonomous regions, each maintaining its current legal status and responsibilities. Each region would retain ownership and governance responsibility for its camp, properties, endowments, etc.

The Executive Minister of ABCORI, the Executive Minister of TABCOM, and Area Ministers of TABCOM will actively participate in the BIRST. (Additional staff from each region will participate as appropriate.) The Executive Minister of ABCORI will determine the level and frequency of ABCORI staff participation in the BIRST. The ABCORI Executive Minister will oversee an evaluation process regarding the functioning of the BIRST. The Executive Minister of TABCOM will provide operational coordination of the BIRST. (Team functioning, cross-fertilization, synergistic assignments and collegial support, mentoring and encouragement would be some of the anticipated benefits of this arrangement.)

Evaluation of our Mutual Relationship:

A. Yearly evaluation

1. Reports from ABCORI and TABCOM Executive Ministers to appropriate committees (Personnel, Executive Committee) of each region.
2. Each region will conduct a review by the appropriate committee/s and report to each Board.
3. Feedback from local churches will be included in the review.

B. Yearly joint meeting of the governing boards of the regions.

Possible Additional Benefits:

This unique relationship between ABCORI and TABCOM **may** lead to synergism in many functions such as

- Communication vehicles
- Financial oversight, policies, insurance, etc.
- Pastoral search supports
- World mission support personnel and mission activities
- Camp programming and staffing
- Misconduct response for clergy and laity
- Common Annual Gatherings (with separate Business Meetings)
- Developing additional persons (volunteers?) for many ceremonial, ecumenical and liaison roles
- Mutual strategies for pastoral care and elderly ministries
- Procedures leading to ordination.

Process:

The Third Revision on 9/10/05 was accepted by the TABCOM Board of Directors and ABCORI Board of Mission. This fourth revision will go before both boards in March and both annual gatherings in May, 2006, for acceptance or no.

TABCOM's Board of Directors voted at its March 4, 2005 meeting to recommend the report of the MA/RI Task Force to the delegates at the Annual Meeting.

RI-MA SYNERGY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHY ARE TABCOM AND ABCORI GOING TO MERGE?

The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island (ABCORI) and The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts (TABCOM) are *NOT* going to merge. We are talking about collaboration of efforts to help both regions serve their churches more effectively. Each region will retain ownership and governance responsibility for her camp, properties, endowments, etc.

2. WHAT IS THIS GOING TO COST?

We see no reason for this proposal to increase expenses of either body. We intend to track costs in order to measure actual costs to each region and discern opportunities for savings in both regions.

3. WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON CAMPING PROGRAMS?

At the present time the camping/conferencing programs of the regions enjoy strong collegial relationships and often share ideas and expertise. The proposed arrangement holds out the possibility of taking these established relationships between Massachusetts and Rhode Island to an even higher level. A shared evaluation of strengths of both programs (including personnel, programming and plants) could form the base of jointly operated and/or promoted programs that would benefit both constituencies.

Each camp facility has unique qualities and benefits. It is possible that some shared camping experiences, shared staffing for specialty camps or conferences, or shared marketing would be beneficial to both camp programs.

4. HOW WILL THE NEW CONFIGURATION WORK?

The ABCORI Executive Minister and the TABCOM Executive Minister will continue to fulfill all the responsibilities they have presently. In addition, both Executive Ministers will participate in the Bi-Regional Staff Team (BIRST). The Executive Minister of ABCORI will oversee an evaluation process regarding the functioning of the BIRST and also determine the level and frequency of ABCORI staff participation in the BIRST. The TABCOM Executive Minister will preside at the meetings of the BIRST and coordinate the work of the BIRST. The ABCORI Executive Minister may be called on by a TABCOM congregation if she/he has skills needed by that congregation. This would be reciprocated by the TABCOM Executive Minister or Area Ministers when appropriate.

It is assumed that monthly meetings of this Bi-Regional Staff Team will facilitate and enhance synergy and cooperation between the regions and provide an enhanced pool of expertise, support and collegiality for all members of the team.

5. WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON PASTORAL PLACEMENT?

No changes are anticipated.

6. WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON THE ORDINATION PROCESS?

At the present time there is no interaction between ABCORI's Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry and TABCOM's Commission on Ordained Ministry. These two groups perform the same functions for their regions. Discussions may be possible identifying ways these groups may be helpful to one another.

7. WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON STAFF?

No changes in personnel are anticipated as a result of this agreement. It is expected that cooperation among staff will be enhanced and beneficial, and collegiality will be increased.

8. WHAT'S IN IT FOR MY CHURCH?

- Increased resource personnel available to churches in both regions as expertise is from a common pool of professionals and volunteers.
- A two-region perspective on trends and shared issues might allow each congregation to strategize for common concerns (e.g., fire safety upgrades, refits for buildings, etc.).
- An increased pool for churches partnering in shared interests, ministries, training, etc.
- Clergy in the two regions could explore sharing health care plans, reducing costs to local congregations.

9. WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON AFFILIATED GROUPS?

American Baptist Women's Ministries of Massachusetts and American Baptist Women's Ministries of Rhode Island: Each organization will continue to function as it now does. They will remain independent organizations as they now are. It is conceivable that at some time the women of these two groups might plan a joint meeting or joint mission effort to enhance their ministries.

American Baptist Men of Rhode Island and American Baptist Men of Massachusetts: Currently there is no formal organization of AB Men in Rhode Island or Massachusetts. Rhode Island is trying to reinvigorate a men's ministry. This is an area for potential cooperation.

Baptist Home of Rhode Island: The Baptist Home of Rhode Island will continue to function as it now does. Kathy Black, Director of Elder Care Ministries, will continue in her position. Kathy has done some consulting with TABCOM at their request. Additional cooperation is possible.

Conference of Baptist Ministers in Massachusetts: Open to conversations about possible cooperative efforts.

Ministers Council of Rhode Island: Open to conversations about possible cooperative efforts.

Massachusetts American Baptist Historical Society and Baptist Heritage Center (ABCORI): These organizations will remain separate bodies. Currently, representatives of each of these organizations are working with the American Baptist Historical Society as ABHS seeks relocation.

Massachusetts Baptist Charitable Society: No changes.

Massachusetts Baptist Foundation for Campus Ministry: No changes.

Northern Baptist Educational Society: No changes.

Rhode Island Baptist Education Society: No changes.

The John Myles Institute: The Institute has a participation agreement in place with ABCORI.

10. WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR ENHANCED MINISTRY?

- Develop system of volunteers
- Joint celebrations
- Joint conferences
- Joint mission trips and projects
- Joint mission events
- Shared training in Christian Education and other areas
- Congregational insurance programs
- Health insurance for pastors
- Pastoral care and support (Conference of Baptist Ministers, Minister's Council)
- Ministry of intervention (training in Behavioral Covenants)
- Interim ministry training
- Staff sharing ideas and possible cooperative staff efforts
- Communication to and among churches

11. WHAT IF THIS PROPOSAL DOESN'T WORK?

There will be an exit strategy put into place on the order of the following:

1. A three-year implementation period, giving us enough time to work out the initial "bugs" and give it a fair chance to work. Clock would start for this June 2006.
2. If either region desires to leave the relationship, the following steps would pertain:
 - A. Vote by delegates at an annual or specially called meeting.
 - B. Process of exploration and reconciliation (if possible) of no less than one year.
 - C. Disconnect effective at second vote.
 - D. Allow six months to effect the disconnect.
3. Any "sub-parts" that have developed an effective working relationship are allowed to continue working in tandem at their discretion.