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FACTS ABOUT AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN THE USA

**ORGANIZED** Organized May 16, 1907, at Washington, D.C., as the Northern Baptist Convention. Name changed to American Baptist Convention in Boston, May, 1950, and to American Baptist Churches in the USA in Denver, May, 1972.

**PURPOSE** “The purpose of the corporation shall be to give expression to the opinions of its constituency upon moral, religious, and denominational matters, and to promote denominational unity and efficiency for the evangelism of the world.”

**ADMINISTRATION** The legislative body of the ABC/USA is a General Board consisting of no more than 160 members. The board meets twice each year. Its function is to give general oversight and direction to the national and international life of the ABC and its mission. Of the 160 members, 111 are elected by election districts through the denomination, 37 are elected by the national biennial meeting as representatives-at-large, and the remaining 12 are standing members by virtue of elected positions within the national body.

A national biennial meeting is held in odd years, with delegates elected by the member churches. Functions of the biennial include: celebration; inspiration; information on the budget and General Board actions; election of officers, at-large members of the General Board, and members of the statements of concern committee; expressing the will of the biennial meeting on issues of concern; and approval of bylaw amendments.

**STATISTICS** Number of cooperating churches: approximately 5,800; Membership: approximately 1,500,000; Number of states represented: 47 plus Puerto Rico.

**ORGANIZATION** American Baptists believe in the autonomy of the local church. Each local congregation determines its own program and relationships. Regional organizations promote American Baptist work throughout their respective areas, serve their member churches, and carry out a program of missions and church extension. There are 34 regions.

**BRIEF HISTORY** The American Baptist Churches trace their roots back to English Puritanism and the congregation of John Smyth who fled from England to Holland in 1608 to escape religious persecution. While there, the group rejected infant baptism and founded a church based on believer’s baptism. Baptists in America go back to the establishment of a Baptist Church at Providence, RI in 1639 by Roger Williams. The first association of Baptist churches in America was organized in 1707 in Philadelphia.

In 1814, the first national Baptist organization was formed to help support a missionary couple. The organization is today called the American Baptist Board of International Ministries. In 1824, the American Publication Society was founded and in 1832, the American Baptist Home Mission Society was formed. Baptist unity was broken over the issue of slavery in 1845, when southerners withdrew to form the Southern Baptist Convention. Other groups have been organized entirely separately from the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

The American Baptist Churches, USA have fellowship with several Baptist bodies in the United States and internationally through the Baptist World Alliance and the World Council of Churches.

**PROGRAM BOARDS** Program functions of the American Baptist Churches are now carried out by three national boards: International Ministries, National Ministries, and Ministers and Missionaries Benefits. Educational Ministries, which for years was one of the program boards, no longer exists. At their June, 2003 meetings, the Educational Ministries Board and the American Baptist Churches General Board voted to reassign Educational Ministries’ discipleship and publishing ministries to the Board of National Ministries.

The American Baptist **Board of National Ministries** supervises work in the U.S., making cooperative connections for ministries of Witness, Renewal, and Justice. Together with partners in mission, National Ministries “encourages life in Christ in and through persons, faith communities and social systems.”

The American Baptist **Board of International Ministries** administers programs in 20 areas of Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Its mission is “to glorify God in all the earth by crossing cultural boundaries to make followers of Jesus Christ.”

The **Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board** was established to help meet human need among ministers, missionaries, church employees and their families. It administers a pension program and the denomination’s medical plan.

**MISSION CENTER** The American Baptist Mission Center in Valley Forge, PA has served since 1962 as a major site for the ongoing planning of domestic and overseas mission work and for the production of various resources designated to help local churches and their leaders in their ministries.

**PROJECTION** American Baptist Churches, USA is the most racially inclusive body in Protestantism, and will within the next few years, be comprised of no racial/ethnic majority group.