



## Reflections

This year's Biennial meeting in Des Moines, right after the General Board meeting, included countless conversations about the General Board's decision to dismiss four Welcoming and Affirming congregations from the denomination. Many friends and members of American Baptists Concerned and the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists openly displayed their support for the four churches.

A number of participants in the youth Biennial expressed their support of the dismissed churches. One young man from the youth Biennial said, "I have never been more ashamed of my denomination than I am right now. I want you to know that the younger generation is behind you." Many of the young people wore rainbow stickers and black armbands to express their support.

A senior gentleman also spoke with some of us. He shook hands with each of us who were present at the time. He said, "You're still a part of us. You're still in the family. We never wanted the General Board to have the power to do this." This gentleman was John Eby, director of "American Baptist Evangelicals."

Mr Eby visited with some of us briefly. He indicated that this was not a happy time for any of us. He said, "It's like watching two good friends get a divorce." From our perspective, however, the General Board's decision felt more like an amputation than a divorce.

Mr. Eby said gently to us, "We never wanted it to go this far." He later explained that the ABE did want the Welcoming and Affirming congregations to be forced out of the denomination. ABE had wanted the dismissing Regions to be able to complete the act of dismissal without any involvement

from the General Board or other members of the denomination. They had never wanted it to go so far as to allow the General Board to hear appeals from the dismissed churches.

The ABE has stressed the idea of the "autonomy of the Region." This same idea was put forth by Bob Rasmussen and others who were involved in the changing of the rules in the ABC of the West so that the Region could dismiss these same four Welcoming and Affirming congregations. It is a spurious concept, however. The autonomy of the Region is not a part of historic Baptist polity. Local Baptist congregations are autonomous. They may freely form voluntary associations. Those associations may work within the context of larger Regions. But neither the association nor the Region has control over the congregations who comprise it. Neither the association nor the Region is an autonomous entity. Both are subject to the authority of local congregations, not one of whom has authority over another.

Recent issues of the ABE newsletter have attempted to build up Regional authority while using inflammatory language about the national denomination. The recent brouhaha in that newsletter about National Ministries' having Walter Wink speak at the Biennial luncheon is an example. Although Aidsand Wright-Riggins responded with courtesy and dignity to the newsletter's attack on Wink, the newsletter persisted in its attack on National Ministries.

I cannot help but be concerned that some American Baptists may be led by the ABE newsletter to distrust our denomination, and even think ill of those who work faithfully in

providing leadership for American Baptists on the national level. It is painful to see a part of our American Baptist family working so hard to undermine other parts.

It is important for American Baptists to communicate our concerns and support with denominational leaders, including Dan Weiss and the directors of the denominational boards. They take their responsibilities and their accountability to the family very seriously. I hope that friends of American Baptists Concerned will support and encourage our sisters and brothers who are in difficult positions of leadership.

## Who's Who

Occasionally confusion arises over the differences between American Baptists Concerned for Sexual Minorities and the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, and why we have two organizations with such similar concerns.

American Baptists Concerned has been in existence for over a quarter century—since 1972. It works to educate American Baptists about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and their involvement in American Baptist congregations. It provides a safe space for sexual minority persons and their supporters, through both the communications of the *Voice of the Turtle*, the website *Rainbow Baptists* and its annual retreat, as well as through individual contacts. ABCConcerned also has local affiliates that respond to sexual minority communities in a variety of geographical areas. The membership/ mailing list for ABCConcerned is confidential.

**Voice of the Turtle** is published by  
**American Baptists Concerned**



American Baptists Concerned is the national Baptist caucus advocating the inclusion and affirmation of sexual minority people. The name or address of a person or business herein is not to be construed as an indication of sexual orientation.

If you are interested in further information about American Baptists Concerned, or would like to submit writing, please write to the preceding address. We are always interested in having writing submitted by our readers.

**Membership, Subscription and  
Donation Information**

If you would like to like to subscribe to *Voice of the Turtle*, join American Baptists Concerned (\$25 per year) or make a donation, please write to the address below:

American Baptists Concerned  
P.O. Box 3183 • Walnut Creek, CA 94565  
(925) 439-4672 • ambaptists@aol.com  
www.rainbowbaptists.org

Editor and Publisher, Chris Boisvert  
(925) 439-4672 • caboisvert@aol.com