



Thursday, August 29, 2019

Greetings Alaska Baptists!

I am honored to have this opportunity to share with you some of the refinement and effort which has been underway as we continue to consider and develop the proposed restructuring and rebranding of the Alaska Baptist Convention. Without a doubt, it is as challenging and complex as I thought it would be, and in some areas, much more so. I have been blessed to have communication from a number of you over the past several weeks and I am appreciative of the comments, critiques, and encouragement I have received, on behalf of the work by our Implementation Team.

Please find here a follow-up to the materials I sent out this past June wherein I attempt to clarify some points, rectify some mistakes, and encourage further thought and communication. It is lengthy, but I have attempted to divide the information into categories for easier understanding.

As before, I encourage you to express your thoughts, ideas, and concerns directly to me, if you like. I'll do my best to respond in a timely fashion and with grace, as you have all shown to me. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Annual Meeting at College Heights Baptist Church in September and would be honored to hear your thoughts in person.

Many blessings to you all

Tracy Simmons
Pastor – Christ Community Church, Alaska
President – Alaska Baptist Convention 2018-19

Name Change/Rebranding

- **What was voted on at the 2018 annual meeting?**
 - *Adopt a new vision for the Alaska Baptist Convention as articulated by Randy Covington, Executive Director of the ABC on Tuesday, September 26, 2018. The adoption of this vision means that the ABC will begin a two-year journey to create a new face that reveals who we are to our culture and to develop a new structure that is efficient and effective. **The stated goal of this vote is to refocus, rebrand, and reposition the ABC so that a modified organization will be in place by the 75th anniversary celebration of the ABC in 2020.***

Randy added the following comment at the time of the vote that was included in the minutes:

- **The vote is to pursue the implementation of the new vision and most likely have an implementation team to work about implementing the new vision by 2020.**
 - *The language presented at the 2018 meeting, very ambitiously, suggested a final proposal would be ready for the 2019 meeting, with implementation to occur during the 2019-2020 year, and final implementation in place by 2020. It was quickly realized by the Implementation Team this was unrealistic and didn't 'provide adequate input from our members around the state. One of the items to be communicated at this year's meeting is the expansion of the timeline for development, with a final proposal, or proposals, at the 2020 meeting and implementation to begin, based on whether the proposals are approved.*
- **What's with the name Alaska Baptist Resource Network/Logo?** *Speaking strictly from a personal perspective, in my 25+ years of ministry in and around the state of Alaska, I've never found the name "Alaska Baptist Convention" to have any substantive recognition beyond our own organization, other than people or ministries who have "heard of us," usually in the context of the larger recognition of the SBC. This doesn't mean anyone should think a name change/rebranding will automatically solve that issue. There still has to be substantive effort in the work of any organization to go beyond a cosmetic change into true organizational refocus. I so believe a rebranding is appropriate for the public face of the ABC for some of the reasons which have been communicated before, such as: a.) people outside the organization don't know who we are and what the name Alaska Baptist Convention means; b.) it doesn't describe in any way what we do or what we are about to the uninitiated.*

The rebranding of our “public face” as Alaska Baptist Resource Network might be described this way:

***Alaska Baptist Convention** is where we conduct our business as member churches*

***Alaska Baptist Resource Network (a ministry of the Alaska Baptist Convention)** is where and how we conduct ministry, both locally and beyond.*

As far as the effectiveness of the name Alaska Baptist Resource Network, we did work with both local and non-local firms who do this work everyday and this is the name they returned to, over and over, among the many we tossed around. While I don't think it's possible that everyone will be thrilled with any choice of a name, AlaskaBRN has been favorably reviewed by most and, even the case of those who aren't thrilled with it, there is a sense that an alternative choice is extremely elusive. If we consider the fact that Alaska Baptist Convention doesn't satisfy a number of our members as a public face for the future, you can see the difficulty faced, in this regard. A large component of the final analysis should be, does this public face branding cause harm to the cause and does it communicate the stated objectives?

As for the rebranding of the website and social media, I can only say I wish we had done a better job in communicating the roll-out. An updated website and social media presence was in the works, already. Including the new logo and branding seemed a logical step to take, as well. (Please see the following segment of this document) However, I wish we would have communicated the upcoming changes more frequently, once the final product was approved, before actually punching the button to go live.

- ***Was the new name for the ABC voted on at the last annual meeting? I thought it was going to be voted on this year. Or am I just a year behind!?! There is definitely some confusion here and I'll do my best to sort it out. I'll include here the recorded minutes from the annual meeting, as well as information from Executive Board meetings. As the Implementation Team worked, we were under the understanding that Randy had made the case for a “name change” and new look, based on the minutes and the motion approved. You can see those below, for reference:***
 - ***2018 Annual Meeting Presentation*** - Dr. Covington shared the new vision for the ABC (File 3, Count 01:15:23). It all began when a study task force, chaired by Dr. Jeff Anderson, was charged with the task of surveying church members to see how the ABC could be more effective in assisting the church with their mission to spread the Gospel. The results of the survey were brought to the Executive Board in the May 2018 board meeting, and it showed that ABC needed to undergo a change in order to be more effective in their role of assisting churches. The change would not be to alternate, substitute, or transform, but to modify their current procedures. In order to modify we would need to:

(1) refocus--develop a clear vision, (2) rebrand--put a new face on the organization by use of social media, and (3) reposition--develop a structure that would better communicate the needs of churches and evangelize areas that have not heard the Gospel. To restructure to a network model where strategy would come from the churches and be field-driven by way of regional facilitators acting as conduits on behalf of the church to express needs to the ABC for support. The state would be divided into six regions: Northwest Alaska, Northeast Alaska, South-central Alaska-Anchorage, South-central Alaska-Mat-Su, Southwest Alaska, and Southeast Alaska. The new vision would be to **Abide** in Christ in the unity of faith (John 15:5 17:21), **Build** the kingdom of heaven on earth (Matthew 6:10, 16:19), and **Cooperate** in one sacred effort (Acts 1:8). The mission statement would be to glorify God as we assist churches to: **Evangelize** the lost, **Equip** new believers, **Establish** new churches, **Encourage** the saints, and **Extend** the Gospel to the ends of the earth. *Rebranding would come about by establishing a new identity that would communicate what is our purpose. The proposed new name would be "Alaska Baptist Resource Network".* Dr. Covington will lead a question and answer time on the Vision following the second session of the 73rd Annual Meeting of the ABC.\

2018 Annual Meeting Action - Dr. Covington called to cast a vote to adopt a new vision for the ABC to begin a two-year journey to create a new face that reveals who the organization is to the culture and to develop a new structure that is efficient and effective (File 5, Count 00:11:10). The stated goal of this vote is to refocus, rebrand, and reposition the ABC so that a modified organization will be in place by the 75th anniversary celebration of the ABC in 2020. The vote is to pursue the implementation of the new vision and most likely have an implementation team to work about implementing the new vision by 2020. The vote was taken by secret ballot.

Executive Board action November 2018 - Approved to rename Designated Account 8986 Missionary Training to Vision Development, move the balance of Designated Account 8402 to Account 8986 and deactivate Account 8402, update the Chart of Accounts as follows: Account 5253 New Vision Promotion--These funds are to be used to assist with the promotion and implementation of the new vision, including travel expenses for implementation team members, and Account 8986 Vision Development--These funds are to be used for expenses incurred by the New Vision Implementation Team and potential *contractors engaged for developing the new structure, rebranding, and website and social media outlets.*

Executive Board Report May 2019 - Dr. Covington gave a report from the Implementation Team (File 2, Count 01:45:15). In the 2018 Annual Meeting, it was approved that the ABC pursue the new vision. The first step of the Implementation Team was to look at rebranding. The team decided the most efficient way to proceed was to register the Alaska Baptist Convention under the “doing business as” name of Alaska Baptist Resource Network. The team engaged a local company, Sundog Media, to create the website for Alaska Baptist Resource Network, and also engaged a company called, One Mission TV, to design a logo. The last part of the implementation process is restructuring or repositioning. That will be the next task the Implementation Team works on with the hope to have a final recommendation to present at the 2019 Annual Meeting.

- *That being said, it was the team’s understanding that Randy had presented the name, but that an actual name change was both impractical and did not respect the historicity of Alaska Baptist Convention. We decided to take a different approach using the DBA function. To some measure, in my opinion anyway, there is still room for discussion here. Our full implementation will not occur until **after the 2020 annual meeting and a vote on the whole package.** A cosmetic change and a flag flying of the new name should serve us well to get some feedback on the general direction. I will say again, and I am willing to shoulder the responsibility, the rollout was a bit sloppy and clumsy.*

If you’ve had a chance to view both the original website updates and those coming after, you will see that we’ve added a tag to the headline to read “Alaska Baptist Resource Network; A ministry of Alaska Baptist Convention,” to more accurately reflect what is actually happening.

I do think this was in the purview of the team, from the action taken at the 2018 Annual Meeting, and with the input of the Executive Board. Even so, our greatest downfall here is poor communication and I apologize on our behalf for that.

The Implementation Team

- *What is the role of the Implementation Team? As to the role of the Implementation Team, my understanding is that we were tasked with taking the broad overview Randy presented, begin to dig into the details, and make some attempts at a logical structure and process by which this shift might take place. In so doing, the materials I previously provided are, in fact, **nothing more than a proposal, with the exception of the naming issue, which I addressed in the last section of this document. Nothing in those materials is set forth as a final proposal.** The intent was to provide a **possible framework** and then solicit input from “regional” interests. That process will continue through to the 2020 meeting.*

Regionalization

- *How are the regions determined? This is still undecided, and is an area where input from our members across the state will play an important role in a final proposal. Included in Randy’s presentation at the 2018 Annual Meeting, and in the materials I previously provided, there is a potential “regional map”. However, there are other ideas, brought by individuals engaging in the wider conversation, and these should be heavily discussed and examined before a final proposal is offered. Other questions raised in this part of the process are:*
 - *How will Regional Facilitators be selected and what will they do? The answer to this question is determined by the ultimate plan for regional structure:*
 - *If regions are determined strictly by geography, or if an idea such as regional “hubs” were adopted, Regional Facilitators would, ideally, be people from those regions, recommended by the people in the regions*
 - *As a jumping off point, I have been attempting to gather as many DOM position descriptions from around the state, to see similarities and differences in those regions already established as associations. It seems logical that those DOM positions would hold some similarities to what we are proposing here, with a much heavier emphasis given to interaction with and direction FROM the churches TO the facilitator, rather than the other way around.*

The importance of this component cannot be overstated. As the suggested regional map exists now, it is simply a convenient way to visually segment the state. I don’t know that it’s the best structure for functionality, as it stands, and this area of research and conversation is at the top of my list. Your input is critical.

- ***Some associations have not had a DOM in years. How will we, and the others, afford to have Regional Facilitators? In my initial documentation, I failed to include all information regarding this critical component and I have attempted to me more clear below: Let me first say that, while amounts have not been discussed at any great length, the intention is for the compensation to be modest, but appropriate to the task. That being said, facilitator funding will, hopefully, come from at least two sources;***

1.) The additional funds we have available due to the shift in Cooperative Program (CP) giving from last year's annual meeting budget. This is an area where, for years, we did receive assistance from NAMB to support associational DOM's. As many of you are aware, when NAMB shifted to the church planting emphasis, those funds were completely eliminated for that prior purpose. While I understand some of the hesitation to shift those funds away from CP, the truth of the matter is, over the past several years NAMB has increased the amount of funding available to Alaska while drastically limiting the manner in which those funds can be used. The church planting model, as it stands today, is simply not sustainable in Alaska, so we end up leaving money on the table which could be utilized in-state, under our direction through the state convention.

2.) Ideally, churches like mine, who give modestly to their association, will shift that giving to the ABC

- *The best practice would be for churches to maintain their desired level of CP giving to Alaska Baptist Convention, while designating a separate amount, perhaps that previously given to their association, to Alaska Baptist Resource Network. Any funds designated to AlaskaBRN would not be subject to the CP pass through percentage, but 100% of those funds given to AlaskaBRN would remain in the state of Alaska for our member churches to utilize.*
- *It's possible some churches may not want to give a separate offering through the state, in addition to their regular CP giving. While this is not ideal for the task at hand, each church must decide their own practices. In this scenario, ABC would receive from NAMB the funds allowed each year, subject to the terms NAMB specifies for the use of those funds, and they would not be directly available through the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, as designated funds would be.*

Funding

- *How will the funding be handled? As the team discussed the mechanisms by which ministry giving would flow from the regions into the AlaskaBRN and back out to ministry efforts in the field, there were three areas of import which were initially identified. I have included below both the questions and the team's recommended approach.*
 - **1. How should we encourage our member churches in the area of giving to the AlaskaBRN, in relationship to their existing associational giving, where applicable?**
 - *At this time, as we have discussed with members and association participants around the state, it appears most likely that our associations will not choose to continue beyond the adoption of the proposed regional structure.*
 - *The desired giving model would see associational giving churches shift their association giving to designated giving to AlaskaBRN.*
 - **2. How will funds be treated when they are received by AlaskaBRN?**
 - *IF the funds received from a church are **not designated to AlaskaBRN**, they will be treated as general offerings and subject to the CP percentage with all other undesignated giving through Alaska Baptist Convention. In this scenario, ABC would receive from NAMB the funds allowed each year, subject to the terms NAMB specifies for the use of those funds, and they would not be directly available through the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, as designated funds would be.*
 - *The desired practice would see a donation stream from our churches, designated to Alaska Baptist Resource Network. All designated funds received would be placed into a central account with guidelines which might delineate the following:*
 - *The threshold amount, below which, the first level of oversight is empowered to assess and approve requests, possibly through the State Director of Missions, perhaps in conjunction with the state Missions and Church Development Committee.*
 - *Fund requests which exceed this threshold would be passed to an additional level of assessment and approval, perhaps through the Executive Board structure of AlaskaBRN.*

- *Consideration should be given to whether there are certain types of requests which will qualify for disbursements, and what kind of requests may be better directed to other available sources in the Alaska Baptist Convention budget, or elsewhere.*
 - *The use of funds held in the Alaska Baptist Resource Network account(s) would be requested **by the churches, from the field.** The intent is not to have rigid restrictions, but to encourage a robust gathering of resources, to facilitate a robust use of resources.*
- *Some existing associations may have events or ministries which have been consistently funded through the associational organization. These same events or ministries can be submitted for funding through the new request/funding flow. In fact, that's exactly the idea! Hopefully, we can increase the creativity and effort of our member churches in their individual efforts and cooperative efforts with other churches. The historic cost of these long held events or ministries may help in determining request thresholds for different approval processes.*
- *Will non-SBC churches have access to the AlaskaBRN resources? NO, unless they become cooperating SBC churches. That being said, there is a strong desire to be less insulated in cooperative Kingdom work with like-minded, Biblical, organizations in the state, to better utilize resources and reduce costly duplication. It's not an attempt at ecumenism, but cheerful, cooperative, Kingdom effort with appropriate neighbors, in Christ. Resources used in cooperative efforts with non ABC/SBC partners would still need to be requested by, and would under the oversight of a local ABC/SBC church.*

Structure and Function

- ***Does this plan increase denominational control over church autonomy?***
 - ABC Constitution & Bylaws Article V, Section 2: ***This Convention shall never claim or attempt to exercise authority over any church or any other Baptist body, but shall always cheerfully recognize and uphold the church's autonomy under Christ.***
- Are we changing the purpose and mission of the Alaska Baptist Convention? From the Alaska Baptist Convention Constitution ***Statement of purpose - ARTICLE II PURPOSE***
 - The purpose of the Alaska Baptist Convention, hereafter known as the Convention, shall be to furnish a medium of cooperation for the cooperating Baptist churches of Alaska in their divinely commissioned work of missions, education, and benevolence in obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, and to cooperate with the work of the Southern Baptist Convention.
 - Randy Covington's presentation at the 2018 Annual Meeting describes the purpose of the AlaskaBRN arm of the Alaska Baptist Convention: *"Our mission is to glorify God as we assist churches to evangelize the lost, equip new believers, establish new churches, encourage the saints, and extend the gospel to the ends of the earth."*
- ***Is this just window dressing? New paint on an old barn? Business as usual with a new face and name? It isn't supposed to be! However, to insure it isn't, it will take diligent work to assess the following:***
 - *Are regions the right way to go? Regional Hubs?*
 - *Are Regional Facilitators the best interface between the AlaskaBRN and our churches?*
 - *What about our existing state staff (Director of Missions; Director of Evangelism, etc.)? Should we consider a restructuring of their positions and duties in the role of Regional Facilitators? Can their energies be better utilized by redefining their roles?*
 - *What are the best practices for receiving and distributing funds given to the Alaska Baptist Resource Network?*
 - *???*
 -
- ***What will happen to existing associations? This is a matter which can only be answered by the associations themselves. Most of those with whom I have spoken seem to indicate, if the restructuring of AlaskaBRN is effective, there would be no cause for the association to continue with elements such as staff, their own DOM, and other overhead. There may be value in continuing in some manner of community and fellowship in whatever way an existing association determines is useful.***

Camp Ministry

- ***Will the Alaska Baptist Convention be taking over the camps around the state?***
In this area, after reading through the materials I sent out in June of 2019, I must deeply apologize. I have grossly miss-communicated our intent in this paragraph and will endeavor to correct that here. However, let me communicate to you now what our thinking was behind that poorly worded paragraph. It is my understanding that the several camps around the state which have affiliations with ABC are likely all held in different manners by their associations or, in one case, not even by the association at all but as an independent entity. What I was trying to express in this paragraph was two things:
 1. *Camping ministry is dear to the heart of the team and, I think, to Alaska Southern Baptists, in general. There was a strong desire to not allow the camps to get lost in the shuffle of a restructuring.*
 2. *In that spirit, I meant to communicate that, **should a regional camp be uncertain of how they would function and where their oversight would come from in the absence of an association, ABC is willing to provide assistance.***

However, I realize now that this was, perhaps, communicated through a lens which was too narrowly focused on particular challenges Chugach Baptist Association may face with LGYRC and its grant from the State of Alaska.

Let me summarize the camp concern by saying it this way: *The Alaska Baptist Convention does not have a desire to become the point organization for camping ministry in our regions. We **would** desire that camps either continue to function as they have been successful, or seek a process which secures their future success and growth if the absence of an associational entity impacts their work. This most specifically affects LGYRC, which is owned by Chugach Baptist Association and exists under a very specific land grant from the State of Alaska. I am not sure how our other camp partners are administrated. So, this is an area where Alaska Baptist Convention and AlaskaBRN would be available to assist but makes no assumptions that they will be needed to facilitate the ongoing ministry of the camps around our state. **It will be the responsibility of the camp entities or administrators to seek assistance if needed.***

What's Next

- **What's next?** *At this point, I have been engaged in conversation with a handful of people who have called, emailed, or written with questions, concerns, comments, and ideas. It is imperative that this continue and I encourage you to participate. Randy and I have been meeting with different people, in person and electronically, around our state. We certainly plan to do more of this in the months to come.*

I will be contacting the members of the Implementation Team to ascertain those who would be willing to serve for another year, as we refine, rework, and communicate our efforts to you.

There will be an update at the 2019 Annual Meeting, as well as a Q&A opportunity, with myself and Randy, and members of the Implementation Team on Wednesday morning of the convention in Soldotna. I hope you'll join us there.