

Point 1: A statement of how the organization and /or proposed use of the property aligns with ABCORI’s purpose and mission.

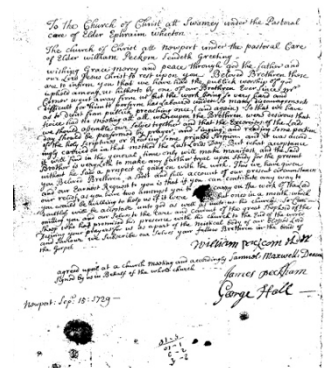
ABCORI Statement of purpose:

“With a commitment to **proclaiming** good news and **transforming** lives, American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island (ABCORI) **resources** member churches; **equips** congregational leaders; promotes **shared** ministry; and serves as a **prophetic** voice to and on behalf of its congregations.”

The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island as a region is the current, manifest expression our Baptist principle of “association.” Terms in **red** will correspond to the bullet points which follow.

A Reflective History of Baptist “associations”

From the emergence of those called “Baptists”, the need to work together has been significant. While much of Baptist theology focuses on the individual conscience, it was recognized in the earliest history that like-minded congregations cooperated for public witness and to share the burdens and joys of ministry. Both Arminian and Calvinistic Baptists in England early formed supportive relationships with allied congregations. They voluntarily committed to help each other in various ways and created common statements of belief and practice. Those early roots came to the American colonies through the experiences of leaders like Roger Williams and John Myles. The cooperation between the Boston, Swansea, and Newport congregations as they conferred on various issues is well documented.¹ The Philadelphia Association brought the Welsh-English traditions to the Swansea congregations in order to form the Baptist Church in Warren, RI (1764)² where the Warren Association was formed to support congregations and to oppose the taxes then levied on Baptist congregations. Over the years the forms, functions and responsibilities of “Baptist associations” has developed and changed. As ABCORI claims its heritage from the Warren Association (1767) we want to review, reclaim and embrace the lessons our history



¹ *Baptists in Early North America, Vol. 1*, Wm. Brackney w/Charles Hartman, Mercer Univ. Press, 2013, pp149ff

² *Ibid*, p.225

of associations has to offer. Then we will more deeply understand the purpose of the organization we share, and the choices before us.

Associations were formed for “the purpose of mutual support, aid to destitute congregations, and advice on matters of order, discipline, expansion, and identity...The Baptist association is considered not a superior body to the local congregation but rather an advisory body voluntarily covenanting with local churches for specific tasks.³” Associations were a “visible means of giving structure to the interdependence and mutual concerns” of the associating congregations. Within the association opportunity was created for “settling questions of theology and polity” among other things⁴ McNutt helps deepen our understanding of this critical Baptist idea:

“The associational principle, as developed among this people from the beginning, brings them to two elemental ‘musts’—they must maintain the independency of the local church, and they must cooperate with sister churches in the wider Kingdom enterprise. To fail in either becomes a cardinal apostasy to Baptist faith and practice.”⁵

In reviewing the historical development of “association” we cannot neglect how the actual polity of such organization is constructed. Hiscox describes the association not as a “representative” body, but as a “volunteer society formed and maintained for mutual help among the churches associated” which enjoys its own independency.⁶ It is this independent status in contrast to a representative status, that currently allows misunderstanding in its contemporary role. This presents an old problem, division or dissolution, as described by Hiscox:

“An Association is a *voluntary* society formed and maintained for mutual help among the churches associated, and for the religious welfare of the field it occupies. It is of human, not of divine authority; it grows out of the sympathies of Christian fellowship and the need of

³ *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, Wm Brackney, ed., Rowman Littlefield, Lanham, 2021. P. 45

⁴ *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, N. Maring and W.S. Hudson, 2nd revision, D. Gregg, ed., Judson Press, Philadelphia, 2012, pp 199-200

⁵ *Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches*, Wm. Roy McNutt, Judson Press, Philadelphia 1935, p. 145

⁶ *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*, Edward Hiscox, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1894, pp.331-333

mutual help. No Church is under obligation to affiliate with it; and any connected Church can withdraw cooperation, at any time, for any reasons which seem to itself sufficient, without prejudice to either its evangelical or its denominational reputation and standing.”⁷

Which brings us to the challenge we all now face together. The disposition of the Canonicus property, the reclamation of its ministry and the future of the association. In 1981 ABCORI had revived the vision begun in 1947 and had begun a campaign to move forward, transforming Canonicus from a summer youth program into a four season space for multiple ministries. We hired professional staff, utilized volunteers from the congregations, consulted with experts and created a vision that was implemented at great effort to achieve our goal. Through about 2000 what we had developed worked. But there has been a change in culture, changes in the congregations, and lastly, the pandemic. Over these 42 years we have seen the faithful effort to maintain both camping and conferencing dwarfed by the challenge. Yet part of the problems that have developed have come from the organizational structure we adapted in 1980, in which we merged ABCORI with Baptist Camping of RI. That decision is a critical part of the challenge we share.

What we achieve in the future depends greatly on the way that we function as an association to address our complex needs as a Baptist people, fully concerned and committed to helping each other. “To do together, what we can’t do by ourselves”. We live in a moment of great challenge but also of great opportunity. One of the demands of our moment is to reimagine how we see this very specialized ministry in relationship to the need for association. We are given theological, economic, and organizational problems to solve. United we are confident that as we were empowered in the past, we shall be empowered by cooperation and God’s Creative Spirit in our midst.

It seems incumbent, therefore, that all of us currently in discussion, be extremely sensitive to the need to be clearly focused on mutual concerns, cooperative work, honest and transparent communications in order to maximize the effectiveness of our association. In our current moment, “There seems to be a lack of closeness and identity of purpose between the local

⁷ Hiscox, P. 335

churches and the regional and national bodies.”⁸ In the post-modern era, when religion and religious institutions are diminished, clarity of purpose and mission is essential and can only be achieved with solid unity within our fellowship. A priority from the leadership of ABCORI in 2024 states: “Help churches let go of what once worked and look to a different future, recognizing that this will involve imagination, as well as grief.”⁹ Both the region and the congregations are bound in cooperation by this expectation. We can not dismiss our historic understanding of what it means to be “Baptists” if we wish to have a future of continued “Baptist” integrity. Imagination is required. Scholarship and research are required. Cooperation, open communications, and hard work are required to reclaim our heritage and our vitality for ministry and mission. At the moment, this requires all of us to be both deeply introspective and open to all sources of the Spirit’s Inspiration.

“Further, regardless of theological outlook, when we share a common ministry field, we might find ways to work together to address particular needs, build trust and ultimately interdependence.”¹⁰

Therefore, in gracious hope to reclaim the vision begun at Canonicus in 1947 by the American Baptist congregations of RI, we submit the following:

Canonicus Ministries, inc. aligns with ABCORI purpose and mission because...

- All persons within Canonicus Ministries, Inc., are pastors, professors, members and delegates from ABCORI congregations and/or other ABCUSA organizations. All members have decades long experience with Canonicus and many other ABC organizations. (resource)(shared)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will continue to provide a public witness to our heritage by reclaiming the significance of the historic relationship between native peoples and Baptists. This promotes a positive image of being "Baptist" as open, inclusive, and concerned with contemporary issues of justice. Reclaiming our heritage is enhanced by having a property to inhabit and share. It will be continue to be a gathering place to promote a sense of our shared

⁸ Maring & Hudson, Gregg, Ed. p.226

⁹ ABCORI Board of Ministry report, ABCORI website: 1-20-24

¹⁰ Maring & Hudson, Gregg, Ed. p. 227

identity as RI Baptists and practice our voice in the world. (equips)(prophetic)(shared)(proclaiming)

- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will continue to cooperate with ABCORI programs as a full partner, by providing a space for learning- a facility, and leadership for events that will serve the intergenerational interests of all faith communities, but particularly those of ABCORI. (resource) (prophetic)(shared) (equips)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will differentiate between “camping”, programs that utilize an “implicit curriculum” to explore the relationship between people and nature, and “conferencing”, programs that provide an “explicit curriculum”¹¹ intentionally creating educational opportunities that support ministries and spiritual growth for individuals and organizations. (resource) (prophetic)(shared)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will be ecumenical and interfaith in its programming. This will continue the public witness of Baptists as ecumenical in their outreach.(equips) (prophetic)(shared)(proclaiming)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will continue to create an environment and community in which participants are able “to sense their belonging with all God has made.” As a dedicated and consecrated natural space, we will practice our stewardship of God’s world in a bio/theological manner. We will understand that the property is a complex ecology, both habitat for woodland creatures and a learning space in which to experience the mystery of God’s creation while in community with other humans. (resource) (equips)(prophetic) (shared)(transforming)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will create a place for Baptists and other faith communities to learn and explore contemporary ways of being prophetically faithful, learning about significant historical, social, and theological issues that affect all congregations. Canonicus ministries are educational endeavors, creating time and place for necessary learning. (equips)(prophetic)(shared)(proclaiming)(transforming)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will expand the community of Baptists and others by creating programs for those who wish to find a spiritual home or continue their spiritual formation.

¹¹ *The Educational Imagination*, Eliot Eisner, Macmillan, New York, 1985. Chapter 5

An intentional focus of programming will be open to all, but also to identify and invite underserved populations to intersect with the Baptists of RI. Retreats, both personal and group, made more effective by coming out of the busy world to a place of quiet...into a safe place of respect, acceptance, and encouragement. (resource)(equips)(prophetic) (shared)(proclaiming)(transforming)

- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will take care to be accountable to all of its constituencies. It will make decisions and operate with transparency and consideration of all points of view. It's governance will be compatible with all ABCUSA expectations.(shared)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will intentionally cooperate with other ABCUSA ministries, and partner with other regional Baptist groups whenever appropriate.(shared)
- Canonicus Ministries, Inc. will relieve ABCORI of the cost and administrative burdens of owning and operating the facility.(shared) (resource)

