

9.5 Theses for the American Baptist Churches in the United States of America

1. **Church decline demands church reform.** From 1987 to 2021 the ABCUSA lost almost a quarter of its membership falling from 1,568,778 to 1,200,130. This decline becomes starker when we consider the growth of our nation's population over this period; had the ABCUSA grown at the same rate as the population it would now stand 2 million members strong.¹ Decline is not inevitable. In many ways our network of churches is more primed for growth than any other. We have a longstanding presence across much of our nation from major cities to small towns. We have a diverse membership that reflects the ethnic and cultural breadth of America today. We hold to a broadminded and biblically grounded faith tradition similar to what is taught in many growing non-denominational churches today. That our denomination possesses such strengths but displays such weakness calls us to repentance and reform (Haggai 1:5).
2. **Without the gospel, the church withers.** While there are many causes of this decline, one stands out from the rest: the failure of many churches to give first importance to our central message, the good news of the perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Matthew 16:16-18).
3. **Without unity, churches cannot cooperate.** The numerical decline of our local churches has gone hand in hand with a decline in the work of our denomination, a decline we see in United Mission giving, our shrinking seminaries, and the ABCUSA's waning

influence on local church life. Because many of our churches do not trust that other American Baptist churches hold to the same beliefs, they do not partner with us. To be effective in our mission, we must unite our churches around our core beliefs (John 17:22-23).

4. **The Word of God is our confession.** For many years our network of churches has held to no creed but the Bible, but we must not let this become no creed at all. We must affirm the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, the final written authority and trustworthy for faith and practice; this unites our churches and our denomination. We must not tolerate a low view of what God has spoken (2 Tim 3:16-17).

5. **The global and historic Baptist faith is our tradition.** American Baptist Churches are part of a family of Baptist churches stretching across hundreds of years and across the entire globe. We must maintain unity with our historic beliefs and with the beliefs of our brothers and sisters outside of this country. We must reject modern American heresies that promote gay marriage, universalism, and a low view of scripture (Ephesians 4:5; Jude 1:3-4).

6. **The local church is our body.** Baptists have always and must always teach and practice the priority of the local congregation. All the resources of the denomination should aim first of all towards the health of local churches. All parachurch organizations from camps to historical societies exist to serve the local church. As church buildings are sold with the proceeds often going to our regional organizations, these funds ought to be used primarily for the revitalization and planting of local churches (1 Cor 12:27).

7. **The Great Commission is our purpose.** The church exists to fulfill the commission first given to the apostles to make disciples of all nations; everything we do must fall under and promote that goal. We long to see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven. We long to see God's justice done in the world for the least of these. God has called us to bring about his justice through discipleship, teaching others to obey Jesus' commands (Matthew 28:18-20).

8. **We must disciple our siblings in Christ.** God calls us not only to a relationship with him but to obedience to his word. If we want our churches to remain churches rather than social clubs, we must teach one another to live like Jesus (John 13:34-35). There must be an emphasis on individual members holding one another accountable for their sinful actions and directing them towards repentance, as iron sharpens iron; thus, strengthening the church as a whole as it seeks to be a light unto the world (Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 5:14). How can we disciple other nations if we are not discipling each other (Matthew 7:3-5)? God also calls us to raise up and educate our children in the ways of the Lord. Whether in Sunday school or camps we must provide a thorough Biblical education to the children placed into our care, so they may confidently follow the Lord as they grow into adulthood and go out into the world (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6; Isaiah 54:13).

9. **Commit to the welfare of the ABCUSA.** We grieve for those churches who have left our denomination over the years and we encourage those who remain to stay. Spiritually healthy churches must take the lead in the denomination. Their pastors and

lay leaders should make new efforts to serve their associations, regions, and the denomination, as we reform our churches. The church should make new efforts to raise up qualified, competent pastors and the next generation of leaders so that our churches may never be lacking in strong leadership (2 Timothy 2:2-5).

9.5 We do all things in faith, hope, and love. We write this in a spirit of faith, knowing that almighty God will not abandon His bride, the church (Hosea 2:20). We write this in a spirit of hope, that the church will learn from its failures and become stronger for it (Romans 15:4). We write this in a spirit of love, not to condemn, desiring to see our churches healthy, faithful, and fruitful (1 Corinthians 16:14). No one person or church can do this alone. We are creating a network of American Baptists seeking to reform our denomination.

To get involved please email us at americanbaptistsforchrist@gmail.com or follow us on Instagram https://www.instagram.com/american_baptistsforchrist/. We are the ABCUSA branch of the Protestant Reconquista. You can find us in the Reconquista Official Discord, a link to which is on the website operationreconquista.com.



1 Data taken from American Baptist Pastor and religious demographer Ryan Burge's article: "Just How Bad Is Denominational Decline?"
<https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/just-how-bad-is-denominational-decline>