

ABCORI Annual Business Meeting Participants Consider Budget, Interim Structure & Nominees

During ABCORI's 2025 annual business meeting, voting participants considered three major items of business: a budget for fiscal year 2026; a modified interim structure for ABCORI's board and committees; and election of board and committee members.

The April 28 meeting took place at Warwick Central Baptist Church and included voting participants from 36 ABCORI churches.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

The proposed budget developed by ABCORI's Finance Committee and approved by the Board of Ministries reflects a \$334,590 deficit.

Finance Committee Chair Robert Butzier explained the budget proposed for fiscal year 2026 (April 1, 2025-March 31, 2026) differs from previous deficit budgets in its lack of readily realized resources to cover payroll and other basic expenses. The other major issue relates to the inability to obtain insurance for Canonicus Camp and Conference Center, which forces ABCORI to self-insure its property.

Mr. Butzier noted that if ABCORI is to fund this deficit budget without exhausting the fully unrestricted funds in its endowment, additional income funds must be found. One option considered by the Finance Committee is to subdivide and sell the Ruah property (former director's lodge) at Canonicus. This stop-gap measure would not resolve the bigger picture of ABCORI's dire financial situation, but it would provide the necessary cash flow for ABCORI to remain in operation through the fiscal year without exhausting ABCORI's limited endowment.

Erica Traub, a delegate from Calvary Baptist Church, introduced an amendment to the motion to approve the proposed budget. The amendment would prohibit the sale of any Canonicus property or buildings. After extended discussion, the amendment was defeated by more than 40 votes.

Earlier in the meeting, ABCORI President Cal Lord announced that the Board of Ministries is to hear a proposal from Canonicus Ministries, Inc., concerning use of the Canonicus property. The board also is open to considering proposals from other outside organizations. All proposals need to include:

- A statement of how the organization and/or proposed use of the property aligns with ABCORI's purpose and mission.
- A business plan, including an organization description; market analysis; business structure and management; products or services; customer segmentation; marketing and sales plan; logistics and operations; and detailed, audited financials.
- Evidence of immediate and ongoing financial benefit to ABCORI.
- Details of the organization's insurance coverage, including but not limited to general liability, liability for all proposed programs/activities, and property insurance for the full Canonicus property. Details of all exclusions in coverage must be provided.

Income from use of the property might help fund the deficit budget. Another option to fund the budget without selling a portion of the property would be to use the remaining unrestricted funds in ABCORI's endowment, which Mr. Butzier said is at about 15 percent of where it should be.

Rev. Jake McGuire, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bristol, introduced another amendment to the motion to approve the proposed budget. The amendment called for an ABCORI special business meeting to be held if there is no resolution to fund the budget by July. The meeting

would allow voting participants from ABCORI churches to decide whether to sell a portion of the Canonicus property or use the remaining available endowment funds. After discussion, the amendment passed by a vote to 74 to 46.

A majority of voting participants then approved the amended motion regarding the proposed budget for fiscal year 2026.

Modified Interim Structure for ABCORI Board & Committees

President Lord presented background on the previous interim structure that has been used for ABCORI's board and committees since 2023 and a report on the work done by a by-laws revision task force during the past year.

Given ABCORI's current atmosphere of conflict, the by-laws task force and the Board of Ministries agreed not to move forward with presenting a proposed by-laws revisions at this time. Instead, the board recommended a modified version of the interim structure for ABCORI board and committees.

The proposed modified structure would include:

- Board of Ministries with 13 total members—11 elected members with votes (president, vice president, clerk, treasurer, six at-large members, and the past president) and two staff members without votes.
- Committees to include finance, personnel, recruitment, standing committee on ordained ministry, and executive.

Rev. Sarah Reed Jay, pastor of Community Church of Providence, introduced an amendment, calling for the reduction of the Board of Ministries at-large members from six to five and the addition of three *ex officio* members:

- A representative of the American Baptist Women's Ministries of Rhode Island (without vote).
- Rhode Island's representative to ABCUSA's Board of General Ministries (without vote).
- The chair of ABCORI's Finance Committee (with vote).

After a majority approved the amendment, the voting participants voted in favor of the amended motion concerning the modified interim structure.

Nominations for 2025-2026

Recruitment Committee Chair Beth Berry presented a slate of nominees for ABCORI's board and committees for 2025-2026.

Rev. Dr. Evan Howard, pastor of First Baptist Church, North Kingstown, offered the following additional nominations:

- Finance Committee: Rev. Dr. Tony Pappas (member, Harbor Church, Block Island).
- Board of Ministries (at-large members): Jill Roberts (member, Community Church of Providence); Rev. Jeffrey Thomas (pastor, Saint James Baptist Church); Lee Trainer (member, First Baptist Church, North Kingstown); Peter Marshall (member, Phenix Baptist Church); David Pickering (member, Warwick Central Baptist Church); and Rev. Dr. Charles Hartman (member, Community Church of Providence).

Voting participants were asked to vote from the original slate of nominees and the nominees offered from the floor for five at-large members of the Board of Ministries and five members of the Finance Committee. After the ballots were counted, it was announced that the nominees from the original slate had been elected. The voting participants also approved the remaining slate of nominees as presented by the Recruitment Committee.

ABCORI 2025-2026 Leadership List

Board of Ministries

President: Eva Irby-Davis (member, Ebenezer Baptist Church)

Vice President: Rev. Alan Newton (member, Phillips Memorial Baptist Church)

Treasurer: David Dolce (member, Central Baptist Church, Jamestown)

Clerk: Rev. Debra Lee (pastor, The Baptist Church in Warren)

Past President: Rev. Dr. Cal Lord (pastor, Central Baptist Church, Westerly)

At-large Members:

- Rev. Michael Campbell (pastor, Congdon Street Baptist Church)
- Jan Fletcher (member, First Baptist Church, East Greenwich)
- Wendy Fobert (member, Norwood Baptist Church)
- Sue Guilmain (member, Greenville Baptist Church)
- John McCann (member, Oak Lawn Community Baptist Church)

Ex officio Members:

- ABWMRI representative: Joanne Brown (member, Warwick Central Baptist Church)—without vote
- ABCUSA Board of General Ministries representative: Rev. Dr. Amy Chilton (pastor, Phillips Memorial Baptist Church)—without vote
- ABCORI Finance Committee chair (to be appointed by ABCORI president)—with vote

Committees

- Finance: Matt Bellisle (member, First Baptist Church, Wickford); Robert Butzier (member, Oak Lawn Community Baptist Church); Sue Colantonio (member, Greenville Baptist Church); David Coon (member, First Baptist Church in America); Rachel McGuire (member, First Baptist Church, Bristol)
- Personnel: Rev. Del Demosthenes (pastor, Memorial Baptist Church); Rev. Natasha Gordon (pastor, Georgiaville Baptist Church); Veronica Mays (member, Community Baptist Church, Newport); Dan Walker (member, Warwick Central Baptist Church)
- Recruitment: Mal Davis (member, Ebenezer Baptist Church); Rev. Dr. Cal Lord (pastor, Central Baptist Church, Westerly); Ann McGloshen (member, Olney Street Baptist Church)
- Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry: Rev. Tim Chesser (member, Warwick Central Baptist Church), Rev. Elise Mancini (associate pastor, Ebenezer Baptist Church), Meredith Eckel (member, Central Baptist Church, Westerly), William Tutt, Sr. (member, Olney Street Baptist Church)
- Executive: officers listed above

(The booklet of materials for the business meeting and yearbook of 2024 annual reports is posted on the ABCORI website.)