

Summary of Table Talk 2026

Table Talk was held at the 2026 Annual Gathering on March 7, 2026. We had 24 tables of conversation—most were four people each, a few were 3 or 5, especially as people who came in late were added to tables. We allowed just over an hour for five specific questions to be discussed and their responses recorded.

Categories of responses were compiled by Interim Executive Minister Joan Friesen as common themes emerged for each question. If a table mentioned only one thing, only one response was included, but if they mentioned two or three comments, they were all tabulated.

We did not separate out delegates from other participants, so this is simply a snapshot of those who were present at the 2026 Annual Gathering who participated in Table Talk. The raw data of all responses is available.

The first two questions were regarding ABC of Rhode Island's mission statement—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.

1. What part of ABCORI's mission statement is most important to your church's ministry? What are some of the specific benefits your church has experienced?

The following aspects of the mission statement were named as most important:

- 10 Shared ministry
- 8 Resource churches
- 7 Equip leaders
- 6 Proclaim good news
- 3 Transform lives
- 2 Prophetic voice

Benefits named were:

- 12 Search process assistance
- 5 Fellowship/Community
- 4 Camp
- 4 Scholarships/Grants/Investments

- 3 Pastor supports
- 2 Workshops/Conferences/Eldercare

2. What part of ABCORI’s mission statement needs a higher ministry priority? What specific things would you like to see our region provide for your church?

Higher priority of ministry from the mission statement were ranked as:

- 9 Shared ministry
- 7 Equip Leaders
- 3 Resource congregations
- 3 Prophetic voice
- 1 Proclaim good news
- 1 Transforming lives

With the specifics around what our region might provide, the highest ranking choice by far seemed to be about how to support youth and the next generation in their faith and leadership

- 10 Youth/next generation
- 5 Fellowship & Connection
- 5 Camp
- 1 Pastor needs/support

Shared ministry was named as the most important part of our mission statement and the thing of which churches want more, especially with next generation ministry.

3. Last year ABCORI delegates voted down a proposal to sell the Camp Canonicus property to Rhode Island’s Department of Environmental Management. How do you interpret that vote? Is there a mandate (any specific “do” or “don’t”) for the ABCORI Board in making decisions now?

Four key responses of a mandate came to the forefront for the table groups. The highest one had 11 groups share it, and it boils down to this—Ask the delegates! Specific ways this idea is named included

- “The delegates should make the decision with God’s will in mind”
- “It’s up to the churches”
- “Follow the will of the delegates”

The other three most named responses for mandates each had 8 table groups. They are--

- Don't sell the property
- Keep and use the Camp
- Communicate and inform the delegates

It seems clear that everyone is looking for a much more participatory process for delegate decision-making and that decisions about the property need to come from the delegates receiving lots of information and giving feedback as it moves forward. It also seems clear that participants want ABCORI to keep Camp Canonicus in order to provide quality ministry and accessibility for our churches.

4. We want to be good stewards and make wise decisions about the Camp Canonicus property. What would you hope for as best options?

These responses reflected more of the “this is how I want the camp utilized” vs. a sense of the best options for who stewards any or all of the property and the decisions which are most immediate.

Top 2 mentions

Traditional (past) programs	7
Alternate land uses	7
(lease unused land, subdivide, affordable housing, nature preserve or park)	

Next group with 3 or 4 mentions

Positive financial impact for ABCORI	4
Special events/weddings/community use	3
Work with Canonicus Ministries Inc	3
New camp/conference approaches	3

With one or 2 mentions

Choices that benefit churches	2
Find other partners	2
Gift to a Christian ministry	1

5. As critical future decisions are made, what is the best way to receive input and feedback from ABCORI's membership (delegates and church members?) How can we work on this together?

We had a lot of good ideas shared, with some we will be ready to make happen, thanks!
Ranking of these responses are—

- 15 Meet more than once a year
- 12 Utilize all means of electronic communication
- 8 Send regular Board updates, including church visits
- 6 Ask and listen
- 4 Worship/prayer gatherings
- 4 Surveys/feedback forms

And one table specifically asked us to share what we heard from one another at this Table Talk, so here it is!