

URGENT MEMORANDUM
FROM THE ROCHESTER SUMMIT STANDING RULES SUB-GROUP
REGARDING A PETITION TO THE GENERAL BOARD

The American Baptist Churches, USA is moving through a crisis. Some religious leaders on the far right, sensing that homosexuality is a “wedge” issue that can be exploited, have begun an effort to **purge the denomination of “heretical” churches and clergy** in favor of a denomination with a **“binding Confession of Faith.”** Even those who find common ground against the practice of homosexuality, however, should be extremely wary of changes to our polity which would make us a creedal denomination. Such amendments to our Bylaws, Standing Rules, Statements of Agreement, and Covenant of Relationships would permanently alter our denominational identity and leave us defenseless against additional doctrinal tests in the future.

WHAT IS PROPOSED? The Indiana/Kentucky Region Board has developed a proposal to change the Standing Rules and Bylaws of the ABC/USA in order to create a binding process for the dismissal of churches that do not comply with the Resolution on Homosexuality. This proposal would **make all local church dismissals binding (without appeal) and without the option to join another Region.** In the IN/KY proposal, any church desiring to voluntarily change its Regional affiliation would be restricted to the Region in which it is geographically located or one that is immediately contiguous. This proposal exploits division around homosexuality, but would create a doctrinal test that could be expanded in the future.

(The Indiana/Kentucky Region Board has succeeded in getting endorsement of 200 local churches from a minimum of five Regions in order to compel the General Board to consider their proposal. The proposal would also necessitate amendments to the Statements of Agreement and the Covenant of Relationships, and therefore cannot be accomplished before the 2007 Biennial at a minimum.)

It will be important that General Board members clarify that no changes in implementation of the Standing Rules can be made until these other documents are also amended.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

I. **Convince your church to sign the enclosed proposal for a responsible appeals process as an alternative to the IN/KY proposal, before a May 20 submission to the GBEC.** This proposed appeals process would guarantee that churches improperly dismissed by their Regions would continue to have the option of joining a Region based upon mutual agreement. The Bylaws stipulate an appeals process, however the General Board removed it after the church dismissals in 1999. In accordance with the Bylaws, 200 or more churches from at least 5 Regions can compel the General Board by petition to consider amendments to the Standing Rules.

Please do not make changes to the wording of the petition since all churches must be signers to a common petition. Additional word-smithing can be done by General Board Representatives once the amendments are under consideration.

II. **Make sure your Executive Minister understands your concerns, and talk to your General Board Representative(s) BEFORE their June meeting.**