**American Baptist Leaders Participate in White House Effort to Elevate Dialogue on Religious Pluralism**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (ABNS 12/17/15)—**Today, the Rev. A. Roy Medley, general secretary, American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), and Curtis Ramsey-Lucas, managing director, Resource Development, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), participated in a White House event on religious pluralism that included the launch of the “[Know Your Neighbor](http://knowyourneighbor.us/)” project.

Created by Gurwin Singh Ahuja, a young Sikh concerned about his own community’s challenges, Know Your Neighbor calls on all Americans to share their own beliefs as well as understand and respect those of others. The coalition is rooted in the concept that America’s strength stems from its diverse heritage.

“At the ‘Know Your Neighbor’ event on America’s tradition of religious pluralism, Dr. Robby Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute presented some interesting facts:  1) Greatest religious diversity is in the Northeast and the West Coast; 2) Most Americans do not have a close friend of another faith; 3)  Almost every survey question they posed around religion in America revealed a huge difference in world views between age groups. Older responders saw America as a Christian nation, while younger ones did not,” said Medley.

“As Baptist Christians in America today, it does not suffice to reference our history as champions of religious liberty. What is needed from us today is a commitment to living that core principle of our faith by reaching out to neighbors of other faiths and befriending them. My own testimony is that my friendships with Muslims have been critical in providing the lens of personal relationships through which to interpret so much of what is said about Islam and Muslims. I hope their friendship with me has done the same for them with regards to Christianity and Baptist Christians.”

Developed after extensive research, Know Your Neighbor seeks to protect and strengthen the fabric of one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world by acknowledging that strength is derived from understanding and collaborating with each other.

“Jesus calls us to love our neighbor,” said Ramsey-Lucas. “And, to love our neighbor, we must know our neighbor. This effort holds the promise of increased understanding and collaboration among people of diverse faith traditions. We are encouraged by today’s gathering and by the commitment of the Know Your Neighbor coalition to religious freedom for all people.”

Other Baptist leaders at the event included Brent Walker, BJC executive director, and Suzii Paynter, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship executive coordinator.

Walker emphasized the need to move past stereotypes and look out for our neighbors’ well-being. “Our religiously plural democracy and the religious freedom we enjoy depends not just on constitutional protection against governmental interference; it also depends on the willingness of American citizens on a personal level to understand and respect each other, including our differences,” Walker said. “The Know Your Neighbor initiative encourages all of us to do so, ensuring America remains true to its heritage and promise.”

Members of the Know Your Neighbor coalition are ACLU, BJC, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Center for Inquiry, Hindu American Seva Communities, Interfaith Alliance, Interfaith Youth Core, Islamic Networks Group, Muslim Advocates, National Council of Churches, National Sikh Campaign, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Religions for Peace USA, The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, and Sikh Coalition.

*The Baptist Joint Committee is a 78-year-old, Washington, D.C.-based religious liberty organization that works to defend and extend God-given religious liberty for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that religion must be freely exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government.* *ABCUSA is a member body of BJC, and ABHMS staff members serve on BJC’s board of directors.*

*American Baptist Home Mission Societies—the domestic mission arm of American Baptist Churches USA—ministers as the caring heart and serving hands of Jesus Christ across the United States and Puerto Rico through a multitude of initiatives that focus on discipleship, community and justice.*

*American Baptist Churches is one of the most diverse Christian denominations today, with over 5,200 local congregations comprised of 1.3 million members, across the United States and Puerto Rico, all engaged in God’s mission around the world.*