**American Baptist Home Mission Societies Affirms Solidarity with Charleston Church**

**OVERLAND PARK, KS (ABNS 6/28/15)—**During its June 22-24 meeting, the Board of Directors of American Baptist Home Mission Societies approved by common consent a letter of sympathy and solidarity to Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston S.C., along with a gift of $9,000 for distribution to the families of the nine victims so senselessly murdered in the church while gathered to pray and study the Bible.

Board President the Rev. Dr. Clifford I. Johnson, pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church, Wilmington, Del., said, “We are the family of God. When one member of the family hurts, we all hurt. As American Baptist Home Mission Societies, we have a commitment to social justice and to caring, and we are bearing witness to that with this action.”

The letter shares the Home Mission Societies’ prophetic ministry commitment to address the ruthlessness of racism: “One step in this journey is our support of efforts toward removing the Confederate flag from flying over the South Carolina state capitol. It is time for the divisive flag to come down, signaling South Carolina’s commitment to reconciliation and no longer providing state sanctions of racial hostility and estrangement.”

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth R. Board, pastor, Pilgrim Baptist Church, Rockford, Ill., said, “We cannot sit on the sidelines,” and members agreed to coordinate a ministry of presence at the state capital when removal of the Confederate flag is considered.

“We are thinking about a great tragedy that has struck the heart and soul of all who claim Jesus Christ,” said the Rev. Kevin “Scotty” Robinson, pastor, Millcreek Baptist Church, La Porte, Ind., leading the board in prayer. “We think of the nine victims as they are resting in peace with you, God. We pray that right now our love and concern will reach all the way down to Charleston and surround the church and those who have lost loved ones. May our efforts speak to them in their darkest hours.”

In his report to the board, Executive Director Dr. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III announced that— on the heels of the Charleston massacre—he is working with the New Baptist Covenant on an initiative that focuses on dealing with race in America by asking Baptist churches across the country to engage in conversations about racism on Sunday, July 5, followed by the development of covenants of action.

In other business, the board unanimously voted to commission the Rev. J. Phillip Miller-Evans and the Rev. Janel Miller-Evans as American Baptist home missionaries. The couple serves at the Micah Center, Pinellas County, Fla., a community-based nonprofit ministry that serves the underemployed through programs providing education and empowerment. Previously commissioned by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, these lifelong American Baptists sought commissioning by their denominational family as well. The couple’s work at the Micah Center is based on a call to “speak for those who cannot speak for themselves” and open doors for those who find most closed to them.

*American Baptist Home Mission Societies—the domestic mission arm of American Baptist Churches—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 more than 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.*