

God calls believers to various ministries according to their gifts. Some are called to teach; some to counsel and comfort. And some are called to ordained ministry.

The Black Church

The African American Church has a long and rich history. From the early eighteenth century to the new millennium, the Black Church has been the touchstone for African American people from cradle to grave. One of the most important ministries undertaken by a congregation is the search for ministerial leadership. Members who serve on a search committee have accepted a daunting, but ultimately fulfilling, responsibility.

American Baptist Personnel Services (ABPS) stands ready to assist ministerial leadership search committees.

Every year more than 500 American Baptist churches seek a pastor or other ministerial staff. ABPS is a full-service resource ready to assist churches in their search. The ABPS mission is to provide search committees with Profiles of trained, professional men and women who are seeking new places to serve God.

The Profiles provided by ABPS are not only numerous (at least 6,000), but diverse. It is this diversity that makes ABPS an excellent resource for all churches that are affiliated with American Baptist Churches USA (ABC USA).



"I believe the unique services of ABPS are to churches as Eli was to the soon-to-be prophet Samuel," says the Rev. Dr. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III, executive director of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA.

"Without Eli's mediation and sensitivity, Samuel would not really have listened to the Voice that called to him in the night."

Dr. Wright-Riggins describes ABPS as "a Spirit-driven service that positions search committees to say, 'Speak Lord, for your servants are listening.'"



Some African American churches affiliated with ABC USA have not taken full advantage of the many services provided by ABPS in their search for church leadership. According to the Rev. Dr. Hillary Gaston Sr., president of New York Theological Seminary, "They do themselves a great injustice."

Dr. Gaston speaks from personal experience. He was a seminarian, holding down a job as a U.S. federal agent in the postal system in North Carolina, when ABPS staff visited his seminary. He provided information for a Profile and was subsequently called by a church. It was an important first step in his continuing ministry.

Over the years, Dr. Gaston's experience and relationship with ABPS have led him to make this observation: "The benefits of using ABPS resources are structure, accuracy, job history, educational background, and the Profile. With this information, the search committee will find the leadership they're looking for."



The faithful match between candidate and church requires a thoughtful, thorough process to avoid potential pitfalls along the way.

ABPS Resources

The following resources enable a church to identify more clearly its mission and leadership needs.

➤ **ABPS Profiles**—"Who is the candidate? What are his or her qualifications?"

ABPS strongly encourages all who are called to serve God in an American Baptist-recognized ministry to enroll with ABPS and complete the ABPS Questionnaire. Information from the Questionnaire is stored in a computer-based data storage and retrieval system that produces ABPS personnel Profiles.

The ABPS Profile is the basic document used in the American Baptist selection process to introduce prospective leaders to search committees and to give a

clear, precise snapshots of candidates. Profiles reveal more than educational and employment background. A search committee also can read the candidate's personal testimonies regarding his or her belief system, style of management, pastoral care approach and more.

This is advantageous to the candidate as well to as the search committee, as the Rev. Dr. David Mitchell can attest: "I felt very good about the process. I was able to give information directly to ABPS and receive information directly from ABPS. I didn't have to depend on who I knew."



This fact was particularly important to Dr. Mitchell, because at the time he was a Navy chaplain stationed in Japan—a world away from "the network." After enrolling in the ABPS-sponsored program, he was contacted a number of times by search committees who had received his ABPS Profile and felt he was a good match. Dr. Mitchell now serves as pastor of the Congdon Street Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island.

➤ **Ministry Opportunities Listing**—"We're looking for a pastor; how can we get the word out?"

The Ministry Opportunities Listing (MOL) is a monthly publication of ministry opportunities within ABC USA that are reported by American Baptist regions and other organizations. The listing provides information about the church or organization and the community in which each ministry opportunity is located.

MOL is an excellent tool for churches seeking pastors or other church staff. If your church is seeking a ministerial leader, ask your area minister or regional executive minister to list the open position in MOL. Currently MOL reports more than half of the known vacancies in American Baptist churches that have at least 100 resident members, and also lists churches of smaller membership size.

Ministers can subscribe to MOL by being listed in the Professional Registry of ABC USA, by having a current ABPS Profile, or by obtaining sponsorship from a regional executive minister. If you have questions, ABPS staff are ready to help. Contact us at 800-392-2343 or mol@abc-usa.org.

➤ **Church Reflections**—"What is our church's mission? What are our needs?"

A pastoral search committee's goal is to present a pastoral candidate to the congregation. However, before the committee can do that, it must first examine the church's life to determine where the congregation has been, where they are now, and where they believe God is calling them to go.

Working in partnership with American Baptist region staff, search committees can use *Church Reflections* to better understand their church and its mission by looking at the church's life, including Sunday school, mission involvement, style of leadership, ministry priorities, visions and goals, and much more. This inward look is critical to the task of calling the right pastor to lead your church through the years to come.

➤ **Calling an American Baptist Minister**—"How does our committee discern God's leading?"

A valuable resource to help in the important task of selecting a pastor, *Calling an American Baptist Minister* emphasizes the importance of prayerful deliberation by the committee and encourages the committee to ask for the prayers of the congregation.

The handbook walks the pastoral search committee through each of the stages of the process, beginning with making early contact with your regional executive minister or area minister, and ending with the welcoming of your new minister and his or her family. Each stage is clear and concise and based upon shared experiences of other churches.



A candid observation from the Rev. Dr. Dennis E. Norris, regional executive minister of the Cleveland Baptist Association, puts it succinctly—"More African-American churches that are members of American Baptist Churches USA should use the ABPS pastoral search process in calling a pastor."

Dr. Norris says it has been his experience that churches that use ABPS in their search are more satisfied with the ministers they call to serve. "From beginning to end," Dr. Norris notes, "the ABPS process of calling a pastor is complete."

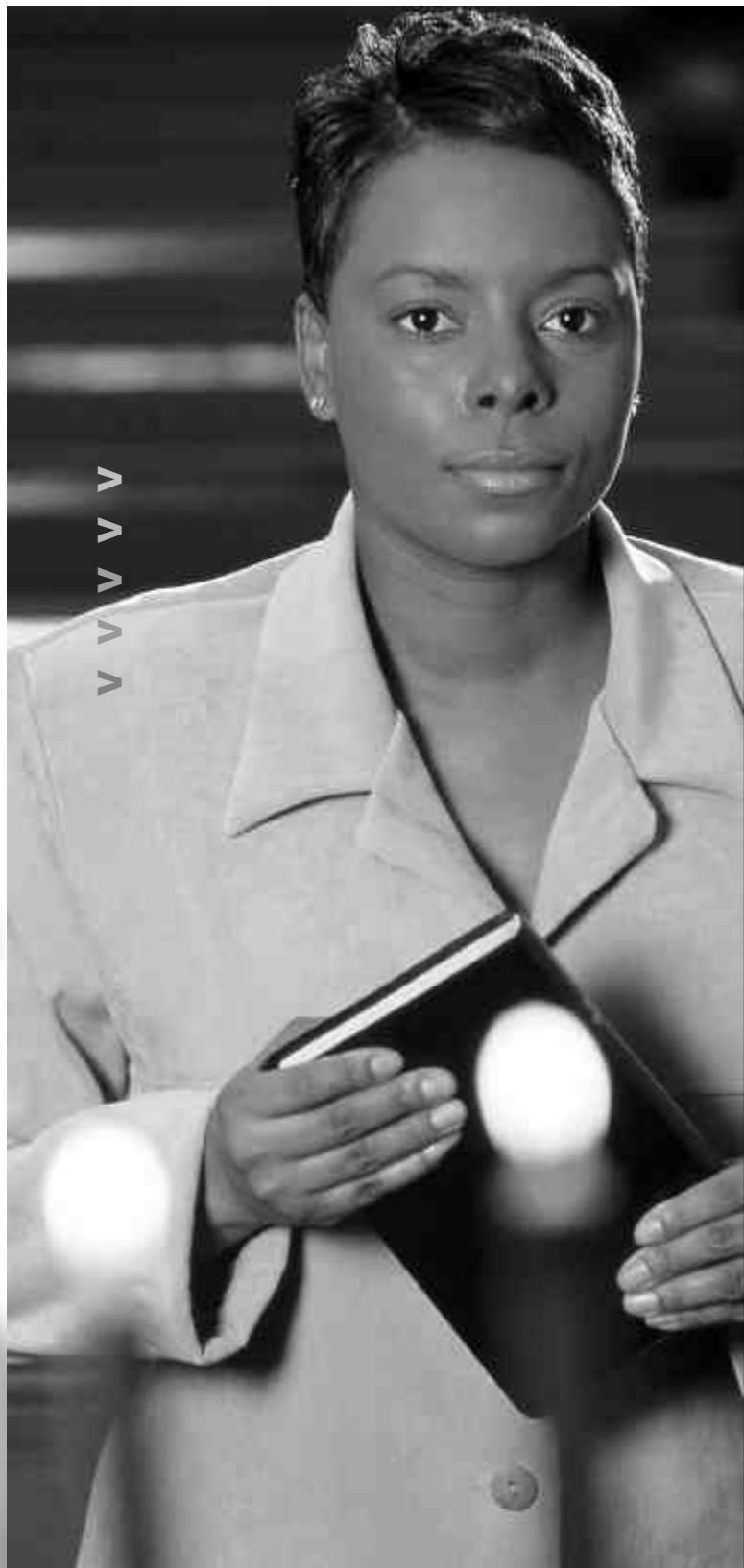
By using the materials mentioned in this brochure, a search committee is more likely to choose the candidate most suited to the church's needs. As the Rev.



Muriel L. Johnson, area minister of American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers, explains, "It's not about bad pastors or bad churches. It's about bad matches." The Rev. Johnson has been an area minister in her region since 1998.

When churches ask her about the pastoral search procedure she tells them, "ABPS can connect search committees with qualified American Baptist pastors from all over the country."

When your church embarks upon the wonderful journey of seeking the person God has chosen to lead you, American Baptist Personnel Services stands ready to travel with you. We are well prepared to assist you in finding ministerial leaders who will meet your congregation's specific needs.



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"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

MATTHEW 28:19-20

When **African American** churches **seek** the ministers **God** has called to lead them, **American Baptist Personnel Services can help.**

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