

## **History of American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest, and Hawaii**

American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest and Hawaii (ABCOFLASH), has been a foundational force in establishing and supporting diverse Baptist congregations across the Los Angeles area since the early 20th century. The region has been known by 3 names since its inception, reflecting the changes that have taken place to this date:

- Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society
- American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles
- American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest, and Hawaii

### **Founding and Early Role**

The Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society was founded in 1906 by 10 churches. It served as a primary organizing body for new Baptist missions and churches in the burgeoning Western city, when its population was only 200,000. Its purpose included,

- Church Planting: In 1910, it helped organize the Baptist Church of Los Angeles (later South Park Baptist Church).
- Leadership support and development: Rev. F. D. Finn of the LABCMS served as the interim pastor for many of these fledgling congregations until permanent leadership could be secured.
- Financial & Planning Support: The Society provided critical assistance with purchasing land, filing articles of incorporation, and funding building projects for new churches, such as Atherton Baptist Church and Torrance First Baptist Church.
- Outreach to Diverse Communities: One of the Society's most significant historical contributions was its proactive outreach to immigrant and minority populations.
  - Japanese-American Ministry: Starting in 1914, LABCMS established mission stations in areas with high concentrations of Japanese Americans, including:
    - Moneta (Gardena) in 1914.
    - Terminal Island in 1917.
    - Boyle Heights in 1925 (which became the Los Angeles Japanese Baptist Church, which has since birthed Evergreen Baptist Church).
  - Latino Ministry: In 1921, LABCMS hosted the first classes of the Spanish American Baptist Seminary in its Christian Center to train Spanish-speaking pastors.
  - African-American Support: The Society contributed over \$80,000 toward the building of the historic Second Baptist Church in South LA, which was designed by famed architect Paul R. Williams.

### **World War II**

**Wartime Leadership:** During the internment of Japanese Americans, Executive Minister Dr. Ralph Mayberry famously traveled to internment camps to coordinate the ordination of leaders like Rev. Paul Nagano to maintain the spiritual life of displaced congregations.

## **Post-WWII Expansion**

Following World War II, the Society shifted focus toward the rapidly growing suburbs.

San Fernando Valley: Seeing the population boom, LABCMS purchased property and launched the First Baptist Church of Woodland Hills in 1950.

### **Other Ministries**

Beyond church planting, the Society founded educational institutions, Camping ministries and ministries in Higher Education:

- Los Angeles Baptist High School (LAB): Founded in 1962 in North Hills to provide Christian college preparatory education. It remained under the Society's (later ABC Los Angeles) ownership until it was determined that it was no longer a primary management focus for the Region (ABC Los Angeles). In 2012, it was sold to a ministry that would continue college preparatory as its main activity.
- Camping Ministry. Canyon Meadows, an American Baptist Conference and Camping facility in the Lake Hughes Angeles National Forest area, was owned and operated by LABCMS for many years. Another site called Frasier Woods was also operated for camping ministry.
- Campus Ministries at USC (1927-2008) and UCLA (1927-1995).

## **Expansion of Region and Name Change**

In 2006, the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest Region withdrew from their covenant with the other ABC regions and national entities. A portion of the congregations formerly affiliated with ABCPSW decided to remain ABC and formed their own ABC association of churches. This new association eventually joined the LA Region, at which time the LA region changed its name to American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest, and Hawaii (ABCOFLASH).

## **American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest and Hawaii**

ABCOFLASH has continued to minister to churches and support ministries in the geographic regions listed in its title, but has grown to plant and welcome churches in other geographic regions and beyond. Youth ministry continues to be strong, as well as opportunities for pastoral leadership development in the ethnically and culturally diverse region. The regional office is now located at the First Baptist Church of Glendale, CA.