

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On Tuesday, September 20, 2005, the following statement was issued to the media by Rev. Jerrod H. Huguenot, on behalf of the board of directors for the Roger Williams Fellowship, a longtime American Baptist interest group:

The Roger Williams Fellowship (RWF) has provided a historic and ongoing voice for Baptist principles and freedoms held dear within the American Baptist Churches/USA and in the larger Baptist family. The RWF board regrets the decision taken by the ABC/PSW Region to withdraw from fellowship with our denomination.

American Baptists have historically lived in a "big tent" in which our common commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord has allowed us to worship and serve together despite our theological and cultural differences. Our life together has been richer because of this diversity.

The Roger Williams Fellowship board regrets that the PSW regional board and staff wishes to draw divisive lines rather than preserve fellowship and continue to work out a common life. Historic Baptist principles such as local church autonomy, the priesthood of all believers, and the freedom of Christian conscience are rarely mentioned among those who are more inclined toward separation than unity in our denomination. If a stated position on human sexuality is sufficient cause to divide our fellowship, where do we stop? Baptists are divided about matters of biblical interpretation, such as the relating of the Bible to economic concern as well as the role of women in leadership. Shall we divide over these issues as well?

We join with the National Executive Council and the Executive Committee of the General Board of the American Baptist Churches/USA in expressing deep sorrow and regret for the actions taken by the PSW board. We strongly commend the vision of General Secretary A. Roy Medley, who calls American Baptists away from partisan alignments and toward a common confession of being a denomination "Centered in Christ." We affirm a return to the polity that makes the ABC/USA a strong and richly diverse denomination.