



## Ministers Council Newsletter

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

June 2014

---

### From the Desk of the Executive Director

*On May 17, 2014, I had the privilege of serving as the Commencement Speaker for American Baptist Seminary of the West. For this month's newsletter, I thought that I would share my remarks with you, in their entirety. I hope you enjoy.*



AMERICAN BAPTIST  
SEMINARY OF THE WEST

I am here today to share a word with you on this beautiful afternoon, but my job is made all the more difficult because I am...discouraged. That's right, I'm discouraged.

Here I am at the ABSW Commencement - this is supposed to be the pinnacle of your seminary experience, a defining moment, what you have spent the last several years - your blood, your sweat, your tears, your prayers working to complete, this is supposed to be like the cherry on top, but I'm here as your speaker admittedly discouraged.

And I'm sure you're thinking, "Well, what's up with that?" But allow me to explain myself. I'm discouraged because I worry and fear that we failed you - you the graduating class. I mean think about it:

You are here because you have completed your studies to achieve your Master of Divinity, Master of Community Leadership, or even Doctor of Ministry degree. Your education has prepared you to serve the church - maybe as pastor, or associate, maybe in Christian Education, or Mission Leadership. And in your heart of hearts, you hoped to serve a nice suburban church in a small community, maybe with about 150 people. Well guess what? Those churches don't exist - or increasingly they don't. And even if they do, they can't afford full time staff.

Maybe you wanted to serve in urban ministry. You felt called to serve an urban church in the city. Maybe you felt called to lead a city mission. Maybe you hoped to minister in a non profit organization that supports the poor and underserved. Well guess what? Those churches are in decline, those mission organizations can't afford staff, and those non-profit organizations; they don't have any money.

And then the overwhelming majority of you as graduates are women. Oh my sisters, I hate to say it, but churches aren't really looking for us. For many of us, the phone does not ring. And if it does, it's a call from someone who wants you to speak on Women's Day, or it's a call from someone who wants you to "speak" for \$100 when the standard honorarium is \$300, or it's a call from a church that's on its last legs and with its last gasp is calling you in hopes that you will serve.

And I haven't even gotten to the finances. Many of you are leaving seminary with thousands of dollars of debt. And if you are fortunate enough to receive a call, the majority of you will not be paid enough to offset and pay back the debt that you have amassed.

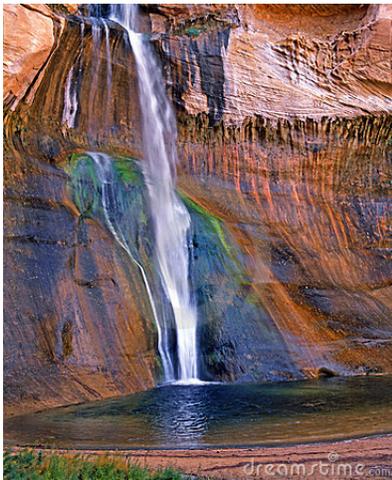
So yes, I am discouraged. And the sad truth of the matter is that after my tirade, I would imagine that you are discouraged too. We've been prepared for assignments that do not exist. That full time pastorate is increasingly moving to extinction as churches continue to face decline.

We are filled with knowledge for which there is little application. Oh sure, I'm glad that I learned of Origen and Augustine, Eusebius, and Tertullian, but truth be told, I've yet to meet anyone outside of my Systematic Theology courses who has ever cared anything about what any of these people said.

We are members of the most overeducated and yet least paid professions in the country. We've amassed more education than medical doctors, psychologists, even lawyers, and yet we command a starting salary that's sadly equivalent to what is being made by kids who have received their high school diploma.

These are the realities that discourage us. These are the realities that try our hearts and souls. These are the realities that make us question our call and sometimes question our God.

Ah, but if we could only step back. If we could take some time to reflect, we might start to see some new patterns emerge.



Think about it. God told us not to remember the former things or to consider the things of old. God said, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" God says, "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." These words are as relevant today as they were when first inspired. I believe that God is truly saying them in our midst. See there's a reason why the "traditional" pastoral roles of the past are decreasingly able to be found. There is a reason that the standard roles in urban and suburban churches aren't there and that the non profits are being limited in their tried and true approaches. God has a new plan and a new way for us to do ministry. God has a new notion about how the gospel is to be forwarded. God has something else for us to do. And I am convinced that as we are discerning and seeking of that new way, God will faithfully reveal his plan to us. Then more people will come to know our God. Then more people will come to believe in our God. Then more people will be a part of the coming kingdom of our God.

But we need to understand that the new ways will not fit into the old paradigms, just as new wine doesn't fit in the old wine skins. We need women and men with a burning desire to discern God's plan. We need women and men with a hunger and willingness to blaze new trails in the wilderness. We need women and men who will fearlessly and boldly step forward saying, "Here am I send me!" You are those men and women. You are those leaders. You are the ones who won't see the limits. You are the ones who will see the possibilities. You are the ones who can see the potential. You are the ones who will lead us into new ways of ministry, new ways of mission, new ways of service and new ways of being.

And because God is doing a new thing, he is extending a new call. I remember when I first acknowledged my call into ministry. Almost from the moment that I acknowledged that call, I felt compelled that I would be a pastor to pastors. Yes, I was sure that God was calling me to be a pastor to pastors. But I also remember the ambivalence I felt in response to that call, because I remember thinking, "What job is that? Is there even such a thing as a pastor to pastors?" After all, I am a Baptist - we don't have bishops and such hierarchy - or at least not supposedly - and in that regard, I found myself sort of doubting my call, thinking, "God can't be calling me to that because that job that doesn't even exist." It didn't make sense.

Well, one day, I was in my office - I had yet to surrender my corporate job even though I was in seminary, because after all I was the Chief Information Officer of an Energy Services Company. It pays a little better than ministry... My phone rang. It was a woman who had received my name and contact information from a friend. She was relocating to the Boston area and reached out to me to make connection. Interested in why she was coming to the area, I asked, "So, what do you do? What is bringing you to Massachusetts?" She said, "Well, the best way to describe my job is that I'm a pastor to pastors."

Well I tell you, I actually dropped the phone. I couldn't believe it. It was as if I was hearing God say, "Why would I call you to something that doesn't exist?"

That might be your story today - to what is God calling you? What new endeavor, what new ministry, what new mission field is God making space for which you will fill? You see, God gave me a heart and a burden for clergy recognizing that so many of us are so busy ministering to others that we do not recognize the need to be ministered to ourselves. And so this is what God has called me to do and I'll tell you, when I first felt that tug, I was certain that there was no such job. But God can make a way out of no way. God can make streams in the desert. God can make pathways through what is impassable. God can exalt the valleys. God can level the mountains. God can do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or imagine by the power that works in us. Step out in your call and trust God to fulfill that call in you.

And really that's my third point. You see, it has not yet been revealed what you will be. Your ministry may not look like mine. Your experiences won't be just like mine. Your call is not exactly like mine. But that is a good thing because God is doing a new thing. And while you may not know what it's going to look like, and while you may not be sure about how you will proceed, you may not even know where you will go or what you will do, I know that we serve a God of increase. I know that we serve a God of addition and multiplication. I know that what is to be will be greater than what has been. And while it may not yet be revealed, I believe that it's going to be greater. I believe that it's going to be better. I believe it's going to be glorious. Why because I believe in you.



So let me tell you something - you may not be certain of the application of your degree, you may not know where you will go from here, you may have debt up to your eyeballs, but trust God's call on your life, because if God brought you to it, then he will bring you through it.

You may feel a call for a role that you've never heard of before, but be emboldened by simply saying, "I'll go where you want me to go and I'll do what you want me to do."

You see nothing but decline in your midst, but trust that you're part of remnant, you are like Gideon's winnowed forces, you have been called for such a time as this and God is about to do a new thing in you because you're open to receiving it and open to believing it.

Go from this place with the boldness of God. Go from this place with the courage of your conviction. Go from this place with the power of the Holy Spirit. Go from this place with the love of Jesus Christ. Go with a full heart. Go and know that I am no longer discouraged for when I look at you by the grace of God, I can only be encouraged.

## Don't Miss Your Opportunity for a \$50 Visa Gift Card

**Exclusive Offer!**

**Save Money & Earn Rewards with...  
The Card that Gives to Global Mission**

**When you are approved...**

<b>The Ministers Council gets</b> <b>\$50</b>	<b>International Ministries gets</b> <b>\$50</b>	<b>YOU get</b> <b>\$50</b>
--	---	-------------------------------



This great offer from our partner, the Christian Community Credit Union (CCCU), expires on June 30. Until June 30<sup>th</sup>, the CCCU will give a **\$50 Visa Gift Card to those who get an IM credit card using promo code 9001**. Upon application acceptance, International Ministries gets \$50; the Ministers Council gets \$50; and you get a \$50 Visa Gift Card. That is a win, win, win! Apply today.

Go to the Ministers Council website at [www.ministerscouncil.com](http://www.ministerscouncil.com) and click on the exclusive offer image. Or simply click <https://www.mycccu.com/tmc?allmob=1> and apply today!



## Remembering Ronny

On May 28, 2014, the Lord called home his precious daughter, Rev. Veronica "Ronny" Lainer. She was 95 years old. Like so many of you, I too have Ronny stories. How could I not? She touched so many lives.

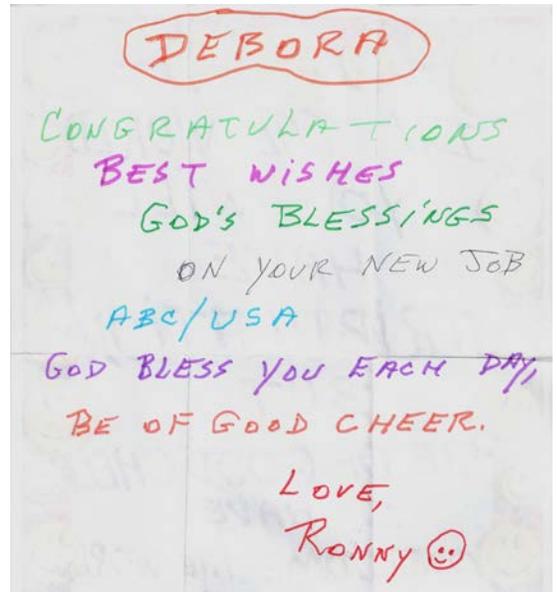
I was newly ordained and preparing to be installed as the 20<sup>th</sup> pastor of the First Baptist Church in Needham, MA. The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts needed someone to come and bring greetings and congratulations to this new "marriage" of pastor and people. I could not have been happier to know that it was Ronny who volunteered to come and represent the region at my installation. She was as excited for me as she could be. So much of my installation service was an euphoric blur, but I remember Ronny – the genuine joy that she expressed as she acknowledged the historic first of my calling to this amazing church. Her remarks were a highlight.

Over the years and every time that I would see her, Ronny would grab my hands and gush, "Oh Debora, you just don't know how good God is." She was certain that others were being left out

because God was blessing her so richly. I would often see her at the Boston Baptist Social Union gatherings when I had the occasion to be the guest pastor bringing the invocation or benediction. The irony was that these gatherings were for Baptist laymen only, but no one would dare tell Ronny that she could not come. She would show up each month just as bubbly and effervescent as ever. Even when she was diagnosed with cancer, she continued to come to the monthly dinner gatherings. She would praise God for the fact that she was experiencing no pain even without treatment. When I asked Ronny why she opted not to go through chemotherapy, she said, "God has been with me all these years. There is no reason to doubt him now."

Of all the people who contacted me to congratulate me on my call to the Ministers Council, Ronny was among the first. From the handwritten envelope, I pulled this personal note. A crisp one dollar bill fell from the letter. Tears sprung to my eyes when I opened the letter. Tears come even now as I remember.

But truly the tears are selfish because as Ronny would often quote "In this world you will have tribulation, but **Be Of Good Cheer**, I have overcome the world (John 16:33). How can we do anything less than be of good cheer when we remember Ronny? Trusting in God's promises, I believe that Ronny is of good cheer in the arms of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, even as we remember her.



## Register Now for the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting – August 11-14, 2014 at Green Lake Conference Center, Green Lake, WI

Registration is open for the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting. The gathering will provide you with the time and space to learn of the work of the Ministers Council, while enjoying the fellowship, spiritual renewal, and opportunities for learning in the company of colleagues.



Our gathering will feature the Rev. Dr. Molly Marshall, President of and Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. We will also offer workshops led by Rev. Margaret Marcuson on Leadership, Rev. Betty Wright-Riggins on Spiritual Direction, Rev. Denise Henderson on Clergy Health, Rev. Dr. Perry Hopper on Planning for Retirement and Rev. Perkin Simpson on Financial Wellness.

Don't miss this opportunity to register and attend the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting. To register for the **Ministers Council Senate/Annual Meeting 2014**, please use the following link: <http://www.abc-usa.org/coordinatedcalendar/event-registration/> . Click "Register Now" located next to the **Ministers Council Senate/Annual Meeting**.

## The Joy of Membership

No longer serving a church in direct pastoral ministry, I had gotten out of the habit of regular visits to the hospital to call upon "the sick and shut-in." Yet, serving an older congregation as I did, I had a number of members who were hospitalized or in nursing homes and as such, I had a regular visitation ministry all around the greater Boston area as I cared for my congregation. In my current capacity, I do not find myself making those same hospital visits. However, as clergy know, you never really get out of practice and when a call comes to visit, you go.

I found myself in Boston Medical Center visiting a young man who was in the ICU. After a time of scripture reading and prayer, I prepared to take my leave and find my way back to the hospital parking lot. Well, if you live in Boston, or any major metropolitan area for that matter, you know that parking is not a trivial issue. The cost of parking can really set you back. So I decided to ask at the information desk whether they provide discounted parking for clergy. As one who does not wear a collar or carry some ostentatious, finger thumping Bible, the attendant looked at me a bit dubiously and asked whether I had any identification that would identify me as clergy. I was almost giddy when I pulled out my Ministers Council identification card. The attendant thanked me and put a special sticker on my parking ticket. When I went to pay my ticket, believing that I had received a discount, I found that my parking fee had been waived. I don't have to carry an American Express Card to know that *Membership Has It's Benefits*.

Am I am member of the Ministers Council because I can get discounted parking during hospital visits? Of course not! But I recognize the benefits of being a part of a covenanting collegial organization that comes together for fellowship, spiritual deepening, and to learn in community. I recognize the benefits of the strength that we have as a body of clergy when we advocate for one another. I recognize the leverage that we have whereby our power paves the way and makes possible the partnerships that serve to equip us and make us better in ministry. And recognizing these tremendous benefits, I am as joyous about my membership as I was to find that my parking fees had been waived.

You too can join the Ministers Council and experience this joy. Go to [www.ministerscouncil.com](http://www.ministerscouncil.com) and click on the "Subscribe Here" button. Don't miss out. Membership does have its benefits.



## Do you have events coming up in your regions?

Share the word and let others know of the good work that you are doing. Send email announcements to Debora Jackson at [Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org](mailto:Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org). We will do our best to include your events in upcoming announcements through the Ministers Council.



## Together in Ministry – Current Status

Some of the most heartening correspondences come from clergy who remember the blessings that they have received from the Ministers Council Together in Ministry program. One such recent correspondence came from a retired pastor who was ordained forty years ago in 1974. She wrote saying, “Enclosed find my “Thanksgiving Offering” for Together in Ministry.” She acknowledged how she had benefited several times from Together in Ministry, how she had been a senator representing her local constituent council, and how she has had the opportunity to attend many gathering. Because of these benefits, she wanted to offer her thanks. How awesome is that?

I feel the same way. I so benefit when I come together with my ministerial colleagues. I am blessed as we pray together. I learn when we train together. These are all of the benefits from Together in Ministry. The numbers keep ticking up as more and more of our colleagues remember the blessings and then share their “Thanksgiving Offerings” with us. The numbers do not have to be large. You have heard me say before that if each of the individuals who have benefited from the Together in Ministry program would give \$11 for each year of the campaign, \$33 in total, we would reach our campaign goal. Will you send in your offering?

To date, our cash gifts and pledges total \$ 284,213.05. Our in-kind contributions total \$70,519.20. Our overall total is \$354,732.25. Send in your offering and help us to meet our goal of extending ministerial excellence through the continuation of clergy peer groups for decades to come. Make your tax-deductible donations securely and electronically by going to <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/> and click on the Donate button. Make your Thanksgiving Offering today.

## WIM ALT Mentoring experiment – Last call to participate in the survey!

Statistics, observation and experience all tell us that many women entering the Ministry do so without the support of mentors. And yet many women who have been called to senior or solo positions cite the support of a mentor as being a critical part of their journey. Recognizing the barriers that continue to exist for women called to ministry and desiring to find a way through the ordination and call process, the Women in Ministry Action Learning Team (WIM ALT) in partnership with American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) is launching an experiment to invite “seasoned” women pastors (5-10 years or more) to become mentors to those women who are in their first five years of ministry and/or on the ordination track.

Our ultimate goal is to develop a mentor network so that women called to ministry are able to fully utilize their gifts and fully live out their call. Rev. Dr. A. Paulette Birchett who received her Doctorate in Ministry after completing a project on mentoring and who is a member of the WIM ALT will be leading this experiment.

**If you would like to participate either as a mentor or a “mentee” please complete the following survey: (click on the link below...)**

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/wimaltmentorshpsurvey>**

## **“A Time of Grace: Aging and Faith” A Virtual Mission Encounter for Women from AB Women’s Ministries**

“A Time of Grace,” September 29-October 3, 2014, is a virtual mission encounter for women offering the opportunity for participants to explore issues of aging from the perspective of faith. Themes and activities will offer the opportunity for those who are of mature age themselves to experience this season of their lives with grace and purpose; those who are experiencing the aging of their loved ones will find encouragement and increased awareness of how to be in relationship as needs change over time. Daily activities will address the spiritual side of aging, physical issues and changing needs, legal concerns, family relationships, how seniors may engage in needed ministries, and how congregations can reach out to seniors in special ways.

Special guests for “A Time of Grace” include Rev. Jennifer C. Streeter, chaplain at the Fairport Baptist Homes in Rochester, New York; Rev. Randy Frederikson, chaplain at Trail Ridge Retirement Community, an American Baptist Homes of the Midwest facility in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Mr. Stacey Lucich, an estate planning attorney in Twin Falls, Idaho; and the Rev. Dr. Bobby Joe Saucer from Decatur, Georgia, author of The Judson Press title *Our Help in Ages Past: The Black Church’s Ministry among the Elderly*.

Virtual mission encounters are a way for women to explore mission topics more deeply while still being able to attend to their responsibilities at work, home, church, or in their communities. Suggested activities to explore each day’s focus are emailed to participants: each participant determines how many activities she may have time to do within her daily schedule. Activities may include such things as reading the newspaper, exploring websites, reading and responding to blog posts, taking prayer walks, researching a topic of interest further, listening to audio files or watching videos, and so forth. Every evening includes a conference call featuring a special guest with particular expertise or stories to share on the daily theme; participants may attend as many or as few conference calls as their schedule and interest allow.

For more information, speaker bios, and online registration, visit [www.abwministries.org/vme](http://www.abwministries.org/vme). Spread the word in your congregation about this excellent opportunity to deepen their understanding of God at work in all seasons of life!

## **“Boot Camp - 2014”**

For Grades 7th – 12th - July 25th & 26th  
Friday 5:00 PM till Saturday 6:00 PM

Obstacle Course, Rope Rappel, MRE Lunch, Breakfast, Round Robin Training, Sleepover in a tent, Chicken BBQ

Using military style training methods and biblical truth adult mentors offer an awesome and fun weekend of leadership training and team building where youth will learn how to live out their faith in Jesus Christ in the world today.

Enrollment is limited to the first 72 registrants so, preregistration is highly recommended.



Please contact First Baptist Brookfield for registration forms or more information at 315-899-6249.

**FREE! FREE! FREE!**

**First Baptist Brookfield  
P.O. Box 6  
Brookfield, NY 13314**

## Attention All Women:

Are you interested in finding time in your busy life to listen to God and to nurture your soul? If yes, this Special Spiritual Retreat Day has been designed just for you.

Please Join the Women at the Oak Lawn Community Baptist Church for a retreat on:

### **“Cultivating Soul Care in the Busyness of Our Lives”**

The retreat will offer experiential opportunities for exploring spiritual disciplines for “Remembering, Reframing and Refreshing” our souls. The focus will be on soul care and on intentionally setting aside time for listening to God for discernment and direction. We will also reflect on women in the Bible and who listened for God’s Word and direction.

Retreat Leader: Rev. Rosalie Norman-McNaney, Spiritual Director, Hospice Chaplain, former RI pastor, ABCORI Consultant and ABHMS–ABC-USA staff. Rev. Rosalie is also the one of the co-editors of the newly published book “Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color” which will be available for purchase and signing.

**Date: Saturday June 14, 2014**

**Time: 9:00 am- 3:00 pm**

**Place: Oak Lawn Community Church  
229 Wilbur Avenue  
Cranston RI, 02921-1016**

RSVP by Tuesday, June 3, 2014 by calling (OLCBC Office- 401-944-0864)  
Rev. Barbara Da Costa – Pastor

## Our Day at a Glance

### **AM**

9:00 -9:30: Meet and Greet- Registration and Coffee

9:30- 10:45: Retreat Session I.

Break

11:00-12:15-Retreat Session II

### **PM**

12:30 - 1:20 – Lunch & Book signing - “Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color”

1:30 - 2:30 – Retreat Session III

2:40 - 3:15 – Anointing and Closing Ceremony

***A Free Will Offering will be taken***

***We look forward to sharing in the blessings of the day with you***

## Upcoming Events

- Hampton University Ministers’ Conference – 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference “Honoring Our Past, Anticipating our Future. June 1-6, 2014, Hampton, VA. ABCUSA will host a reception: 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Reception for American Baptist Attendees, “United in Mission: Our Vision of Unity,” Wednesday, June 4, 2014 9:30 PM – 10:30 PM. Embassy Suites at Hampton Roads Conference Center, Conference Room “A”. Please join us!
- Christian Leadership Institute Fellowship in Jerusalem, July 14-25, 2014.

- The Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting – This year's **Ministers Council gathering will be open to all ministerial leaders**. August 11-14, 2014, at Green Lake, WI. Register at <http://www.abc-usa.org/coordinatedcalendar/event-registration/>.

### **Ministers Council Contact Information**

Web: [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org)  
Mail: The Ministers Council  
PO Box 851  
Valley Forge PA 19482-0851  
Phone: 1-800-222-3872, extension 2334 (Joyce Moon), 2334 (Rev. Debora Jackson, DMin)  
FAX: 610/768-2066