

*Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director*

*December 2014*



### From the Desk of the Executive Director

How can it already be December? Wasn't it just yesterday that we were saying "Happy New Year?" People always said that time moves by more quickly as we age. I must have reached that wizened age, because time is just speeding by. And while age perhaps plays a role in the flight of time, I would also contend that the nature of our work is a contributor as well.

What do I mean? Well, maybe you start your day with a plan to do various and sundry tasks. You open your email with the intent to clear out your inbox, but the review takes longer than you expected and before you know it, there are more emails in the inbox than when you started. As you are absorbed in email, your phone rings and requires you to provide some unplanned pastoral counselling. You take the time to be present for the caller, but then realize that you are late for a planned appointment. You quickly scramble to change your schedule with the sad realization that everything else that was planned for the day must subsequently be delayed. You have not started your sermon for Sunday, but you reason that maybe you could work on it later. Of course when later comes, you are just as busy as when you first deferred the work. More than that, you have undoubtedly picked up additional tasks along the way that need to be completed in the short term.

It is the reality of ministry. Our activities as clergy are "highly varied, taxing, fast-paced, unrelenting, and fragmented," according to Dr. Richard DeShon who conducted studies of United Methodist Church clergy.<sup>1</sup> In his research he acknowledged, "I have never encountered such a fast-paced job with such varied and impactful responsibilities." That is the nature of our work and yet, when this mode of operating becomes the sum and substance of our days, it is no wonder that time flies by. We are so consumed by the tactical requirements of our work that we never have the opportunity to look ahead intentionally and strategically. We do the work that is thrust right in front of us. This is one of the biggest challenges that confronts each of us in ministry. But it also represents one of the biggest dangers in ministry. In a time when so many ministries are in decline, we cannot afford to engage only in the tactical

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ministerscouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/clergy-effectiveness-study-ksap.pdf>

battle. And maybe before 2015 rolls in, we would be well served to reflect on 2014 to see how we might reposition ourselves and our efforts.

Consider engaging in an exercise of Examen for your year. As you look back over your year, for what moments were you most grateful? Did you see growth in your ministry? Did you realize a personal milestone or achievement? What were those moments? What was most life giving about them? Similarly, for what moments in this past years were you least grateful? What happened in those moments? Did you experience a decline? Were there specific challenges that confronted you? What was most life draining for you?

Now consider these life giving and life draining experiences over the last twelve months. How might you structure your work to maximize the life giving opportunities and minimize the life draining ones? I shared recently in a workshop that as a pastor, doing visitations was particularly draining for me because it was challenging for me to make small talk in the midst of pastoral visits. Yet as pastor, I had to visit those who were hospitalized, sick or shut-in. I could not say, "That's not my gifting so I won't be visiting." But what I was able to do was recognize that as I trained deacons and others to accompany me on such visits – training and teaching being part of my gifting – my life giving experiences became greater than the life draining ones and I realized greater balance in ministry.

Along these same lines, consider the strategic efforts that did not receive enough of your time and attention. How might you change the way that you operate in order to accommodate more strategic endeavors? For me, this was an opportunity to consider how I might increase my capacity. For each of us there are tasks that require our expertise and tasks that do not. As a pastor, I quickly learned that I did not need to write the weekly bulletin. My administrator was quite capable of doing so. Similarly, I did not need to select the hymns for worship. If I told my conservatory-trained organist my scriptures, he was very well equipped to select the appropriate hymnode. Delegating those tasks increased my capacity so that I could actually work on my sermon during the work day and not on my own time. Imagine!

Without intentionality, we have no hope of breaking the cycle. The hymn writer said that "Time is filled with swift transition." So it is our challenge to make the most of the opportunities while we can. I pray that as you examen your time, you are better prepared to strategically address what comes your way.



### ***May the Waiting of Advent be Blessed and Grace Filled***

*Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage for the coming of the Lord is near. James 5:7-8*

## The Ministers Council Receives a “Care of Souls” Grant from the Imago Dei Fund



The Ministers Council is proud to announce that we have been awarded a \$45,000, two-year grant to implement the “7R’s of Sanctuary: Leadership Effectiveness through Spiritual Practice” program. The grant was awarded by the Imago Dei Fund, a foundation that supports efforts to bring about the imago Dei in both personal and larger quests for wholeness to redeem with love our broken world, as demonstrated in Christ's life and teachings. As a foundation, the Imago Dei Fund seeks to participate in what God is doing by partnering with inspired people—those with passion and a good idea—who are working within effective organizations that seek to make the world a better place. The grant received by the Ministers Council was the result of the Imago Dei Fund’s focus on the Care of Souls. Reaching back to classical Christianity, Care of Souls represents the nurture of the inner person and the human journey of healing and growth into wholeness.

The 7R’s of Sanctuary program is very much in keeping with the care of souls. The project is designed to help clergy to realize spiritual wellbeing and increased effectiveness as leaders by incorporating spiritual practices in their lives. The program enables leaders to become more effective by taking time apart from their daily leadership duties to engage in spiritual practices, chiefly the practice of reflection, so that their souls are nurtured and they are enabled to remain connected to their calling. Funding will enable the Ministers Council to offer two, three-day retreats and up to four follow up sessions per cohort each year for two years. As a result of participating, leaders will learn how to realize sanctuary, restore their souls and emerge from the 7Rs of Sanctuary with direction for their leadership. Not only does this impact the leader, but also the people entrusted to them in their churches and through ministries in the community.

Research demonstrates that the spiritual practice of reflection is the key to realizing efficacy in leadership. Our theory of change is that to attain spiritual growth and effective leadership clergy need to regularly take time away from the demands of leadership for reflection. At issue is the fact that clergy are at times too busy being “leaders” to plan the time needed to renew spiritually; restore their sense of purpose; put issues in perspective and regain courage and heart. This program, as a result, provides a unique opportunity for clergy to address the need to nurture their souls.

The program is being implemented as a two-year pilot starting in Massachusetts in 2015. The program aims to teach the sustainable, repetitive practice of seeking sanctuary for restoration through a three-day retreat and follow up sessions. 7Rs of Sanctuary provides a structure and process that reinforces the need for spiritual practice so that it is seen as an essential rule of life. The goal is to care for souls by reinforcing that God’s intent for rest is a refreshment likened to receiving a new soul (Exodus 31:17). We want to see these practices become a way of life, helping people to discern God’s leading in making decisions and determining strategies. By taking time apart, decision making is enriched in a spirit of peace and certainty, which is life affirming.

For more information about the 7R’s of Sanctuary Program or how you might participate in the pilot cohort, contact the Ministers Council office or email me at [Debra.jackson@abc-usa.org](mailto:Debra.jackson@abc-usa.org).

### Share the Good News!

What’s going on in your region, your church, or your local Ministers Council? Do you know that by sharing your news with us, over 2000 subscribers will read your news too?

Share your news flash by contacting the Ministers Council office at (800) 222-3872 x 2334 or email Joyce Moon at [joyce.moon@abc-usa.org](mailto:joyce.moon@abc-usa.org)





## Renew or Become a Member of The Ministers Council

Time is waning and your 2014 membership to the Ministers Council expires on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Don't let that happen! You can do something about it today.

What, you say? You can renew your membership with the Ministers Council. Don't miss out on the benefits and the opportunities for connection. And if you are not a member, join today so that you can be a part of the Ministers Council. Membership fees are based on a personal income sliding scale as follows:

\$55,000+	\$100
\$25,000 - \$54,999	\$50
\$10,000 - \$24,999	\$25
< \$10,000	\$10

**Become a member or renewing your membership in the Ministers Council and receive a gift with our thanks.** Contact your local council or go to [www.ministerscouncil.com](http://www.ministerscouncil.com) for more information.



## Announcing the Ministers Council Endowment Gift

The Ministers Council has just launched the new Ministers Council Endowment Gift of Stock Program as a beneficial way for supporters to invest in training, education, peer learning, and resources tailored to increase the effectiveness of ministry leaders. The Ministers Council Endowment (MCE) was established to provide

financial support that enables ministry through two important offerings: the Equipping Ministries Fund and the Together in Ministry Fund. A small portion goes to offset administrative expenses.

The Equipping Ministries Fund is a dynamic programmatic effort to design new courses and offerings in response to clergy needs. Once there was a time when the focus of ministry was largely concentrated on preaching, teaching and caring for the congregation. Now, given the challenges of declining congregations, politically charged communities, and the difficulties of property management, pastors are called to be entrepreneurs, CEOs, social workers, community organizers, and so much more. Where will we gain the skills to do the work that we are called to do? The Equipping Ministries Fund will provide resources to develop courses, workshops and forums that are in keeping with current needs.

The Together in Ministry Fund replaces the three-year Together in Ministry Capital Campaign that ends in 2014. Through this fund, the Ministers Council will be able to provide scholarships for new covenant groups, educational resources to help facilitators plan peer group meetings, and defray the costs of peer group gatherings.

The exciting aspect of this Endowment program is that it features multiple ways to give. While many want to contribute to our efforts, liquidity is often an issue. By providing cashless and other such alternative means for contributions, such as stock or marketable securities, bequests, gift annuities, and the like, people can support the Ministers Council and our efforts to create programs and extend resources that positively impact ministers and equip them for ministry in their communities.

To learn more about the new Ministers Council Endowment, please visit <http://ministerscouncil.com/the-ministers-council-endowment>.



## Together in Ministry – Current Status

Who would have guessed that members of the clergy could raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to support one another in ministry? No one would have ever thought it possible. It is not so much that we would not want support one another, but the question was whether we had the means and whether we could encourage others to get on board. Well, the Together in Ministry Capital Campaign is evidence of the success that we can realize together as we commit ourselves to a goal. Several years ago, Joe Kutter, the Executive Committee and Senate realized that we needed to create a means to sustain and continue the success of Together in Ministry. So many people had been helped, so many ministries had been saved all through the simple and yet revelatory idea of clergy peer learning groups. As clergy came together, they deepened friendships, developed support networks, and found resources and respite in the company of colleagues. They realized growth and renewal in ministry. These outcomes were too good to let go of, just because the funding had ended. We were committed to sustaining Together in Ministry so that future generations of clergy could realize the benefits that we had.

2014 marks the end of this three year campaign. Did we fully reach the goal that had been set for the program? No. But did we accomplish something that the Ministers Council had never accomplished before? Absolutely. We raised \$292,974.25 in cash and pledges and \$76,680.00 in in-kind donations. That is a total of \$369,654.25. This is a reason for celebrating and expressing our gratitude to all who contributed and made this accomplishment possible.

Now I said that 2014 marks the end, but in reality, we're not done yet. Pledges need to be honored and any outstanding funds need to be collected. This is where we are trusting in you. Have you fulfilled your pledge to the Together in Ministry capital campaign? If not, the end of year is a great time to wrap up that outstanding payment. Simply click <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/> and make your secure donation.

And if you did not get a chance to pledge, that is ok too. Many Together in Ministry contributors participated by making one-time donations to the capital campaign. Again, simply click clicking <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/>. You can help us go even further in our fund raising efforts.

Together in Ministry was a milestone program for the American Baptist Churches, USA. The Together in Ministry Capital Campaign was a milestone effort for the Ministers Council. We are continuing our efforts to support clergy and expand our impact. Join us in the effort to ensure ministerial excellence for years to come. Support us as we finish well the work that we started. Give to the Together in Ministry Capital Campaign.



## WOMANIST SYMPOSIUM: "But Who Do You Say I Am?"

[Graduate Theological Union - American Baptist Seminary of the West](#)  
[\\* Black Church-Africana Religious Studies \\* Women's Studies in Religion](#)

**Saturday, January 10, 2015 from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM (PST) Berkeley, CA.**

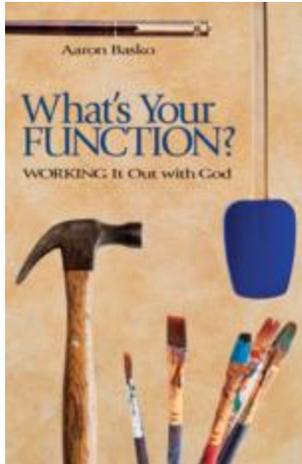
Register today by clicking the link above.

General Admission: From December 1 – January 10. Price: \$55.00

Seminarian: Open now until January 10. Price: \$35.00

At the Door Day of Event. Price \$75.00

Keynote Speaker: The Rev. Dr. Linda E. Thomas, PhD, Prof. of Theology & Anthropology at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago.



## Hot off the Press: New Judson Press Releases

What's Your Function? Working it Out with God.

This great new book helps readers to discern the career that fulfill their function. It helps to analyze:

- Purpose – what you were born to do
- Inspiration – what you love to do
- Earnings – how you can make a living

This book is a great read and vital resource for people who are beginning ministry, considering a career change, or simply discerning and sharpening their serve to enrich their current ministry. Get your copy today and enjoy free shipping when you use your Ministers Council Membership Card.

**Coming in June 2015**, look for the new Judson Press book *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: The 7Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors*, by Debora Jackson.

## Opportunities for Involvement

This newsletter would not be complete without making mention to some of the events that have been in the news over the last few weeks. The Ministers Council is committed to our Baptist heritage of autonomy and individual freedom of conscience. Therefore, we will not instruct you in your response. However, we wanted to inform and connect you with some of the resources available through the American Baptist Churches, USA Family.



### Immigration

On Immigration, the Rev. Aundrea Alexander, Esquire, National Coordinator-Immigration and Refuge Services of American Baptist Home Mission Societies issued a call to support President Obama's Executive Action on Immigration on November 24<sup>th</sup>. In her statement, Rev. Alexander noted that it was important for Congress to hear from people of faith indicating support for expanding deferred action.

ABHMS' Office of Immigration and Refugee Services is committed to providing resources and services to our immigrant and refugee communities as well as to the congregations that are opening doors to them. For additional information, contact the Rev. Aundrea Alexander, Esquire, ABHMS' national coordinator, Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services, at [aundrea.alexander@abhms.org](mailto:aundrea.alexander@abhms.org) or 800-222-3872, x2430.

### Ferguson

On November 25, ABCUSA General Secretary A. Roy Medley issued a statement indicating that our prayers are with the people of Ferguson. In his trip report to St. Louis, Dr. Medley wrote:

"We face a moral and social crisis related to black males. It is a crisis that many are blind to or ignore as long as it doesn't spill over into their lives. It is a crisis that costs lives and devastates families. It is a crisis that deprives us of leaders, doctors, teachers, and workers. It is a crisis that is turning us into the largest penal colony in the world."

The full text of Dr. Medley's letter can be read [here](#). Additionally, the governing board of the National Council of Churches issued a statement that you can read [here](#).



### **Eric Garner**

And then today, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Grand Jury ruled not to indict the New York Police Officer Daniel Pantaleo, finding no probable cause in the death of Eric Garner.

I have to admit that I am troubled to the point of dismay. And as a mother, I am worried. The picture is of my son. He is a 5' 3", 11 year old, weighing about 105 pounds soaking wet. He is happy, optimistic, positive, and full of the joy of the Lord and I would like him to remain that way. But because of the world in which we live, the conversations that I have had to have with my child taint that possibility. My husband and I have had to explain to our child why security guards follow us through stores believing that we are about to steal. We've had to deal with people who have wanted to "high five" our child as though that is "our" standard way of greeting. We've have had to remind our child not to allow other children to touch his hair when picked out in a giant afro. We have had to "have the talk" with our son about walking through stores with his hands in full view; and how he should conduct himself if ever in a situation with police. These

are not fun conversations. All too commonly, these are conversations that people of color have with their children, and especially their sons.

How are you led to be involved or respond? As faith leaders, we can encourage better relations with law enforcement. We can enlist our communities to be actively involved. We can work with government for law enforcement reforms. While we recognize the progress, we can acknowledge the problems and help to find long term solutions. And we can pray: God grant us your grace that we use our voices and influence for the good.



## **February 6 Deadline for Church Sponsorship**

The Mission Summit is less than seven months away! For the Biennial Mission Summit, June 26-28, 2015, in Overland Park, Kansas, churches are invited to register as sponsors. If a church registers as a sponsor for the Mission Summit, church members get a discount\*. The church will also be listed on the event website at [www.americanbaptists2015.com](http://www.americanbaptists2015.com) and in the event program book. Sponsoring churches and regions will help to support the Mission Summit and make it a success. More information, including pricing and savings, can be found here. Don't miss the deadline for Church Sponsorship: February 6, 2015!

\*If a church registers as a sponsoring church, members of the church can individually register at a discounted rate of \$40 per person. If your church is not a sponsor, church members will pay an individual registration fee of \$165.

## **ABHMS Encourages Entries to BJC Essay Scholarship Contest**

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) encourages entries to the 2015 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee

(BJC). High school juniors and seniors can win up to \$2,000 for college by writing an essay examining an employer's ability to dictate an employee's attire, including religious apparel that an employee requests to wear on the job.

Each year, the contest engages high school students in church-state issues by directing them to express a point of view on a religious liberty topic. The grand prize is \$2,000 and a trip for two to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$1,000, and third prize is \$250.

High school students in the graduating classes of 2015 and 2016 can enter the contest by writing an essay between 800-1,200 words addressing the following:

Under federal law, employers cannot discriminate on the basis of religion—and other protected categories—when hiring, if they have 15 or more employees. A conflict can arise when an employer refuses to allow an employee to wear religious clothing at work or refuses to hire someone because of such attire.

For example, clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch claimed its “look policy” allowed it to not hire a Muslim woman who wanted to wear a hijab—or head scarf—on the sales floor.

In an essay, discuss whether and to what extent an employer should be able to dictate an employee's attire—such as denying an employee's request to wear religious garb.

Should the image or brand the employer portrays with a dress code trump the employee's religious expression? What are the broader implications for religious liberty?

Entries must be postmarked by March 6, 2015, to be eligible. Click [here](#) to download contest forms and complete details.

Winners will be announced in summer 2015, and the grand prize winner will be recognized at the BJC board meeting in Washington, D.C., in October 2015.

Essays will be judged on depth of content, mastery of the topic and skill with which they are written. Students should develop a point of view on the issue and demonstrate critical thinking, using appropriate examples, reasons and other evidence to support their position.

Visit [www.BJConline.org/contest](http://www.BJConline.org/contest) for complete contest rules. If you have questions, contact the BJC's Charles Watson Jr. at 202-544-4226 or [cwatson@BJConline.org](mailto:cwatson@BJConline.org).

## Upcoming Events

- Graduate Theological Union / American Baptist Seminary of the West – Womanist Symposium 2015. January 10, 2015. Click [here](#) to register.
- MLK Day Worship – New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, Renton, WA – January 18, 2015
- MLK Day Worship, Evergreen Association of the American Baptist Churches – January 19, 2015
- New England Assembly of American Baptists, Leominster, MA – January 23-24, 2015

## Ministers Council Contact Information

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