

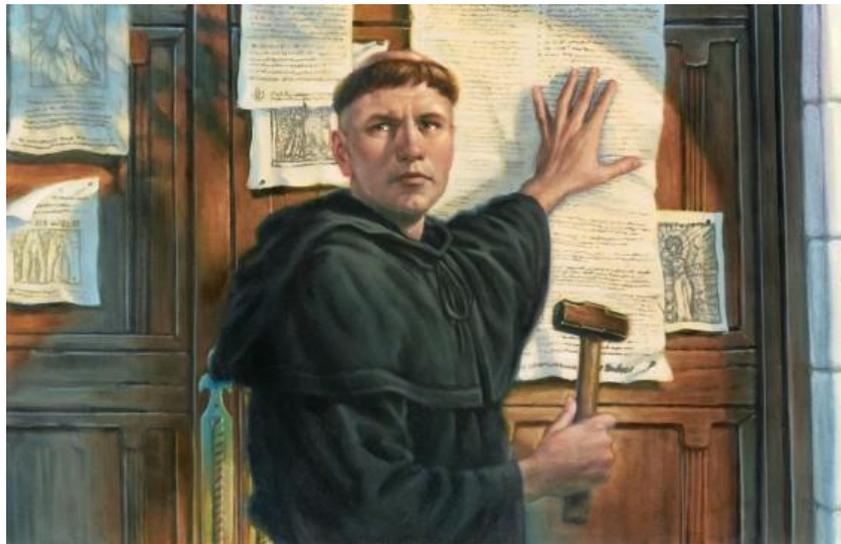
Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

November 2016

### From the Desk of the Executive Director

While Reformation Sunday was not a phrase in my church lexicon growing up, I have found myself giving it much thought of late. It is not so much the thought of Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses on the Whittenberg door, but the ultimate “great” result that came from it.

Author Phyllis Tickle, in her book *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing*



*and Why*, uses the event from October 31, 1517, as just one data point in a 500 year hiccupping, epoch cycle where the faith is upheaved. And yet in the upheaval, we realize an expansion of the faith and renewed stability. Thus in this instance, Luther’s act of 500 years ago is credited with helping Christianity become a global religion because this act was the catalyst of what we now call the Great Reformation. Five hundred years later, we as Protestants may love pointing to this bit of history as we are believers of the reformed tradition that emerged from it. However, we may be a bit more uncomfortable with the fact that we are in the midst of another 500 year cycle and we are the ones who are more negatively impacted by the upheaval.

I do not need to point out the evidence of the change. We have been seeing it for decades: the slow decline of the church; increasing generations of “unchurched;” and the diminishing influence of Christianity as the standard. And yet on the other hand, we are seeing an increase of people who call themselves spiritual; a new openness to pluralism; and a syncretism in matters of the faith that readily borrows from and blends different traditions. For example, I have seen laypeople at seminaries taking Old Testament theology just because; medical professionals who are learning mindfulness techniques to help them in their vocational efforts; and thirty-somethings who are participating in Havruta study as a way to engage the scriptures in community. Is this an expansion of the faith? I would say so. But this expansion is not happening where most of us work and live. So what are we to do?

Some of our churches will act oblivious to the change. In these churches, folks will continue business as usual: sing the same hymns; pronounce the same liturgy; engage in the same mission efforts. The slow decline may continue with the congregants getting older, and the giving becoming less. And yet we can convince ourselves that there isn’t really an imminent threat. Often times these are the churches in which the numbers are still respectable. We tell ourselves that we have a decent number of people in the pews on a Sunday. Sure, that number might only be a percentage of what it was “back in the day.” But we attribute that to the general decline in church attendance and are often ambivalent regarding what we could do to make a difference.

Some churches will actively fight the change. Historically, we know that early twentieth-century Fundamentalism was the backlash to a perceived society in decline. Ironically these are churches that may grow in the short term. As I heard said in Israel, "The synagogue I don't attend is orthodox." We want to cleave to the often times conservative tenets of the faith with unwavering resolve, holding the church in a fixed snow globe while the world continues to change. What's more, people will often come to these churches as a means of preserving a way of life. We go to church and its 1970 all over again. It's comforting because you know what is going to be said and done. You don't need the hymnal because you know all of the verses to the songs that will be sung. It is great in the short term, but we see the problem immediately for the future. The stuck and cleaving church is seen as even less relevant to an increasingly religiously disenfranchised population.

Our hope does not lie in either of these options. Rather, I believe that the real opportunity lies in embracing the changes that are in our midst, which of course is easier said than done because we are attempting to build the bridge even as we try to across it. Yet, we have some leading indicators that can shape our actions. We know, for example, that Millennials tend to be interested in matters of faith, but not as interested in institutions for the institution's sake. As such, we must speak to why faith matters, rather than offering arguments that try to preserve what is. I, for one, want to share Jesus with people because I know that I am living a more blessed and abundant life as a result of my personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And so I am open to having that conversation, peer to peer, and over a meal or glass of wine (yep, I said it). I don't have to be on a raised chancel with a grandiose pulpit to communicate my message. In fact, that's an obstacle for some.

We know, for example, that people are increasingly open to experiences from different faith traditions. How do we leverage that hunger and curiosity? Can we teach classical spiritual practices in our churches? Would that make a difference? Can we create new partnerships that help to expand our knowledge base and incorporate different components in our traditional ways of doing things? I have had the successful experience of incorporating Quaker "Clearness Committee" practices into my retreats. It has been an amazing way of emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit in discerning God's path and plan. Moreover, I am attending a retreat to learn Ignatian Spiritual Practices. I want to understand how praying the hours in silence and solitude might enrich my spiritual life, but I also want to see how I might bring these ideas into the workshops I offer.

I am sure that there are dozens of other suggestions and ideas that could be employed and I welcome your responses regarding how you are navigating this changing landscape. However, my point is this, borrowing from an old narrative: No one puts new wine in an old skin, for if they do, the skin will burst, the wine will run out, and the wineskin will be ruined. This 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's actions reminds us that we are in the midst of a great change. But that change does not have to mean our demise. We have the opportunity to put new wine in fresh skins so that both the wine and the skin are preserved. Let us commit ourselves to being part of the discovery of the new methods and ways of being the church. As we do this, I am convinced that the faith will grow and that God will be glorified.



## **ABHMS presents \$60,000 OGHS grant to Weirton Christian Center**

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has presented a \$60,000 One Great Hour of Sharing Domestic Development Grant to Weirton (W.Va.) Christian Center. The presentation was made at the center on Oct. 18 by Victoria Goff, ABHMS' national coordinator of Volunteer Mobilization and Disaster Response Ministries.

The center has been serving families in the Weirton area since 1917, when 13,000 immigrants came to work at Weirton Steel. For the last three decades, the center has provided preschool and after-school programs. Today, the steel mill employs less than 800 people; high-income jobs have been replaced with minimum-wage jobs in the gaming industry. In addition, the city is situated between two counties known for high rates of heroin overdose.

To better accommodate the approximately 300 children from struggling families that it serves yearly, the center is constructing a large building with a USDA-approved kitchen. While the center currently provides a healthy snack after school and dinner five days weekly, the plan is to add lunch for the preschool program and to provide at least one meal on weekends.

Weirton Christian Center is one of ABHMS' 16 Neighborhood Action Program (NAP) Christian centers. For more information about NAP centers, visit [www.abhms.org](http://www.abhms.org) > Ministries > [Neighborhood Action Program](#) Christian Centers



## Share, Preserve, and Tell Your Story

Everybody loves a good story. We tell stories of our lives, of our families, of the communities and experiences that shaped us into the people we are today.

The American Baptist Historical Society's ministry is one of our stories, Baptist stories. We hold records documenting Baptist stories, from the London Confession of 1644 — the earliest statement of Baptist principles — to twenty-first-century reports from the Baptist Temple in Rochester, New York and the Wilksburg (Pennsylvania) Baptist Church. Items ranging from the diaries of Walter Rauschenbusch in the 1880s to a 1940s film about mission work among the Crow Indians in and around Lodge Grass, Montana convey stories of who we are.

American Baptist Historical Society records span the life and ministries of congregations as young as the New Life Christian Fellowship of Castro Valley, CA, which just celebrated twenty-five years as a congregation, and as long-lived as First Baptist Church of Ballston Spa, NY, and the American Baptist Churches of Metro New York, both of which recently marked two-hundred twenty-five years of ministry. The Historical Society presented all of these with certificates acknowledging their faithful ministry; perhaps you have received such a certificate in the past. (If you have a church anniversary coming up, please let us know so that we can celebrate your faithfulness, too!)

American Baptist Historical Society's ministry is one of stories, *your* story. Your story may begin during the colonial era, or it may be a story of a church-plant from the 1990s. Your story may include baptisms in a local river or lake, vibrant Christian Endeavor groups or Ladies' Guilds. Your story may recount the struggles of a small group of faithful Baptists during trying times, or aspirations of becoming a mega-church. Whatever your story, it intersects and interweaves with the millions of stories the Historical Society preserves in its archives and shares with the world. These are *our* stories.

Preserving these stories entails placing documents in archival-quality folders and boxes and storing them in a climate-controlled, secure space. Sharing them with others requires inventorying, indexing, and uploading catalogs. Creating an inventory and simple finding aid for a small set of records and storing them safely costs \$50 annually. Large groups of records cost more to prepare and store, as much as \$1,000 per year. Preserving and digitizing 10 minutes of film costs \$2,000. To help fund this ministry of maintaining the original congregational and denominational records, personal papers and other collections on our almost 6 miles of shelves, the Historical Society has set a goal of raising \$3000 on #GivingTuesday (November 29). Join dozens of generous Baptists who care about our stories. Donations may be made via the [American Baptist Historical Society website](#). One of the ways people can help when shopping online is by using [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and choosing American Baptist Historical Society to receive a percentage of what is spent. Follow us on [Facebook](#) for updates on our progress on #GivingTuesday.



INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

WORLD MISSION OFFERING

## **Gifts to the World Mission Offering are being doubled – for a limited time.**

This year, International Ministries is doing something different. For the first time in World Mission Offering (WMO) history, a select group of donors created a challenge fund that will match every undesignated\* gift to the WMO—up to \$200,000! When churches or individuals give now, their gifts for global mission will be doubled!

*\*This matching opportunity is for undesignated support only—that is, the support of all of IM's global servants and all the work of IM. It is not intended for specific projects or global servants. A gift to support a specific IM global servant is welcomed and appreciated, but it will not be part of this WMO matching opportunity.*

Each year, the WMO casts a spotlight on a different part of the world—giving American Baptists a personal, front-row seat to the powerful ministries that are changing lives for Christ around the globe. For the 2016 WMO, IM is excited to present the story of the spiritual revival happening in Baptist churches right now in Cuba.

Please download any of the resources below and use them freely in your church. These and other printed materials and a DVD were mailed to churches in July. If you didn't receive your packet, contact Daniela Glomb at 610-768-2208 or [daniela.glomb@internationalministries.org](mailto:daniela.glomb@internationalministries.org). Many of the World Mission Offering resources are available in both English and Spanish.

## **Celebrate Women's Day on Friday, June 30, 2017**

Planning to attend the ABCUSA Mission Summit in Portland, Oregon, this summer? Kick off the festivities with American Baptist Women's Ministries at Women's Day on Friday, June 30. With guest speaker Rev. Marie Onwubuariri, Regional Executive Minister of ABC of Wisconsin, and music/worship leader Rev. Kimberly Salico-Diehl of Fort Collins, Colorado, the day promises to be uplifting, motivational, and an opportunity to renew or build new relationships with your sisters in the American Baptist family. Tickets will be available through the ABCUSA Mission Summit registration process in early 2017. Mark your calendars now! For more information, visit [www.abwministries.org/events](http://www.abwministries.org/events).

American Baptist  
**Women's**  
MINISTRIES

## **Relax, Relate, and Renew with Sisters on the Sea September 15-18, 2017**

Join American Baptist Women's Ministries and American Baptist Women in Ministry on the high seas by registering for our partnership cruise, September 15-18, 2017. We'll be sailing on Royal Caribbean "Majesty of the Seas," departing from Port Canaveral (Orlando), Florida, and visiting Grand Bahama Island and Coco Cay. Relax with your Christian sisters in friendship and fun, relate to one another and to Jesus Christ through conversation, prayer, worship, and Bible study, and renew yourself for the ministry to which God has called you. Registration is open now! Early registration is recommended due to a limited number of cabins and meeting space aboard the ship. Visit [www.abwministries.org/cruise](http://www.abwministries.org/cruise) for more information, costs, and the registration process.



## News from Ministers Council Local Chapters

Tremendous activities are occurring in our local chapters of the Ministers Council. Below is an update from some of our chapters.

### ABC Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors

Endorsed Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors have a special chapter they can join for only another \$25 in dues. Because of our mission- our specialized ministry, we are often isolated from our ABCUSA peers. 2017 is a membership building year when we endeavor to get to know each other, affirm our skills and leadership in the denomination and assess our needs. Want to join us? For more information contact: Rev. Elizabeth (Betsy) Ritzman [Betsyritz@comcast.net](mailto:Betsyritz@comcast.net) or Rev. Sarah Fogg [sarahfogg4@gmail.com](mailto:sarahfogg4@gmail.com)"

### ABC of the Greater Bay Area

Social Media and Ministry is the topic of a one-day seminar and the annual two-day retreat sponsored by MCGBA at Redwood Glen. From Monday, January 9 to Tuesday, January 10, "Why Church Wi-Fi: Mobilizing Faith for the Future" features social media strategist and author, Justin Wise, and will explore the impact today's technology is having on the church and our faith. The one-day seminar is intended for pastors and their tech teams to get on the same page, with the two-day retreat allowing the pastors to process the material and develop an action plan for their ministries at home. A flier for the one-day seminar is found here: <http://redwoodglen.com/leaders/2017oneday.pdf>. A flier for the full retreat is found here: <http://redwoodglen.com/leaders/2017retreat.pdf>. For more information, contact [larry@redwoodglen.com](mailto:larry@redwoodglen.com).

### ABC of Metro Chicago

The Ministers Council of Metro Chicago, over the past three years, has become more intentional about recognizing the work of our members who serve in areas of specialized ministry, such as chaplains and pastoral counselors. This past month we celebrated Pastoral Care Week by highlighting several of our specialized ministers in a series of email blasts with prayers and devotional thoughts. (Pastoral Care Week has been celebrated nationally since 1985, and this year's theme was Spiritual Resilience).

The three specialized ministers we featured October 16-22 were Chaplain Kelly Wunderlich, Corporate Chaplain for Hillshire/Tyson Foods, Chaplain (CPT) Patty Jenkins, Chaplain for the US Army Reserves (currently deployed to Iraq), and Rev. Jacki Belile, Founder and Director, Clear Center Coaching@Living Well Ministries.

We will continue to profile specialized ministers throughout the year, shining a light on the vital work in which they are engaged.

Submitted by Rev. Sarah Jay, Cabinet Member, Ministers Council of Metro Chicago, Interim Pastor, Irving Park Baptist Church, Associate Regional Minister for Euro and Multi-Ethnic Churches, ABC-Metro Chicago

### Ministers Council of ABC of Pennsylvania and Delaware

The region's Biennial meeting occurred the week of October 16. There was a celebration of ordination for 15 pastors with many years of service.

## Ministers Council of the Philadelphia Baptist Association

Please receive this memorandum as your official invitation to the upcoming Ministers Council meeting. This meeting will be held at the PBA office, 8711 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19128 on **Wednesday, November 9, 9:30am**. The schedule is outlined below:

9:30-10:00 a.m.	Social Gathering	(Coffee, tea, etc.)
10:00-11:30 a.m.	<b>Presentation:</b>	General Theme – The Church & Ministry Outreach To Our Communities
	<b>Facilitator(s):</b>	Rev. Dr. Donald D. Moore Senior Pastor, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church
11:30 a.m.-12:00 p. m.	Business Meeting	

## ABC of Rhode Island and Connecticut

November 5, Baptist Heritage Day - This year's event features Brent Walker, retiring executive of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. The BJC is a Washington, DC based group that monitors the federal legislative process for issues of religious freedom and the relationships between governments and faith communities. It is supported by a wide range of Baptist organizations. For more about Brent see: <http://bjconline.org/brent-walker/>. This event will be held at Emmanuel Baptist Church, 529 Charles St., Providence, RI 02904. For more information: Charles Hartman – (508) 336-0799 or [revdochart@gmail.com](mailto:revdochart@gmail.com).

November 7, lunch with Dr. Susan Gillies, Interim General Secretary, ABCUSA. 12 noon at Meadowood Conference Center.

March 6, 2017, Ministers Council Annual Meeting, 12 noon – Luncheon Meeting with special speaker. ABCORI Annual Meeting at 7:00 PM

May 1-3, 2017, Annual Retreat at Block Island. Save the date! Watch for program specifics.

## ABC of the Rochester Genesee Region

Rev. Glynis LaBarre from AB Home Mission Societies spoke at a recent ministers' workshop. She spoke about personal dimensions of ministry. A dinner for retired ministers was held recently. Both events were well attended. Dr. Charles Jones from International Ministries spoke at the region's annual meeting. First Baptist Church of Rochester has installed Rev. Brent Bowden as their new pastor.

## Ministers Council of Michigan

A biennial annuitant gathering has just occurred. The local Ministers Council Executive Council was in attendance. Pastors in this region largely fall into two groups: one group seems to be doing well, while a second group feels stress because of financial and other issues. This Ministers Council chapter is trying to address this. A spiritual renewal retreat will occur soon. This chapter also has a mission to new pastors and to young pastors.

## Support the Ministers Council

Why do we do what we do? Because ministry can be challenging. Ministry can be isolating and lonely. And in the isolation and loneliness, it can be difficult to succeed. And yet, we know of a different vision of ministry that is within our grasp. We know that when clergy are supported – when they have the opportunity come together as colleagues to fellowship, to partake of spiritual sustenance, and be strengthened as learning communities – they thrive. We know that when someone advocates for clergy – helping to set vocational standards for ministry, promoting for equitable compensation packages, and encouraging enriching benefits such as sabbaticals and continuing education – they grow in healthy and life-giving ways. And we know that when clergy are healthy, thriving and growing, the people that they touch and serve are healthier, thriving and growing as well. We know what the vision looks like. We do what we do to bring that vision to fruition. Want to help us?

You can help by joining the Ministers Council. Join the thousands of ABC clergy, lay leaders, counselors, and seminarians who recognize the benefits of collegiality, centeredness, and

competence through the Ministers Council. You can contact your local chapter or you can access the Ministers Council website and pay your dues electronically at <http://ministerscouncil.com/subscriptions/>.

You can also help by giving to the Ministers Council. We exist because of you. And through your support, we are able to develop and implement programs like the 7Rs of Sanctuary that help leaders integrate spiritual practices into their leadership for increased effectiveness in leadership. We are able to co-host events such as the 2016 Ministers Conference through which participants had access to a number of wonderful resources for personal and professional enrichment. We are able to advocate for you across the denomination, giving you a voice in the discussion and seat at the table. You can give to the Ministers Council through our website at <http://ministerscouncil.com/> by clicking the "Donate Online" box. Also look for our #GivingTuesday promotions on November 29<sup>th</sup>.

We do what we do for you. Please support the Ministers Council and help us to continue the good work that we do.

## Travel Schedule

- ABCNYS Biennial, Syracuse, NY, November 4-5.
- Introduction to Ignatian Spiritual Practices, Harwich Port, MA, November 15-17.
- Valley Forge, PA, November 21-22.

## Ministers Council Contact Information

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