

Together in Ministry



Collegiality * Competence * Centeredness

January 2024 Newsletter



Epiphany, January 6, concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people.

A Pastoral Reflection from the President



Have you joined the ugly Christmas sweater trend? In case you have been living under a rock the last few years, the newest Christmas fashion trend has been to don a sweater that one day would have been considered “ugly,” covered in sequins, baubles, gaudy decorations, or clashing colors. There are ugly sweater parties, ugly sweater days at elementary schools, and we even encouraged our congregation to wear them on a Sunday morning!

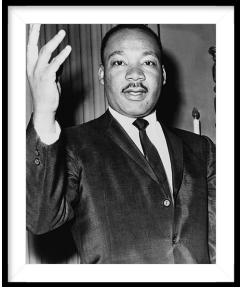
Of course, the idea is meant to be ironic. We wear the sweater because we know we aren't supposed to wear the sweater. I thought it was a goofy fad when it first started, but have embraced the trend as of late. I have two...one with a “baby Yoda” reaching out for a Christmas hug, and one with a massive llama, wearing a bright green scarf. I proudly wear both. There is something that seems counter-cultural about standing over and against the perfect, “supposed-to,” consumeristic culture that Christmas has become. It feels like the kind of thing that a smelly-shepherd-der-visiting-a-baby-in-a-feed-trough holiday might embrace. I can imagine the shepherds showing up in their ugly sweaters to the manger, and Mary and Joseph sharing a knowing and grateful glance.

This season, and into the new year, I invite you to be a little “ugly.” What are the ways that you might shrug off the “supposed to” of ministry, and do things a little differently? Will you listen more to the voiceless in your community than the big givers in your congregation? Will you think more about collegiality, centeredness, and competence than clergy *competition* (the unspoken fourth “C”)? Will you set aside the tyranny of the urgent for that much-needed day off, a couple weeks of vacation, or even an overdue sabbatical? This year, I hope that the Ministers Council can help you embrace the “ugly.” Take a step away from the “supposed to,” and embrace the “need to.” And let me know if you need to borrow the llama.

Matt Sturtevant
Ministers Council ABCUSA President

On January 15, we celebrate the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Dear Lord, lead us as we go forth as people of service. Renew in us the spirit of service and sacrificial love as shown in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. May we be vessels of hope and justice in a world of violence and injustice. Open our ears to the needs of our world, and open our hands in helpful service to our neighbors. Amen.



National Updates



MC CONNECT! *A Pre-Lent Gathering to Strengthen the "Ties that Bind"*

Are you a new Ministers Council member looking for connection? A long-timer who needs fresh support? A Baptist minister not previously

an invested member? A person who longs for a new chapter or a revitalized chapter where you serve? Join us for this first connecting session of 2024, with content-rich sharing about YOU, what you need and the Ministers Council's resources for serving you. Rev. Jacki Belile, Coordinator of Membership and Chapter Development, will lead us with an anchoring devotion inspired by Matthew 11:28-30.

Contact ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org for more information.

TWO OPTIONS:

Tuesday, February 6
9am Pacific/11am Central/12pm Eastern

OR

Tuesday, February 13
5pm Pacific/7pm Central/8pm Eastern

Join Zoom Meeting by clicking
here: <https://ministrelife.zoom.us/j/2954166836>
Or call in by dialing: 1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 295 416 6836

Inspiring ministerial excellence for the glory of

Jesus Christ since 1935

. . . to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

—Ephesians 4:12-13



To make your payments, please visit the Ministers Council website at:

<https://www.ministerscouncil.com>

Contact Rev. Dr. Valerie Andrews if you need contact info for your local treasurer.

For all these decades, your national Ministers Council family has strived to provide opportunities for Collegiality, Competence and Centeredness. We've created resources articulating the challenges and ideals of an "excellent" (not perfect) minister in the Baptist contexts of ministry. Today, we connect chapters and developing affinity groups, host monthly webinars, and provide grants for clergy covenant groups and chapter events. Your Annual Dues ensure this work continues, and expresses your commitment to the "building up" of yourself and your colleagues. Renew for 2024 today!

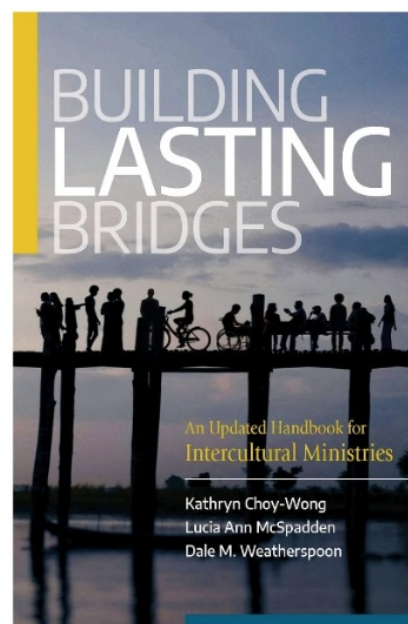
Events and Webinars



JANUARY 18, 2024
5pm Pacific/7pm Central/8pm Eastern
Rev. Katie Choy-Wong

Join us in a discussion on Rev. Katie Choy-Wong's publication, *Building Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries*.

If you are looking for creative ways to relate to one another cross-culturally in a world of diverse people, this webinar is just for you! Invite your ministry leaders and congregation to join us in this time of mutual understanding.



Staff Reflection

It was the day after Christmas, and I found myself wide-awake at 3am. I tossed and turned, and decided to get up and begin my day.

After completing my regular morning rituals, I sat at my workstation and began writing emails, finalized the 2024 church calendar, and jotted notes to myself, while simultaneously working on MC projects. I am sure you are familiar with “*getting into your zone of work*,” where you find it difficult to stop what you are doing (except for bathroom breaks of course). Well, that was me!



Hours later, I realized I was at the end of my day and considered taking a walk outside. “*It’s a dreary day today and probably cold...perhaps I should stay inside*”, I began tell myself. Nevertheless, as many clergy do, I pushed through! During my walk, I began to take deep breaths followed by exhaling s-l-o-w-l-y. Oddly enough, in my mind, I could clearly hear these lyrics:

***Lord, send a revival,
Lord, send a revival;
Lord, send a revival,
and let it begin in me.***

Hmmm...

As we approach the end of another year, perhaps you, like me, could really benefit from a revival to transition into a new season. Much has occurred this year, this month, this week, and I venture to say, even today (though not all bad)! Yet, full transparency, I am exhausted! Surely, a revival (*to restore to life or to rebuild*) would do many of us well in our minds, hearts, body, and spirit, as we prepare to face what is to come. It has been a year of transition for many of us, but the good news is: THE LORD WAS, IS, and WILL BE WITH US! Therefore, we have hope, even in the unknown.

So join me in raising your voice, as together we sing this familiar Baptist hymn, for the Psalmist has said: “***Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, LORD God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.***”

Blessings in this New Year,

The Reverend Dr. Valerie Andrews
Program Administrator, Ministers Council

Prayers and Milestones

Prayers of Intercession

For peace among nations, especially between Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine.

For all victims of human trafficking worldwide,

For areas of the United States facing winter storms, heavy rains, and other

weather events,

For a renewed sense of hope and possibility at the start of this new year.

Please share your prayers and milestones for the February 2024 issue by sending an email to ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org before January 27.



ABC Announcements

Roger Williams Zoom Conference with Don Ng

Flag your 2024 calendar for a zoom event sponsored by Roger Williams Fellowship, featuring our friend and colleague **Rev. Don Ng**, as he reflects on his experience as an Asian-American in our pluralistic society, so riven by divisions, suspicions and threats to civil liberties, especially among our immigrant neighbors and their immediate descendants.

This event will take place on **Thursday, January 11** at **10 AM EST / 1 PM PST**. Look for more information, including the zoom link coming soon!



Why Sabbatical? A Planning Workshop

This Jan 5 online workshop will walk through a process of sabbatical planning. Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing will be your guide in how to prepare the leadership and congregation, and develop your own goals for a time apart.

When: **Fri, Jan 5**, 1:30-4:30 pm ET

Price: \$65

[Enroll now!](#)

Hungry for Spiritual Direction

Curious about the Christian tradition of spiritual direction? Wondering about its gifts for life today? In this 4-week cohort, discover the history of spiritual direction and experience its contemplative practices in personal formation.

When: **Fri, Jan 12–Feb 2**, 6:00-8:30 pm ET

Price: \$125

[Get started!](#)

ABNS: ABHMS Webinar Series Addresses Mental Well-Being in Asian American Congregations and Communities

KING OF PRUSSIA, PA (12/21/23)—Recognizing a tension between all-too-real issues of mental well-being within Asian American congregations and communities and an entrenched cultural hesitancy to acknowledge them, the Center for Continuous Learning (CCL) of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has crafted “Love the Lord with All Your Mind.” This three-part webinar series beginning in January 2024 is designed to facilitate dialog about mental health with faith leaders who are themselves Asian American or who serve in congregations and communities with a significant Asian American presence.

[Click here to view the news release.](#)

Ecumenical Resources



McClendon Scholar in Residence

Where Faith, Intellect and Justice Meet

The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

How Can We Heal Our Nation? A Webinar with Rev. James Forbes



The next McClendon Scholar program will feature Rev. James Forbes, Senior Pastor Emeritus of Riverside Church in New York City. He will speak on Saturday morning, **January 13, 2024 at 10:30 AM EST** on the topic of “How Can We Heal Our Nation?” He will speak at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church (NYAPC) in downtown Washington, DC and the program will also be available via webinar. Rev. Forbes has been one of the leading voices of progressive Christianity for half a century and we are particularly delighted to have him with us on Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend. Rev. Forbes will also preach on **Sunday, January 14** at the regular worship service at NYAPC.

Please register now if you want to attend this program. To attend in person, register [here](#) and if you are unable to attend in person and want to join via webinar then register [here](#). After you register you will receive information about the free parking available for those who can come to NYAPC to hear him speak and those who are attending the webinar will receive the zoom link needed to access the program. I hope you will plan now to join us either in person or online.

Pastors & Leaders Conference: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

AMBS Pastors & Leaders is an annual gathering of pastors and those who hold leadership roles in local congregations, chaplaincy contexts, regional churches, denominational settings, not-for-profits and community organizations.

We meet together to connect, worship, learn and be inspired for our ministries. Our gatherings reflect AMBS’s Anabaptist orientation but are open to people from any denomination or no denomination.

Plus daylong **Leadership Clinics** before the start of the conference on Monday, Feb. 19!

- The early registration cost is **\$200 USD** for in-person or online when you register by **Jan. 19, 2024**
- The registration cost after Jan. 19 is **\$250 USD**
- The final registration deadline is **Feb. 12, 2024**

For more information and to register go to:

<https://www.ambs.edu/pastors-and-leaders-conference/>

Reminders

We are committed to an exchange of chapter news, as well as announcements of personal and communal milestones and prayer requests. For inclusion in the February issue, send these to ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org by January 27.

**How to reach us:**

- Phone: (610) 314-7837
- Office Hours: Tuesdays from 9am - 1pm (EST), and Thursdays from 2:30pm - 6:30pm (EST).

**Stay connected**

- Visit us at our **website**.
- Join us on **Facebook**

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