



Ministers Council Newsletter

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

December 2013

From the Desk of the Executive Director

There are times when we can be so self absorbed that we may not realize how truly blessed we are. Have you ever had such an experience? I did just a few days ago.

I was just coming home from a business trip. The trip was wonderful, but now it was time to simply go home and unwind. I got to my car, loaded my luggage and proceeded to make the trip home out of Boston. As I made my way to the garage exit, my car died.

“Ugh!” I sighed. “Not today, not now,” I moaned.

My car is getting on in years and I have had a number of repair issues over the past few years. I was just about to call AAA when I was able to get the car started.

“Thank you Jesus,” I sighed as I traveled on.

I exited the parking garage and merged onto the airport roadway heading for the turnpike. My “thank you Jesus” praises quickly turned into cries of “please God” as my car started to die once more. This time, the car would not comply no matter how many prayers I threw upwards. I was upset, to put it mildly. It was cold, it was dark, I was stranded in a dead car in Boston, and I was unhappy.

I called AAA and relayed them the details of my location. The dispatcher then in turn placed me on hold for what seemed like an inordinate amount of time.

“Ms. Jackson,” the dispatcher said.

“Yes, I’m here,” I replied.

“Well, um, we cannot tow your car where you are located.”

“What do you mean you can’t tow my car?” I was trying not to shriek.

“You are located on the Massachusetts Turnpike and that’s the jurisdiction of the State Police. They have to come and get you.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” was my only reply. I was thinking less charitable thoughts, but I will not share any of those...

So, a State Police cruiser and a flatbed truck from the Department of Transportation came to my rescue. The good news was that having broken down on the turnpike, they had to come and get me quickly. The bad news was that they had to take me to the police barracks in South Boston, even further away from my home, from whence I would have to call AAA again to have them come to get me.



By now I'm feeling pretty sorry for myself. It was cold, it was dark, I was stranded in a dead car in South Boston, I was unhappy, and to add to it I was now hungry. As I was standing there feeling badly, I saw a man dressed in reflective outdoor apparel who, after having taken an upsetting phone call, was literally stomping around the parking lot. Yet, even in his unhappy state, he came over to talk to me.

"What's the matter here," he growled.

"My car broke down on the pike and I need my car towed to Newton."

He said, "Well, I have a family emergency," stormed off again and climbed into his truck.

I did not know what to make of that exchange and was left to ponder its meaning in the cold parking lot. However, the man did not leave me stranded. His emergency notwithstanding, he backed up his truck, and began to hook my car to it.

"The truck is warm and the door is unlocked," he said and beckoned me to go and sit.

As we headed for Newton, he began to tell me his situation. The Apostle Paul assures us that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, but there sure is conviction. As the man shared all that was going on in his life, I was convicted to my very depth. My situation was largely one of inconvenience. His situation was much more substantial. And while God may use circumstances that demonstrate to us that we do not have it so badly, God also gives us opportunities to minister to others out of what is really an abundance of blessings. I had the very privileged opportunity to minister to my driver. After he shared his story and situation, I shared my belief that God would make a way and open the doors for him. He looked at me oddly after I made this comment and it was then that I shared that I was a member of the clergy.

Once we got to my home, we exchanged names. I gave him my card and asked him to call me so that I would know how things went for him. My inconvenience was largely over. His situation was still unfolding. However, God gave me the opportunity to do again what he has called me to do – minister to others. We may be having a bad day. We may be inconvenienced. But we can never lose sight of the fact that someone is suffering more than we are. My job – our job – is to be mindful of that suffering so that we might join those who are suffering and journey with them. It is a gift. It is the gift of ministry - one that we all share.



Sue Sechrist Retires from the Ministers Council

"Ministers Council, this is Sue."

If you have ever called the offices of the Ministers Council, ABCUSA, that is the friendly greeting that you received. Sue Sechrist will be retiring as the Office Administrator of the Ministers Council on December 31, 2013. Sue started working for the Ministers Council on September 13, 1993.

Much has changed in the 20 years that Sue has been here. Gene Wright was the interim Executive Director when Sue started with the Ministers Council, after having already served eight years in ABCUSA. Gene was followed by Kate Harvey Jacobs who served as Executive Director from 1985 – 2008. Kate was followed by Joe Kutter from 2008 – 2012, and then Debora Jackson from 2012 – Present. Sue has seen her share of initiatives and efforts in 20 years: Together in Ministry, Communities of Practice, the Jerusalem Council, and Healthy Habits in Ministry. She has made sure that we were ready for various events: annual Senate Gatherings, Biennial meetings where she staffed the Ministers Council booth; and Minister's conferences such as Wait on the Lord, Strong in the Lord and Together in the Lord.

But where most have had the pleasure of encountering Sue is when she would answer the phones at the Ministers Council office. How many times has she responded to an inquiry for a Treasurer wanting to know how to handle Membership Dues? How many times have people called wanting to know where a certain Ministers Council resource could be found on the website? How many times has someone called looking for ministerial standing, or answers to questions about Clergy Code of Conduct,

or how to start a local council, or the location of closest local council. Sue has been the warm, knowledgeable voice on the other end of the phone or the rapidly responded to email message that crossed your electronic transom.

An appreciation gathering was held for Sue at Mission Center on Thursday, September 12. She will be in the office until Monday, December 23. Please let Sue know how much you appreciate her by sending email notes to Sue.Sechrist@abc-usa.org; written correspondences to P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851. Alternatively, you can call (800) 222-3872, ext. 2334 and hear for yourself, "Ministers Council, this is Sue."



Together in Ministry – Current Status

We have a new giving total for the Together in Ministry Capital campaign. Our cash gifts and pledges now total \$276,048.05. With the in-kind donations of \$68,280, we have a grand total of \$344,328.05. This is great.

What is also great is that we are receiving contributions toward pledges. While these totals would not be seen, we are tremendously grateful for the folks who are honoring the pledges that they made, particularly as we consider the difficult economic challenges that many are facing. Thank you for your contributions.

Looking for ideas of what your council could do to support the campaign? At the most recent ABC Rocky Mountain Minister's Council meeting, members decided that this year they would build into their regional dues an extra charitable donation towards the TIM campaign! How awesome is that?

End of year is a wonderful time to make a tax deductible contribution to the Ministers Council. Our funding comes solely from the dues of members, endowment funds, and the fund development efforts in which we engage. We need your help to achieve our purpose of continuing the Together in Ministry program as a resource to extend ministerial effectiveness. Make your donations securely and electronically by going to <https://secure-q.net/Donations/ABChurches/3796> and thanks.

Bringing Meaning and Joy to Advent and Christmas

By Nancy Leport

My Dear Pastoral Colleagues,
Can we talk?

Is your December newsletter full of "EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA READ ALL ABOUT IT" with the "IT" being all the extra Advent/Christmas activities? The Advent/Christmas season, for those churches that follow the liturgical calendar, can be a time of extra programs, extra services, extra pastoral care, extra music, extra expectations and extra stress. It marks a time of anticipation, celebration, and exhaustion for most pastors.

I know that there have been many times when all I can think of is how wonderful it will be when Advent is over and I can get some rest. One Christmas Eve I broke out in hives due to the stress of the season. Add to it family and friends' expectations and how to fit it all in becomes a juggling act requiring our utmost concentration.

And it has begun for 2014. December 1 - December 24 will carry us through the chronological season this year but how do you want to walk through it? Or, to put it another way, "How do you want to experience the end of Advent and how do you want to walk into that Christmas Eve Service?"

How we live in that dash or gap between the first of December and Christmas Eve will determine whether we are stressed out and exhausted at the end of the season or whether we are fresh and fully open to the message we are called to preach in Advent.



Now some pastors thrive on the activity and extras of the season, if you are one of them, then you can stop reading right here. Go and enjoy it as fully as you ever have.

If, however, you are one of the pastors who ends up with a head cold, or counts the days until it is over or finds him or herself snapping at loved ones and a tad bit irritable by Christmas, then maybe this article is for you.

And because everyone has a different breaking point or absorption level with stress, getting through the season is not a one size fits all process. So here are a few general suggestions.

What I have found helpful both personally and with clients is to look at the extras that bring meaning and joy to your experience of Advent and Christmas. Make sure those are given high priority. Schedule them intentionally and approach them the same way. By that I mean make sure you are well rested before they occur and haven't gone too far off your diet or exercise routine.

Speaking of diet, the many rich foods at this time of the year can wreak havoc with our bodies and our minds. A good rule of thumb is only eat those things at a party that you can't get at any other time of the year or don't allow yourself to eat at other times. Exercising during times of high stress is a great way to lower the effects of cortisol surging through your system and replacing it with those wonderful endorphins.

Acknowledge this is an unusual season and don't do 'business' as usual. Pare the meetings down to the bare minimum. Or, if you are going to have to meet, change up the agenda to reflect on the season rather than on the budget or the latest report from the property committee. Set people free to make decisions without your presence being required.

Above all, guard your heart. Let the wonder of the season fill your heart; see it through the eyes of the children, the elderly and those who are looking for a miracle. We, clergy, spend a lot of time in our heads, studying, teaching, searching for just the right words or concept. Let this Advent/Christmas season be the one where you find the words, the lessons and the sermon illustrations in your heart.

We know what it is that Mary pondered in her heart. We know the rest of the story. We are messengers of the good news who at this time of the year bring glad tidings of great joy to all. Be the good news. Be that joy. Be heart-filled with the reason for the season.

Getting to Christmas healthy and spiritually whole can be the best gift you can give yourself, your family, and your congregation this year.

Peace and Joy,
Nancy

Rev. Nancy Leport, is a graduate of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, an ordained American Baptist pastor, certified interim minister, and board certified life design coach who lives in Le Roy, NY and hopes to winter in Woodstock, GA. She also holds a Post Masters Certificate in the Practice of Spirituality from Boston College. She writes three blogs, one on Sabbath Taking (www.sabbathmoments.wordpress.com), one for church health and wellness (www.churchhealthandwellness.wordpress.com), and one for busy women (www.time4yourselfblog.wordpress.com). A former pastor, her passion is working with clergy who are feeling stressed by the demands of the pastorate.

Living Out our Cultural Reality – An Update from the Mission Table

By Debora Jackson

In November, I had the privilege of attending the Mission Table in Green Lake, WI with approximately 100 other leaders from across the denomination and county. It was an awesome gathering. We considered 32 ministry challenges and used our time to listen to one another, discern God's leading in the conversations and continue our engagement in ways that would lead us faithfully forward. A wonderful synopsis of the conversations can be found in a posting by Bridget Holmstrom at <http://www.abc-usa.org/missiontable/>.

For our final dialog of the gathering, we had the option of selecting from 10 different discussion topics. I chose the topic *Living Out our Cultural Reality* which was a discussion about our multicultural

reality. Specifically we noted that ABCUSA is already a multi-ethnic denomination, but what does that mean for our ministry as we move into the future.

This is truly one of those difficult conversations. I would not be so bold as to suggest that I know all of the reasons why talking about multiculturalism is difficult, but two reasons come quickly to mind. First, the “right” people are rarely in the room when we begin a conversation about multiculturalism. Who are the right people? They are the people with the power. We often do not recognize power dynamics but they are real, particularly in places like the church. And the reality of the power dynamic is that power has to be conceded in order to make room for the other. This fact is true whether we are discussing women in ministry, greater lay involvement in the work of the church, changing mission focus, or making our worship more diverse. That being said, most often conversations on multiculturalism do not include the persons with power. Rather they are dominated by those without power. Given such composition, these conversations are often cathartic and supportive, but they can rarely change the hearts and minds of individuals because those who most need to hear the messages are not present.

Secondly, I recognize that the most marginalized are the least likely to speak in a multicultural gathering. I saw this dynamic in an interesting experiment recently. Dozens of people came together for a multicultural conference in Melrose, MA. Participants were ethnically segregated for a first round of conversations. It was fascinating to see the level of indignation rise as people found their segregated groups. However, once the round began, the conversations were lively and loud once we started.

In the second round, people were partially integrated. The difference in the conversations was dramatic. Where there had been lively engagement, there was now strained conversation. Where there had been laughter, there was simply talking. The volume was significantly lower in the second round as people felt less comfortable in speaking.

In the third round, the groups were fully integrated. It was painful. Those who were typically accustomed to having power in conversations monopolized this round. They monopolized to mitigate the uncomfortable silence and encourage those who were quiet to speak. Yet those who were less inclined to speak used that monopolization as a shield through which they could further disengage. For instance, I observed a Haitian woman who never said a word during the third round. Her perspective was most important, but it was never shared.

These two examples only affirm the learning that came from our conversations at the Mission Table. The first critical learning is that diversity is everyone’s job in ABC and it needs to be before us in everything that we do. We have to make room for other voices, other ideas, other cultures, other ways of doing things. That is the way to real growth, never mind the fact that it is a theological and Biblical mandate.

Then, in order to hear all voices and share power across all peoples, we have to create safe spaces for sacred conversations where we regard diversity as sacred and where we exercise mutual accountability. I cannot help but think of the Haitian woman who did not participate. How could we have invited her in? How could we have guarded and maintained the space so that she felt safe in sharing what may have felt too vulnerable to say.

Truly we are living in adaptive times where the challenges of our time will not be easily solved. However, adaptive leadership theory encourages us to make space at the table for others recognizing that as other voices and perspectives are heard, we will learn. And in that learning, it will become possible tomorrow to solve what is unsolvable today.

Looking for tools to expand your consideration of multiculturalism? A colleague shared a link to <http://www.racialequitytools.org/home> which has resources for racial equity. This very robust website has a number of useful ideas, data, strategies, and other tools. One of the most insightful is a 4 minute video on white privilege in action as told by Joy DeGruy in [A Trip to the Grocery Store](#).

Living out our cultural reality is reminiscent of Jesus in Luke 4:16. He declared to all in the temple that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recover the sight of the blind, let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. We have not just the power, but mandate to do this work on behalf of our brothers and sisters so that we all will live a more fulfilled existence. That is what it means to me to live out our cultural reality.

Do you have your IM Platinum Rewards Visa?

It's not too late to take advantage of the partnership between the Ministers Council and the Christian Community Credit Union. When you are approved for the International Ministries Platinum Rewards Visa, both the Ministers Council and International Ministries receives a \$50.00 donation. Apply for your Visa today. Go to www.myCCCU.com/IMCard and use Promotion Code 9001 for the Ministers Council.

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Visit mycccu.com/cards for credit card application and terms.

Christian Community Credit Union is privately insured by American Share Insurance up to \$250,000 per account. By members' choice the Credit Union is not federally insured or insured by any state government.



Judson Press Promotion Continues for 2014!

One of the Ministers Council's most generous partners is Judson Press. Through 2013, Judson Press has offered a discount code to Ministers Council Members through which we can receive free shipping on Judson Press titles. Did you take advantage of that offer in 2013? If not, don't feel so badly. You will be able to continue to reap the benefit of this valuable partnership in 2014. Just contact your Regional or Constituent Council president for the 2014 Judson Press promotional code. Soon you will be able to go to the new Ministers Council Website at www.MinistersCouncil.com and log into the Members Only Section. There, you will have the ability to access the code directly.

HEAR *the* CALL

On July 19-21, 2014, International Ministries and the Ministers Council will partner to sponsor *Hear The Call* Retreat. The retreat program begins Saturday evening and ends late Monday afternoon. The retreat convenes students, second-career seekers and active retirees and invites them to ponder God's call on their lives. Attendees will participate in and register for only ONE of three tracks: Track 1 for those exploring a call to cross-cultural global mission service; Track 2 for those feeling a call to pastoral ministry in the US & Puerto Rico; and Track 3 for people wanting to be more involved in local mission in their church, community, state or region. Our weekend will also include worship, inspirational messages, Bible Study, workshops and personal reflection time. It will be a powerful discernment experience. Invite those who you know who are sensing God's call on their lives to register now at <http://www.internationalministries.org/read/50426-2014-program-fees>. More information can be found at <http://www.internationalministries.org/read/49675-2014-world-mission-conference>.



**Questions, Comments,
Praises or Complaints?**

We want to know. Please contact us with your feedback.



A TIME TO SERVE: PREPARING TO SERVE

A cruise for sisters in Christ!

September 19-22, 2014

Royal Caribbean 'Enchantment of the Seas'
Departing from Port Canaveral, Orlando, Florida

Spend a day experiencing the beauty of **Nassau**, a blend of cultural influences from Haiti, England, West Africa, and many other places. Shop at the Straw Market, or eat fresh seafood in Arawak Cay; get some history by visiting Fort Charlotte or the 18th century Balcony House, or play with dolphins on Blue Lagoon Island.

Take the opportunity to enjoy the sun and surf of **CocoCay**, a private island filled with beaches, shopping, and activities exclusively for passengers of Royal Caribbean. Snorkel in a coral reef, take a nap on a hammock, shop at the straw market, walk the nature trail, or tap into your adventurous side by parasailing or riding on a WaveRunner.

And be inspired through Scripture, meaningful worship, and spiritual growth!

Exploring more of our two-year focus on "A Time to Serve," during our sessions together on the ship we'll be looking at how we are **prepared to serve**. How do we attend to our spiritual and physical health to help us be effective disciples for Christ? What practices can we adopt to help us continue to grow as women of faith while we are called into an ever-deepening relationship with God? Is "self-care" a bad word? Or is it a necessary part of keeping ourselves ever-ready to serve others?

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson
Executive Director
Minister's Council ABCUSA



Dr. Lisa Croft
Family Practitioner

FEATURING



Joyce Sinclair Lake
Performing Artist



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info@abwministries.org

Save your space on the boat by registering today! For more information, go to <http://www.abwministries.org/events/event-details.cfm?id=146>.

Other Events

- Ministers Council Executive Committee Meeting – January 5-6, Orlando, FL
- Emerge – Ministers Conference and Orientation to ABC Life – January 6-9, Orlando, FL
- Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, Guest Preacher, Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson – January 12, Oakland, CA
- Greater Bay Area Ministers Council Retreat – January 13-14, San Damiano Retreat Center, Danville, CA. Register by January 1. For more information go to <http://redwoodglen.com/leaders/2014retreat.pdf>
- American Baptist Seminary of the West – President's Cabinet Meeting – January 15, Oakland, CA
- Christian Community Credit Union Meeting – January 16, Los Angeles, CA
- American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles Meeting – January 16, Los Angeles, CA
- MLK Day Observance – January 20, Framingham, MA

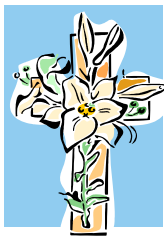
Do you have events coming up in your regions? Share the word so that others might know your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Send email announcements to Debora Jackson at Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org.

Upcoming Episodes of “In Their Shoes: Women Walking with Women Worldwide

American Baptist Women's Ministries' podcast series, “In Their Shoes: Women Walking with Women Worldwide,” addresses topics with impact upon women and girls in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and around the world. November 2013's episode, “Depression and Women,” features an interview with Rev. Dr. Judith Craik, American Baptist pastor and pastoral counselor, exploring depression from a perspective of faith. Upcoming episodes will address congregational ministries with the incarcerated and their families with Rev. Errol Cooper, self-care in ministry with Rev. Nancy Leport, advocacy with Peggy Burke, and more. To subscribe to this free monthly podcast series, visit www.intheirshoespodcast.org, or find it on iTunes

Join the Ministers Council

Join the Ministers Council through your local constituent council. Contact information is posted on www.ministerscouncil.org under the WHO WE ARE link. You can also go to www.ministerscouncil.com and sign up online by clicking <http://ministerscouncil.com/subscriptions/>. Scroll through the list to find your council.



Remembering Newtown

Saturday, December 14, 2013, marks the one-year anniversary of the deaths of 20 children and six educators killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Place a candle in your window on Saturday to remember the lives lost. Ring your church bells on Sunday. Remember these precious lives and the lives of 173 children under the age of 12 who have died from gunshots in the U.S. over the last year since Newtown.

Ministers Council Contact Information

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We welcome your comments or questions on this newsletter. Send you thoughts to Debra.Jackson@abc-usa.org