



Ministers Council Newsletter

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

November 2014



THE BAPTIST IDENTITY

Four Fragile Freedoms

WALTER B. SHURDEN

From the Desk of the Executive Director

In October, Houston Mayor Annise Parker subpoenaed the sermons of pastors who opposed the city's Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO). She wanted to review sermons and correspondences of these pastors to determine whether they were discussing the ordinance from their pulpits. People across the country condemned the act as an outrageous violation of religious liberty. The call was issued for pastors to send sermons and citizens to send Bibles to the mayor's office in an effort to inundate and overwhelm the administration. The response was so great that hundreds of Bibles, sermons, and religious texts flooded the mayor's office. More importantly, the backlash was so strong that the mayor ultimately had to back down and revoke the subpoena.

Am I commenting on this incident to ask you to send sermons or Bibles to Houston? Well, no, because you must govern yourselves accordingly. However, this is one of those issues that ought to galvanize and move us to action. I am reminded of the Martin Niemöller quote, "...Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me." As pastors and preachers, we are moved by the Holy Spirit to speak a word that God inspires. Whether that word comes from the lectionary texts, inspired by devotional study, or motivated by a current event, I believe that it is God who intercedes and gives us voice. God's Spirit moves us and emboldens us. Therefore, I believe that we must speak freely as God has given us utterance, free from intimidation. These are the times that we must be like the tree planted by the water and declare, "I shall not be moved." As ministerial leaders, we cannot allow such acts to occur and go unchallenged. If we won't speak against this, who will?

Then as Baptists, we also ought to be motivated to act. When I graduated from seminary, the Baptist Student Fellowship of Andover Newton Theological School gave me a gift. It was the book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*. It was inscribed, "Embrace, honor and lift up these Baptist distinctives." Honoring these distinctives, we as Baptists must know that Baptists were instrumental in securing religious liberty. In "A Pronouncement on Religious Liberty," a document adopted in 1939 by the three largest Baptist denominations in the United States at that time, "Religious liberty, as our Baptist ancestors defined it, was an emancipation from governmental and all other coercive restrictions, that thwarted the free exercise of religion, or their high purpose to achieve a Christ-like character." From the establishment of our faith tradition, Baptists were responsible for declaring the need for separation between church and state. This is our history and our heritage. To keep silent in the face of such an egregious violation is to deny our Baptist heritage. Again, if we won't speak against this, who will?

Don't get me wrong; I understand the challenge. We really are a diverse family. We are as diverse in as many ways as can be defined. And because of our diversity, which we rightly celebrate, we will scarcely agree on anything. So I offer my musings, while recognizing that all will not agree. After all, some may have heard of this incident and thought that it was not a big deal. Some may have viewed this as government's attempt to quell disorderly conduct against a newly passed ordinance. And because of that some might say that the mayor was within her rights. After all, Romans 13:1 tells us to be subject to governing authorities because authority rests upon whom God has appointed. Nevertheless, I believe that we are compelled to speak out. As an organization of ministerial leaders who are ordained by or serve American Baptist Churches, I believe that compulsion is even greater. Our fellow clergy have been impacted. Today it was them; tomorrow, it may be you. Moreover, the hard-fought rights won by Baptist leaders have been encroached upon. In knowing our history, we cannot be silent. This truly is our issue. And if we won't speak out, then honestly, who will?

Taste and See

Psalm 34:8 encourages us to "Taste and see that the Lord is good..." and certainly we know this to be true. It is so sweet to spend time with God, in prayer, in study, and in fellowship with our clergy colleagues. And if we would make the time to "taste and see," indeed we would see that the Lord is good. But how many times do we actually do that tasting where it comes to being in fellowship with colleagues?

I had the opportunity to participate in the Peer Power: Cultivating Clergy Communities of Practice retreat at Bon Secours Spiritual Center this past week. I was there to serve as a workshop leader; however, I too had the opportunity to "taste" the experience of a clergy community of practice, and it was good.

Etienne Wenger defines a "Community of Practice" as a group of peers who share a concern or a passion for something they do and who learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. For those of you who participated in Together in Ministry, this is really no different. But it leverages the momentum of the Lilly Endowment's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program by encouraging clergy peers to continue to gather to be strengthened and sustained in this nurturing way.

Enjoying the pleasure of participating in an experiential group with Rev. Malcolm Hamblett, Assistant to the Region Minister and President of the Ministers Council of ABC Vermont/New Hampshire, my group enjoyed an abbreviated session on the topic "Assessing This Season of My Ministry." It was a powerful opportunity to reflect on ministry but then share those reflections with colleagues who were willing to listen and ask questions to help us make sense of our experiences. It was a holy time in which we privileged to be together.

And just that little taste made some ask, "Why don't we do more of this?" We just need to make the time because starting a Community of Practice peer group is very straight forward. Five to ten members are encouraged to come together on a monthly basis and be led by a facilitator. The group creates a covenant regarding their ways of being and commitments to one another. Each meeting consists of worship; check-in where people share updates regarding their wellness and ministry; topic for discussion; review of the meeting; and next steps for the next meeting. It was recommended that groups plan to meet for at least three hours, particularly if a meal is being shared.

We know all of the benefits. We know that clergy who come together are healthier in their ministry. We know that clergy who come together are not subject to the issues of isolationism. Clergy that come together have life-sustaining friendships, realize greater support, and are emboldened for future uncertainty. We know all of these things, but we do not engage. Perhaps we believe we do not have the time. Perhaps we believe it will cost too much money to participate. Perhaps we just don't believe in the benefits. But as the psalmist said, "Taste and see." Being together with clergy peers is a wonderful way to see that the Lord is good. If you want more information on starting a group, contact the Ministers Council office or email me at Debora.jackson@abc-usa.org.

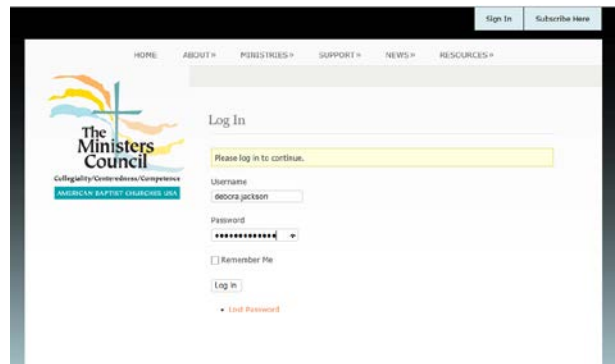
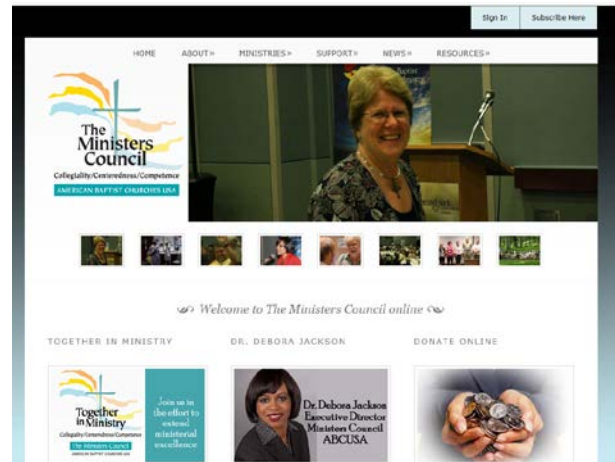


Been to the Website Lately?

Have you been to the Ministers Council Website lately? It is a resource for you and your ministry. Moreover, if you are a member of the Ministers Council, it is an even greater resource because you can access the “Members Only” section of the website. Do you know how? If not, follow these steps:

1. Go to www.ministerscouncil.com or www.ministerscouncil.org.
2. Click the “Sign In” button at the top right screen.
3. At the Log In screen enter your Username and Password
 - a. The format for most usernames is FIRSTNAME.LASTNAME unless you created your account yourself.
 - b. Your password is what you created. If you do not remember your password, click the link “Lost Password” at the bottom of the page.
 - c. A new password will be emailed to your account and you will have the opportunity to reset your password upon next login.
4. Upon successful login, you will see a new menu option “Members Only”. There you will find more resources to enhance your ministry.

Log into the website to day and make the most of your Ministers Council Membership.



Courage to Search for Freedom and Justice Pilgrimage

Rev. Sandra Dorsainvil, Director of Mission & Stewardship, the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts shared the experience of a recent Civil Rights Pilgrimage made in September. The group consisted of nine adults from Massachusetts and Maine (seven clergy, two lay, one white man, four black women and five white women) who traveled through Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee. The context for the September 2014 Pilgrimage was the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The goal was not to solve but to search, not so much to rescue as to be present, not to cover our eyes and ears, but to let the “scales drop from our eyes” and to dare to notice, speak and name social injustices we would have witnessed along our travel. Furthermore, they sought not to fix anything but to be transformed by the people, stories, and understandings that would be gained from the conversations and visits made.



A powerful moment for the group was having the opportunity to meet Ms. Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson. Ms. Boynton Robinson's story is fully told at <http://www.ameliaboynton.org/2.html>; however, sitting with her was like sitting with living history. She joined the 1965 march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge with all hope that the world would see their struggle, and that the truth would be seen by our own country and government. Friends at the march picked up her limp body left on the street, after having received two violent blows to the neck, and took her to a hospital. Now at 109 years old, Ms. Amelia Platts Boynton-Robinson is clear minded, inspirational and instructive. Rev. Adrienne Berry-Burton noted that “She is not burdened down with anger or hatred or a taste for revenge. She held no bitterness against the police officer who hit her. Her



forgiveness gave her the freedom to move forward. Hope lived on in her heart. A police club did not kill off her love or her hope.”

Rev. Cynthia Maybeck shared that “On this pilgrimage, I have been charged to create change. And so I have become a woman of prayer. Oh, I have always prayed. But the experience of pilgrim prayer has sharpened my conviction and inflamed my passion. I pray that God will use me to dismantle racism. I pray that Christ will grace me with opportunities to witness against white privilege. I pray that the Holy Spirit will transform me to see possibilities of change and to confront power fearlessly and faithfully. The Civil Rights history is powerful; the racism is painful; the community of pilgrims is providential.”

Elaine Fadden noted that “... All these questions raced through my head, while as pilgrims we walked together. Emotions flowed as I stood in Dr. King's kitchen and still felt the power of the inspiration he received in his moment of despair to keep going. (And 10:22 on the clock was permanently frozen).”

Elaine continued by indicating that “No words are able to describe what I felt as we were standing on the sidewalk at 16th Street Baptist Church, on the spot where the bombs were laid, and we were praying with Sarah Collins and George Rudolph, her husband. I had a strong sense of the Holy Spirit's presence in the circle praying, and lifting our pleas for peace and healing heavenward to God.”

The group also created history, having had the opportunity to integrate 2nd Baptist Church in Memphis, the sanctuary, the choir loft and the pulpit. The pastor, Rev. Dr. Stephen Cook, and congregation of Second Baptist Church, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship church with Southern Baptist roots, welcomed our American Baptist colleagues, male and female, in a step of moving forward into a future of accepting the diversity of God's Beloved Kingdom and Community.

And this was key. All nine fellow pilgrims walked, prayed, cried, saw, sang, laughed and lived transformation. They remain grateful to all known and unknown brothers and sisters who lifted them in prayers during the journey and beyond. They remain grateful for the sacredness of community. And their deepest gratitude goes to The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts and The American Baptist Home Mission Societies for their support.



Your Vote Counts! Don't forget to vote on November 4th



Do You (or Your Leaders) Make These Five Mistakes when Communicating About Money at Church?

Margaret Marcuson

I don't have to tell you that communication is a big challenge for church leaders. "I didn't know about..." "No one ever told us..." You may have shared the message for weeks, and people *still* didn't get it. This is often hardest when it concerns money. Here are five mistakes church leaders often make when communicating about money.

1. **They share only numbers.** Budgets and financial statements are important, but they won't communicate to most people. And they will not motivate people to give. Stories of lives touched will do far more than a sheet of numbers. Using pictures will help even more.
2. **They don't consider the role of anxiety.** Anxiety is like static, and it makes it harder for people to receive information in any form. If anxiety about money is high, you need to communicate more often and through more avenues. Expect that people won't hear, or won't hear correctly, and put extra effort into the message. Then don't be frustrated when they come back asking for more information. Simply give it again, neutrally.
3. **They report giving on an evenly-divided twelve month calendar.** No church receives giving evenly throughout the year. If you report giving in this way, in most churches you will be giving bad news every year until December. An alternative: Based on a three year average, calculate what you can expect to receive in each month. That way you can report a realistic expectation for July, not one-twelfth of the annual expected giving.
4. **They use only one means of communication.** Many churches still send out one stewardship letter. See if you can find five different ways to ask people to give. Here are a few ideas: a letter, an e-mail, a request from the pastor, an invitation from a lay leader in worship, a personal invitation to new members.

5. **They don't communicate their thanks, only their request.** Thank people for their pledges and their giving. Do this individually, not just with a blanket thank you from the platform or in the newsletter. People like to be thanked, and it helps motivate them to continue to give.

<http://ministerscouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/111-Tips-to-Survive-Church-Finance.pdf>

Rev. Margaret Marcuson is Vice President of the Ministers Council's Spiritual and Personal Wholeness Committee and a Member of the Executive Committee. She is the author of [Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry](#) and [Money and Your Ministry](#).

What's Your News Flash?

Are there things happening 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



Together in Ministry – Current Status

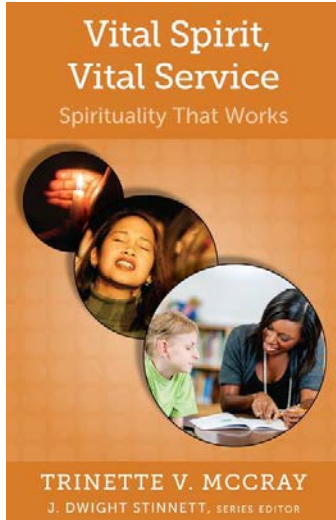
A significant focus for the Ministers Council has been to create a fund development capacity in the organization. This means that we are seeking and developing new sources of revenue to sustain the organization beyond the dues of its members. As a result, we are investigating, vetting, and applying for foundation grants to extend our reach and enhance our efforts. One question that grant proposals commonly ask is how much money in donations and contribution has been raised by the organization in the last year. You see, foundations want to contribute to organizations that have other resources to support their efforts and demonstrate the capacity to help themselves. It makes sense. While it is erroneously cited from the Bible that “God helps those who help themselves,” foundations have truly cleaved to this idea. They want to help those who help themselves. They want to ensure that their contributions will actually have a return on the investment in that the program and organization will live beyond the grant.

That is what the Together in Ministry capital campaign has been all about. It would be a travesty to see a \$2 million dollar, 10 year investment be for naught because we did not sustain it. Our TIM groups that continue to function have found ways to sustain their gatherings because they have seen the value in coming together. They are willing to help themselves and so they invest and, in gathering, reap the benefits.

But we know that God's grace extends to those who cannot help themselves. Isaiah 25:4 says, “For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress.” God is our refuge; an ever-present help in the time of trouble. But God also blesses us that we might be a blessing. Has God blessed you with support in your ministry, with a measure of security, with what you need to flourish? If so, can you be a means through whom God blesses someone else?

You can give to the Ministers Council Together in Ministry capital campaign and be that blessing. Many have already been that blessing because we've raised thousands of dollars over this past year. To date, we have raised \$290,238.05 in cash gifts and pledges, and \$71,519.20 in in-kind contributions. Be a

blessing to someone by clicking <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/>. While we know that it was Algernon Sidney who first said the oft-misquoted saying and Benjamin Franklin who repeated it, we serve God that had another plan in mind. Be a part of God's planned provision and make your tax-deductible donation today.



New Judson Press Releases

Vital Spirit, Vital Service: Spirituality That works.

This new release by Rev. Dr. Trinetta V. McCray explores the teachings of thinkers and servants such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jitsuo Morikawa and determines the seven principles of formation and transformation ministries to identify, particularize, and individualize effective spirituality and service for the local church context.

Order your copy today and enjoy free shipping with your Ministers Council Membership.

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.



Become a Member of the Ministers Council

Are you a member of the Ministers Council? Do you have a membership card with a lovely 2014 sticker affixed? Well guess what? That means your membership expires on December 31st! **Horrors!**

But you can do something about that! 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

Get ready for 2015 by becoming a member or renewing your membership in the Ministers Council. Contact your local council or go to www.ministerscouncil.com for more information.

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.

Early Bird registration is open now until November 30. Price: \$48.00

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.

Ministers Council Greater Bay Area

SURPRISED BY JOY??

Monday, January 12 - Tues, Jan 13, 2015

at Redwood Glen with Rev. John Polite

As ministers we can get cynical. Often we don't look for joy and thus do not experience joy amid the challenges we face each day in ministry. Join us and Rev. John Polite at Redwood Glen as we focus on finding joy amid loss, obstacles, and busyness. You just may be surprised at how easy it is to experience joy as you open yourself to the Spirit and your colleagues. For a registration form, click [here](#).

Though the MCGBA retreat officially begins on Monday and ends on Tuesday, you are invited to extend your retreat at Redwood Glen with an early arrival or late departure at no additional cost!

The move to Redwood Glen has also reduced retreat costs this year:

\$120 for Conference Center lodging and **\$90** in the cabins.

Rev. John Polite will be our featured speaker. A Southern Cal native, John has strong NorCal ties as a graduate of ABSW and a current member of the ABSW Board of Trustees. A pastor, gifted worship leader, and speaker, JP will bring a fresh perspective on how to experience joy in ministry.



Download a registration form [here](#), or [email](#) Rev. Larry Jay for more details.

Caring for You and Your Ministry



CARING FOR YOU AND YOUR MINISTRY

Do you feel like you're being pulled in too many different directions?

Does the leadership team of your ministry feel burned out?

Experience reflections and Bible studies by women who have personally experienced the dangers of not caring for themselves adequately while trying to attend to responsibilities.

Find guidance for attending to your own energy and the energies in the ministry as a whole.

Become a more effective leader in Christ's name.

8 pages, \$13, Item #W4940 available at <http://www.abwministries.org> or 1-800-4-JUDSON Published by American Baptist Women's Ministries in partnership with American Baptist Women in Ministry, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851, (610) 768-2288



Have you seen it? Inspired, Transformed...American Baptist Churches

The film Inspired, Transformed... American Baptist Churches is a celebration of who WE are as American Baptists, a group of people whom God has blessed to serve as the hands and feet of Christ, in the ways that we understand our freedom in Christ.

In the month of November, we are inviting all our churches across the country to select a Sunday to view the film during the Sunday Morning Worship Service to celebrate our American Baptist heritage.

This film invites us to celebrate where we have been and to be hopeful about the future to which we believe God is calling us with initiatives like Transformed by the Spirit. You are invited to visit <http://www.abc-usa.org/inspired> for more resources for your November worship service.



Mission Summit 2015 Church Registration Deadline: February 6

Make your plans now to attend Mission Summit 2015, the American Baptist Churches biennial event, June 26-28, 2015, in Overland Park, Kansas. Mission Summit 2015 will once again offer a church registration plan making it easier for individuals to attend! Once a church has registered, an unlimited number of members from that church may register at a reduced rate of \$40 per person.

New for Mission Summit 2015, church registration will close on February 6, 2015, when individual registration opens. Don't miss out on this lower registration rate, and make sure your church is registered today! Learn more at <http://www.americanbaptists2015.com>.

New Baptist Covenant Summit Slated for January

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) encourages American Baptists to [register now](#) for the New Baptist Covenant Summit to be held Jan. 14 and 15, 2015, in Atlanta, Ga. The gathering will commission and celebrate "Covenants of Action"—or projects in which at least two churches from varying Baptist traditions cooperate to address a pressing community need.

"The New Baptist Covenant expresses the best of what it means to be Baptist in the United States of America. In addition to our mutual commitments to Bible, soul, church and religious freedoms, we aim for a covenantal commitment to each other, which transcends racial homogeneity and denominational nativism," says Dr. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III, ABHMS executive director and co-leader of the summit's program committee. "As difficult as it may be, New Baptist Covenant participants are committed to living out the Jesus Manifesto in Luke 4:18 in partnership with others."

Summit speakers will include American Baptists the Rev. Dr. Amy Butler, senior pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York City and ABHMS board member; the Rev. Luis Cortéz Jr., president and CEO of Esperanza, the largest Hispanic faith-based Evangelical network in the United States; and the Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock, senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, spiritual home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The New Baptist Covenant is a movement founded by President Jimmy Carter in 2007 to break down barriers of race, theology and geography among Baptists and to incarnate Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (NRSV).

To view a video about the New Baptist Covenant and Covenants of Action, visit <http://vimeo.com/99205251>. To register for the summit or for more information, visit the New Baptist Covenant's website at <http://newbaptistcovenant.org>.

Upcoming Events

- Unity Day Worship – Providence Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD – November, 16, 2014.
- 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

Web: www.ministerscouncil.org

Mail: The Ministers Council
PO Box 851
Valley Forge PA 19482-0851

Phone: 1-800-222-3872, extension 2334 (Joyce Moon), 2333 (Rev. Debora Jackson, DMin)

FAX: 610/768-2066