

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

May 2016

From the Desk of the Executive Director

I just can't believe all the things people say... Controversy. Am I black or white, am I straight or gay... Controversy. Do you believe in God? Do you believe in me? Controversy.

So often the milestone markers of our lives are based on the music that was popular at the time. Prince was one of those defining artists for me as I came into adulthood. My college days were characterized by Prince's hits and to this day, I can sing much of his music word for word. Prince was one of my favorite performers because he was a consummate showman. You could not help but marvel as Prince danced, sang, and played every instrument on the stage while exuding seemingly boundless amounts of energy. So it was truly shocking and upsetting for me to learn that this musical genius was dead at the age of 57. And while the official cause of death is awaiting the completion of the autopsy and toxicology reports, it is all the more distressing that prescription opioid medication may have contributed to Prince's death.



Opioid abuse has truly become an epidemic in this country. According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 259 million prescriptions were written for opioids in 2014.¹ This is more than enough to give every American adult their own bottle of pills. And we are obviously consuming and abusing opioids in mass quantities. In 2014, almost 2 million Americans abused or were dependent on prescription opioids.² And from 1999 to 2014, more than 165,000 people have died in the U.S. from overdoses related to prescription opioids.³

Why am I sharing these statistics? I share them because opioid abuse is an ever present crisis in our midst. While states are implementing laws to curtail prescription abuse, such as limiting prescription quantities, mandating database information sharing, and requiring in-person prescription filling of opioids, opioids remain easily accessible depending upon your community and demographic. In addition, opioids are extremely inexpensive, making them a "cheap high." I was amazed that with insurance, a prescription of Vicodin, a drug containing acetaminophen and hydrocodone given to me after hernia repair surgery, costs less than a dollar. How can it be that Tylenol and Advil cost more than a potentially-habit-forming opiate?

So given accessibility and low cost, chances are that someone you know and are ministering to is abusing opioids. The touchier issue, however, is that some of us who are doing the ministering are the abusers because it's so easy to call up "*Dr. Everything'll Be Alright*" and fill a prescription.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/opioid-prescribing/>, Accessed 4/29/16

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014.

³ CDC. Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics; 2016. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov>.

In the book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*, Ruth Haley Barton quotes Jethro's words to Moses to introduce the idea of living within our limits in ministry. As Exodus 18:17-18 says, *"What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."* Leadership is sometimes so heavy that we start to operate beyond the limit and contribute to our own depletion. There are many signs of such over functioning, but one potentially dangerous sign is succumbing to escapist behaviors like substance abuse. However, in these times, rather than seeking to anesthetize, we need to stop and access what God has given us to do. The reality is that each of us has a limit. As Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 10:13, we faithfully discharge our duties when we keep within the field that God has assigned to us. Perhaps if we were more mindful of our limits we would be less vulnerable to detrimental behaviors. Moreover, maybe we could live up to the hopes expressed in Prince's song "Free":

*Don't sleep 'til the sunrise, listen 2 the falling rain
 Don't worry 'bout tomorrow, don't worry 'bout your pain
 Don't cry unless you're happy, don't smile unless you're blue
 Never let that lonely monster take control of U*

In other words, don't allow opiates to destroy your life or the lives of those around you. Live within your limits. Seek God for direction. Solicit support from those you trust, *"and if the elevator tries to break you down, go crazy, punch a higher floor."*

American Baptist Quarterly (ABQ) is now AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

Beginning with the first issue in 1982, this scholarly journal of the American Baptist Historical Society has recently been digitized by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA). It is now available through *ATLASerials®*. ATLA staff are currently digitizing *Foundations*, the predecessor to ABQ, for the years 1958-1982.



ATLA is a professional association providing support of theological and religious studies libraries and librarians. All articles of the ABQ are now part of *ATLASerials® (ATLAS®)*, an online full-text collection of major religion and theology journals used by libraries, librarians, scholars, students, and religious leaders.

Many seminaries and libraries subscribe to *ATLASerials*, so you might be able to access this database through your seminary or university library. For example, Bethel Seminary provides access to *ATLASerials* to its alums. While ABHS sells back issues of ABQ for \$15, some of the most popular issues are no longer available. Digitization by ATLA and the on-line availability makes these timeless articles available for researchers and readers.

AT YOUR FINGERTIPS is the ABHS campaign for funds to digitize and make available on-line, significant Baptist collections.



My strength lies in weakness
 In weakness I pray
 My prayer chases shadows
 My night turns to day
 Far up the road I see all I should be
 Lord help me be patient
 Be patient with me

Rev. Donald Hasselman
 Pastor, Mount Bethel Baptist Church

National Congregation Study Results Released

The National Congregation Study (NCS) is an ongoing national survey that has been implemented in waves, starting in 1998, to gather information about the basic characteristics of American congregations. Over the course of 16 years, much information has been gathered about congregational life, as more than 3,815 congregations have shared statistics that include, but are not limited to demographics, leadership situation, worship life, programming, and neighborhood composition.

The study results are rich and can tell us much about how religious practices are changing in the United States. Some of the key findings are as follows:

- The number of congregations claiming no denominational affiliation increased from 18% in 1998 to 24% in 2012.
- White mainline congregations, and the people in those congregations, are older than the congregations and people of other religious traditions.
- Most congregations are small but most people are in large congregations.
- People are increasingly concentrated in very large congregations.
- The average congregation is getting smaller, but the average churchgoer attends a larger congregation.
- People in smaller congregations give more money to their churches than do people in larger congregations.
- Worship services have become more informal and expressive.
- 10% of churchgoers worship in multi-site congregations.
- American solo or senior pastoral leaders are more ethnically diverse and older, but not more female, than they were in 1998.
- Thirteen percent (13%) of congregations are led by volunteer senior or solo pastoral leaders.
- Assistant and associate ministers and specialized congregational staff constitute 42% of the full-time ministerial work force and three-quarters (74%) of the part-time ministerial work force.
- Compared to solo and senior pastoral leaders, secondary ministerial staff are more female, younger, less likely to be seminary educated, and more likely to have been hired from within the congregation.
- There is increasing ethnic diversity over time both *among* and *within* American congregations.
- Food assistance is by far the most common kind of social service activity pursued by congregations, with more than half (52%) of all congregations listing food assistance among their four most important social service programs.
- When congregations lobby elected officials or participate in demonstrations or marches, the issues they most commonly engage are poverty, abortion, and same-sex marriage.
- Acceptance of female lay leadership is very widespread, with 79% of congregations allowing women to hold any volunteer position a man can hold, and 86% allowing women to serve on the main governing board.
- Congregational acceptance of gays and lesbians as members and lay leaders increased substantially between 2006 and 2012, but acceptance levels vary widely across religious traditions.



Can you benefit from these findings in your ministry? Learn more about the study or explore the data from the study by clicking [here](#).



Register Now for the Ministers Council's 7R's of Sanctuary Cohort

The Ministers Council is excited to announce the next cohort of the 7Rs of Sanctuary, a year-long program designed to help ministerial leaders become more effective in leadership through spiritual practices. The cohort begins with a three-day retreat through which you can be immersed in a contemplative setting with colleagues while learning practices that will strengthen your leadership and increase your spiritual well-being.

The next cohort begins with a three-day retreat starting on June 6-8, 2016 and will be held at the Wisdom House Conference Center, 229 East Litchfield Road, Litchfield, CT 06759. Space is limited, so don't miss out on this enriching program that will help you increase your effectiveness in leadership, as you are further grounded in God.

[Register Now](#). Registration ends on May 20th.

Register for the 2016 Ministers Conference:

August 22-25, 2016

[4H Youth and Conference Center](#)



Registration for the 2016 Ministers Conference is now open! Plan to join us as we focus on "The Holistic Maintenance of the Ministry." Featuring Dr. Jennifer Davidson and Rev. Brad Berglund in worship, ABC Partners with workshops and program offerings, space for rest and renewal, this year's conference promises to be a highlight of the summer and opportunity for you to learn strategies for sustainable living in ministry and practical actions as outcomes. The schedule for the Conference is listed below:

Monday, 8/22	Tuesday, 8/23	Wednesday, 8/24	Thursday, 8/25
Registration 5:30 – Dinner 7:00 – Worship	Registration 7:00 Breakfast 9:00 Morning Worship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhythms of the Spirit 10:45 – Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clergy Health Networking Economic Challenges facing Pastors 12:00 – Lunch 1:30 – Sabbath Free time 5:30 – Dinner	Registration 7:00 Breakfast 9:00 Morning Worship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiencing Rhythms of the Spirit Plenary Session 12:00 – Lunch 1:00 – Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clergy Health Networking Economic Challenges facing Pastors 2:30 – Individual Experience time 5:30 – Dinner 7:00 Worship	7:00 Breakfast 9:00 Morning Worship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhythms of the Spirit Communion 11:00 Dismissal 11:30 Lunch

Are you interested in registering? Do you want to learn more? Full retreat details can be access by clicking [here](#). You can download the pdf version of the registration form by clicking [here](#).



An Abundant Life... *Even for Ministers?* Webinar Hosted by the Ministers Council Ministries Team

You are Invited - Ministers Council Webinar for Ministers
on May 19th

Please plan to attend the upcoming webinar, **An Abundant Life... *Even for Ministers?* Testimonies and Tools for Thriving in Your Ministry**. The next offering in a series of webinars prepared by ministers for ministers, this session will be held on **May 19th, 2016 at 2 p.m. eastern time** (1 p.m. central, 12 noon mountain and 11 a.m. pacific times). The hour-long session will allow time for questions after the presentations. Both of our presenters are members of the Ministers Council's Ministries Team and offer this webinar in a spirit of learning and support for all ministry colleagues.



Our facilitators for the webinar are Rev. Dr. Steve Neal and Rev. Jacki Belile. Steve Neal is a graduate of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, KS, where he earned his Master of Divinity degree in 2003. He recently completed his doctoral studies at Drew Theological School in Madison, NJ, where he received his Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Growth and Community Development with a special concentration in the theology of shalom.

Steve has ministered in the urban core of Kansas City, KS since 1999, first on staff at Bethel Neighborhood Center, then as Pastor of Oakland Park Baptist Church, and for the 8 1/2 years as Pastor of First Baptist Church of Turner.

He and his wife Laurie make their home in the Kansas City neighborhood of Turner, along with their pets, Downy the dog, and Gracie the cat. His passions are spiritual formation and reaching out to the homeless.



Rev. Jacki Belile, CPC is the Founder and Director of Living Well Ministries and the Clear Center Coaching Method™. She helps lay and clergy leaders across the country to “clear the chaos and the clutter” of their lives in order to listen and live from their Clear Center. She is the President of the Ministers Council of Metro Chicago, where she collaborates with colleagues who care deeply about supporting clergy wellness.

Since 2000, Jacki has led retreats and seminars on topics including: spirituality of change, organizational growth, forgiveness, clergy/activist wellness and spiritual disciplines. She has consulted on church visioning and growth, program development and partnerships between the faith and public health sector. In addition to her coaching ministry with individuals and churches around the country, she serves as Minister of Congregational Development at Eden United Church of Christ. She has previously served as pastor of Grace Baptist Church (Chicago, IL) and as Sabbatical Pastor at The South Church (Mount Prospect, IL) and Phoenix Community Church (Kalamazoo, MI). She is the author of the forthcoming book *Forgive for Life: Finding the Way Forward*.

Jacki is a graduate of Taylor University (1990), Chicago Theological Seminary (1996) and The Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (2008). She resides in Chicago with her life partner of 28 years. Her “abundant life” includes gardening, yoga and increasing amounts of solitude as a “recovering extrovert.”

Please register for our meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone by going to: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/66628579835402753>. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

News from Ministers Council Local Chapters

Conference of Baptist Ministers in Massachusetts

Dick Haley reported that the annual gathering of TABCOM is coming up on May 13-14 and the Conference of Baptist Ministers in Massachusetts (CBMM), our regional Ministers Council, activities will be held in connection with the annual gathering. Included will be a round table discussion about partnerships in the region. CBMM will lead worship sessions that include the use of *lectio divina*. Regional partner organizations are being surveyed as part of a long range planning effort.

Oregon Ministers Council

Randy Miller reported on an event sponsored by the Oregon Ministers Council in collaboration with the region. A two-day conference at the end of February featured Tony Pappas presenting the Joshua Strategy, a missional church approach he has developed using texts from Joshua's entry into the Promised Land. A good number of both ministers and congregational members attended.

Randy also reported that their chapter has just appointed a new Treasurer, since their former treasurer, Greg Sneller, has left the region to work for International Ministries. Randy is the new Treasurer.

ABC of the Rochester Genesee Region

Ivan Marable reported that there is a retreat upcoming for the Ministers Council and others in the region. In addition, a survey is being conducted in the region to assess needs.

ABC of Nebraska

Jurdan Counts reported that their chapter is undergoing leadership changes as well. The North East conference will meet soon and more changes are in store, including the local chapter representative.

The Prairie Pastors Conference was held April 11-13. Four regions—the Dakotas, Nebraska, Central and Mid-American—collaborate to create this annual event. Ann Borquist, a missionary in Southeast Asia, was the speaker this year and did a wonderful job.

Ministers Council of the Greater Bay Area

Larry Jay reported that their local chapter holds four events a year. They just had an event called "Aging and Saging: Wisdom in Ministry." Twenty people attended this gathering which fostered dialogue between seasoned ministers and younger ministers. The next event will be a picnic for families in the summer and in the fall, the annual seminary outreach will occur.

ABC of Vermont/New Hampshire

Greg Vigne reported that his chapter just had an Executive Council meeting yesterday to plan for their annual meeting, which will occur in 3 weeks, in connection with the region's annual meeting. Dale Louise Nichols was appointed as Vice President to complete the term.

This Saturday, at Camp Sentinel, there will be a dedication of the Ray Wixson Retreat house on Lake Winnepesaukee, with views of both the mountains and the lake. Ray Wixson was past President of their Ministers Council and very active. A partnership was created to help build this retreat house.

Ministers Council for Greater Indianapolis, Indiana & Kentucky

Dan Hopkins reported that they are looking forward to their Pastors Retreat on May 12. Tim Gardner will be their speaker. Saturday last (April 23), the churches and other community groups came together for a day of service; it went well and provided a practical ministry to the community.

ABC of New York State

Walter Hargrove reported that their annual retreat coming up in Hamilton, New York on May 2-3. Al Staggs, a minister and actor, will portray several different faith leaders, such as Roger Williams and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, through impersonation.

ABC of Metro Chicago

Jacki Belile shared that the Metro Chicago chapter is humming along, with a recent quarterly Fellowship Supper well attended by pastors, chaplains, counselors and seminary reps.

We'll once again co-sponsor a continuing ed track at ABCMC's Annual meeting on May 13-14th at the Westin Itasca, IL. A highlight will be Rev. Dr. Denise Janssen, who will speak at our inaugural Christian Educators Appreciation Luncheon, along with Rev. Randy Creath who will provide musical inspiration. The afternoon also includes a workshop on "The Metaphors of Preaching" with Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes of McCormick Theological Seminary, followed by our quarterly fellowship supper.

Saturday is jam-packed with great stuff, including "Sisters in Service - A Conversation Cafe" which is also co-sponsored by the Ministers Council. (Dr. Trinette McCray will be with us by Skype for this women's gathering for lay and clergy alike; part of a new initiative underwritten in part by a grant from the North American Baptist Women's Union and with great visionary support from Virginia Holmstrom and Pat Hernandez.)

The day ends with the Annual Disciples Dinner, at which we're honoring the recently-retired Dr. Larry Greenfield, and "Daily Disciples" nominated for faithfulness recognition by their local churches.

ABHMS Launches New Website, Features Free Brian McLaren Bible Study Video



Visit the NEW ABHMS website!

- Free video Bible study from Brian McClaren
- New podcast series featuring American Baptist volunteers
- Resources to develop Christian leaders, equip disciples and strengthen your ministry

www.abhms.org

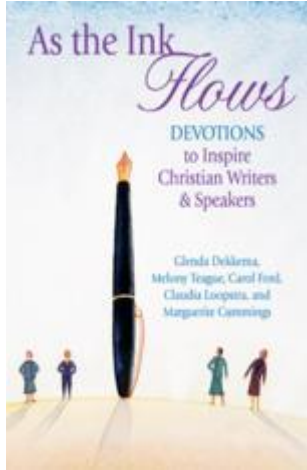
[American Baptist Home Mission Societies](http://www.abhms.org) (ABHMS) continues its nearly 200-year-old commitment to domestic mission across the United States and Puerto Rico with a redesigned website that brings the ministry to life for the 21st century and beyond.

For easy navigation, the updated website—www.abhms.org—categorizes content by three ministry emphases—“Developing Leaders,” “Equipping Disciples” and “Healing Communities,” as envisioned by new Executive Director Dr. Jeffrey Haggray.

“On a recent visit to Virginia Union University,” says Haggray, “I was moved to see, for the first time, the university’s inspiring granite chapel built on land purchased by ABHMS in 1899. We have such a profound legacy of mission and ministry that has changed the world. ABHMS’ new website harnesses 21st-century technology to ensure our mission continues bringing transformative ministries to churches and communities today, and for many tomorrows to come.”

New features include an inspirational free video of renowned theologian Brian McLaren’s first Bible study at ABHMS’ “Space for Grace” conference; a “Profiles in Mission” podcast series providing engaging interviews with mission volunteers; a history timeline that colorfully traces ABHMS from its roots to present day; a comprehensive calendar of events; a digest of current mission efforts by American Baptist congregations and ABHMS partners; and the opportunity to interact via social media. The site will continue to offer useful resources as well as highlight American Baptist-related feature stories—now called “Mission Stories”—and informative news releases.

The redesigned website debuted on April 27—the anniversary of the founding of The American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1832 at Mulberry Street Baptist Church, New York City.



New Release from Judson Press **As the Ink Flows: Devotions to Inspire Christian Writers & Speakers**

By Glenda Dekkema, Melony Teague, Carol Ford, Claudia Loopstra and Marguerite Cummings

This new release from Judson Press is a marvelous devotional resource for your use in ministry. For each devotional, the structure of the book offers scripture, musing from the author and a prayer. Then in the spirit of “letting the ink flow,” questions are provided that solicit reflection and prompt more in-depth writing. Given the compelling hook of the devotionals, writers and non-writers alike would be motivated to pull out a pen and journal and allow their thoughts and ink flow.

And good news Ministers Council members; you can order your copy today and enjoy free shipping with your Ministers Council

Membership. Click [here](#) and get your copy today.

Travel Schedule

- Mid Career Clergy Retreat, Wallingford, PA – May 2-5.
- ABCoRI Ministers Council Retreat, Block Island, RI – May 16-18.
- **7Rs of Sanctuary Cohort Retreat – June 6-8, Western Massachusetts** (Contact Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org if you are interested in participating)

Local News Anyone?

We want to share news and events from local Ministers Council chapters and ABCUSA organizations that want to promote their good works across the country. Do you have news to share? Forward your stories and information to Debora Jackson at Debora.jackson@abc-usa.org. We want to share your happenings with others.

Join 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 join the Ministers Council and reap the benefits of being part of a covenanting community of clergy who care. You can contact your local chapter or you can access the Ministers Council website and pay your dues electronically at <http://ministerscouncil.com/subscriptions/>.



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 2333 (Rev. Debora Jackson, DMin)
FAX: 610/768-2066