



## May 2024 Newsletter



*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. -Acts 2:1-4*

## A Pastoral Reflection from the President

### **Bluebells! Everywhere! Springing up from the lush forest floor.**

I had joined the national Leadership Team in the Chicago area for our annual planning retreat, and we had joined the clergy of the Greater Chicago and Wisconsin MC chapters for a day of rest and restoration: "Take a Breath." We spent the day worshipping under the beautiful stained-glass windows at Eden Church, enjoying meals provided by a generous Palmer grant, breathing in deeply as we stretched our arms toward the sun, and enjoying a "wandering" walk in God's creation, where I saw so many gorgeous Virginia bluebells! There were more bluebells, growing in bunches by the beautiful stream on the property of the Portiunicula retreat center. when the leadership team moved into the planning retreat center for several days of prayer and preparation.



I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43.19)

Perhaps it was no accident that amongst the spring flowers around us, this verse grew to hold special meaning. As we imagined what God might have in



store for 2024 and 2025, it felt as though new ideas and creative possibilities were springing up, like a brilliant bunch of bluebells on the forest floor. It was exciting to see your creative and innovative leadership team think about ways to support clergy, encourage chapters, celebrate good ministry practice, and continue the important momentum of TIM peer groups. Remembering the week, I am thankful for bluebells, and for those who planned and participated in our events, for those of you who prayed for our work, and for those who are ready to join us in the cultivating of what new things God is springing up.

Matt Sturtevant  
Ministers Council ABCUSA President

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## Making Space for Our Bodies: The *Space for Grace* Experience



“Grace is about making space for our bodies.” As we prepared to start a three-day journey after successfully making space in our busy agendas to gather in Philadelphia, seeking a much-needed opportunity to find grace, Dr. Michael Koppel began the opening plenary by reminding us that our bodies are unavoidable recipients and participants of God’s grace. Indeed, as the Body of Christ, we usually keep ministering to the spiritual self, neglecting the visible part of ourselves. In a room full of people, we typically forget that God made our bodies as a gift of His grace.

ABHMS’ *Space for Grace* is more than a learning experience for Baptist ministers and lay people from our diverse denomination. It is an opportunity to connect with old acquaintances and make new ones bodily; to shake hands, hug, kiss, laugh, and cry with a broader part of the American Baptist family that, for most of the time, distance and hectic schedules keep us apart.

*Space for Grace* has become a cherished moment for me to revel in connection, rekindle previous encounters, and forge new ones, bringing a deep sense of personal satisfaction and contentment. The provided spaces for cultic moments and educational tracks offered the opportunity to celebrate the experience that worshiping and learning are not abstract and isolated spiritual/intellectual situations, but spaces where our souls and hearts connect with God and others, allowing body and mind to discover that God’s grace is around and within us.

In an era dominated by digital interactions, the rarity and value of face-to-face encounters cannot be overstated. Sitting next to each other at a worship service, workshop, or even just passing through a hallway presents a unique and precious opportunity to breathe life into the Psalms’ exclamation of “how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” This is how we can truly embody God’s grace. When we intentionally make space for our bodies to coexist, His grace overflows, “even life forevermore.”

Julio Gonzalez-Paniagua  
Ministers Council – Interim Secretary

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## National Updates

### We Heard You!

A great big **THANK YOU** to those of you who responded to our Ministers Council Survey. We (the national leadership team) are eager to serve you and wanted to be sure we were on the right path. The good news- it sounds like

we're hitting the mark a lot of the time! And, now we better know how to serve you in the ways you need. We appreciate the time you took to complete the survey and share with us your insights! If you didn't get a chance to respond, you are always welcome to send us feedback. Email our Program Administrator Rev. Dr. Valerie Andrews at [ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org](mailto:ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org) with any questions, comments, concerns, or ideas. We can't promise immediate results, but we can promise you that we will hear you and do what we can to support you!

### **Some highlights we observed in the survey results:**

- We have a large number of retired clergy eager to connect and serve - stay tuned for more information as we take this information and run with it!
- Many of you responded that you are thriving in ministry! We celebrate this! So often we hear about all of the negative aspects of clergy life, and we are delighted to celebrate with you the ways that you are thriving. To that end, we want to hear more! Email [ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org](mailto:ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org) and share your story of thriving. (more info below)
- We all need support in a variety of areas- connection, spiritual practices, practical resources. We will continue to do what we can to connect you to the resources you need to thrive. Stay tuned to the monthly newsletter and our Facebook group for opportunities to find support. Do you have a way you can support others? Let us know!
- Connection, connection, connection- so many of us are seeking connection. The good news is there are already many ways to connect- through MC Live, our Facebook group, local chapters, TIM groups, and more. And we are already seeking new and improved ways to connect as well.

Ultimately, we know that we are better ministers when we work together and move towards centeredness, competence, and collegiality. I'll add two more "C's" to our mantra- collaboration and communication. Your National Leadership Team is composed of dedicated individuals who care deeply for the mission and ministry of the Ministers Council - in addition to our regular daytime jobs! We all need to work together to help one another find the support to be the people God has called us to be.

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## **Need Funding?**

The Ministers Council is here to help. We have already provided information on some possible funding sources for several churches and other organizations that would extend their ministries. So far Linda Bergeon, our Grant Station guru, has sent lists to 10 churches and 2 camps. She is currently developing lists for 3 additional churches.



Do you have a project that might have grant possibilities? If you answer yes, contact: Linda [pastor9linda@gmail.com](mailto:pastor9linda@gmail.com) for help.

Sara Day,  
Ministers Council Treasurer

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## **Thriving Stories**

Are you thriving in a particular area of your life/ministry? Do you have a story to share? We want to hear from you! Send us a brief note telling us what is going well and how God is one the move. Include a picture as well! Email [ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org](mailto:ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org) and share your story!

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# Events and Webinars



## 3rd thursdays **me live** WEBINAR SERIES

**May 16, 2024**  
**5pm Pacific/7pm Central/8pm Eastern**

### **Alphabet Soup: How We Relate (or Don't) to Our ABC Partners**

MC, ABCUSA, IM, ABM, OGS, BRC, NLC, BNG, ABNS, BPFNA-- what do all of these letters mean? And why does it matter? Join Rev. Sarah Strosahl-Kagi of our national Leadership Team for a lively discussion about our ABC family-- who is who, what is what, who does what, and how we can work together to be the people God calls us to be!

#### **ZOOM INFO:**

Join Zoom Meeting by clicking here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83404699633>

Or call in by phone and use Meeting ID: 834 0469 9633 Find your local Zoom number here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83404699633>

Meeting ID is: 886 1222 3788.

## Chapter News

### **From VALLEY FORGE MINISTERS COUNCIL**

Attempting to provide avenues of recovery from the COVID pandemic for the last two years, Valley Forge Ministers Council has been addressing the subject of *RESILIENCE*. Speakers from various avenues of ministry and backgrounds have been generous in presenting short programs to our group.

[READ MORE](#)

**Do you have Chapter News or Events to share?** Challenges or lessons? Please send news for the June newsletter to [info@ministerscouncil.com](mailto:info@ministerscouncil.com) by May 26.

## Prayers and Milestones

We pray for all our leaders who serve in chaplaincy, counseling and local

church settings.

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For all who find Mother's Day difficult—the ones who grieve the loss of a mother, the ones who long to be mothers, and the ones who carry the pain of broken relationships. Comfort them with Your presence, Lord, and remind them of Your unending love. Amen.

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Remember in prayer students at college, university and seminary as they prepare for final exams, celebrate graduation or begin their careers, that they might find opportunities to use their gifts, faith and passion in service to their neighbors and communities.

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Praise God for the work of the Spirit, which calls us to faith, focuses and strengthens us, accompanies us in our baptismal journeys and unites us in a diverse, global community of siblings in Christ.

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We continue to pray for wisdom as our communities strive for peace and justice. May it be Christ's peace and Christ's pattern.

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## Staff Reflection

### MAKING A NEW MINISTERS COUNCIL FRIEND!



Today (4/25/24), while attending a retreat for The Bridge for Early Career Preachers program at the Richmond Hill Retreat Center, I had the pleasure of meeting the Reverend Faye Cooper-Baldwin, a member of ABCOTS.

While sitting in my room completing work assignments, I received an email from Reverend Cooper-Baldwin. I called her, and we chatted as if we had known each other for years. The purpose of her call was to inform me she wanted to pay her dues for the Ministers Council, because she hadn't been active for several years. Naturally, she called the right person, and together, she and I were off to the website! It wasn't until later that I soon discovered she was only 20 minutes away from where I was, and she asked if she could stop by the Retreat Center to pick up her 2024 membership sticker and card. "By all means," I said joyfully to my new friend! A few minutes later, my phone rang, and Reverend Cooper-Baldwin was downstairs, full of life, excited, and dressed to impress! We laughed, chatted, embraced one another with a hug, and I asked her if we could take a photo together to be shared in the MC Newsletter; of which, she graciously agreed.

As I write this, I reflect on the scripture, which tells us to be mindful of how we treat others, because indeed they could be angels unaware (paraphrasing). Today, I met an angel desiring to *re-connect* in the face of Reverend Cooper-Baldwin. Our time together was as if I had seen the "face of



God” who wanted to re-connect with me.

I say to each of you my friends, you may never know who might send you an unexpected email, knock on your door uninvited, or give you a call without foreknowledge. Treat them kind, with love and respect. For who knows, it could be the very face of God desiring to reconnect with you! \*By the way, it is not too late to join or renew your dues with MC!

Submitted with profound joy, Reverend Dr. Valerie Andrews



**From the Ministers Council**

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## ABC Announcements

**The Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA), in** partnership with American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), is proud to announce the 2024 PBA Missiological Conversation on May 2, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. EDT. Themed “Christian Belief + White Supremacy + Authoritarian Governance = Fascism,” this hybrid event, with on-site and online participants, will critically explore rising authoritarianism in certain faith-based communities and voting blocs across the nation as well as its wider implications for the church and American society.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read more

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Mark your calendar for July 18-21, 2024, at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, where Women and Girls of all ages across the United States, including Puerto Rico, will gather for an opportunity to deepen their understanding of God's word and to unlock the leadership potential within them.

Highlighting our two-year 2023-2025 Ministry Focus, "Be Strong, Be Courageous," we will feature inspiring plenary sessions, engaging workshops, and enriching Bible studies to uplift and strengthen your faith.

We urge you to save the date and start planning to be a part of this transformative gathering. Stay tuned for more updates.

You can learn more about our speakers and agenda, and to register, go to [www.abwomensministries.org/events](http://www.abwomensministries.org/events).

## Ecumenical Resources



Conversations will take place every Wednesday through July 3, at noon ET.

### **First up: *Dialogical Preaching as a Decolonizing Practice***

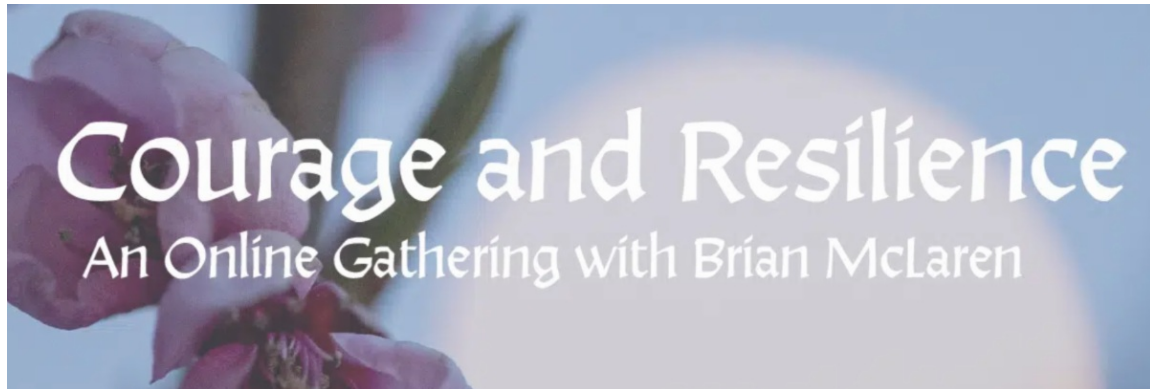
**May 1 @ noon ET**

On this Zoom, we will engage a radical pedagogy rooted in dialogue by interrogating the preaching moment. How are congregations still harmed by colonialism and whiteness embedded in the traditional, monological model and what might dialogue have to offer as an alternative? Join us as we teach the ins and outs of dialogical preaching, but more importantly, open up a dialogical space for those gathered to engage and wonder together how

dialogical preaching can make preachers and congregations more honest, free people—a people not automatically living into the realities of colonialism and whiteness, realities of control and oppressive power, but rather collectively leaning into and being a part of God’s kin-dom vision in the here and now.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information on all conversations and to register

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## **Courage and Resilience: An Online Gathering with Brian McLaren**

Discover courage and resilience for challenging times at this 90-minute online event on May 17, 2024.

Is there life after doom? Many of us long for new ways of thinking, becoming, and belonging in these turbulent times. From ecological overshoot to economic injustice, the healing of our world begins with healing ourselves.

Explore the complexity of hope and grief with us. Register for Courage and Resilience: An Online Gathering with Brian McLaren, Friday May 17, 2024. This event will be recorded, and all registrants will have access to the replay for one year.

**DATE:**

May 17, 2024 10-11:30 a.m. PT

**FEATURING:**

Brian McLaren

**LOCATION:**

Online

**COST:**

\$95, \$30, \$10, \$5

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information and to register

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## **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 June issue, send these to [ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org](mailto:ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org) by May 27.***



**How to reach us:**



**Stay connected**



- Phone: (610) 314-7837
  - Office Hours: Tuesdays from 9am - 1pm (EST), and Thursdays from 2:30pm - 6:30pm (EST).
  - Visit us at our **website**.
  - Join us on **Facebook**
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