

“STATE OF THE REGION”

American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin (ABC/WI), October 14, 2017 Annual Meeting, Staff Reports

Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri, Regional Executive Minister | marie.o@abcofwi.org

Opening Reflection

Psalm 1:1-3 (NIV)

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.*

Being a servant of God this past year has felt like this – a tree planted by streams of water; yielding fruit in due time; continual life-giving experiences. I think back over the past year and can name various challenges, but really my heart is filled with thanksgiving.

What is the state of our region? We continue to experience transition in our regional office; the vitality of our association life together is strained by localized challenges to ministry and regional differences that threaten to keep us part; there is always more we wish we could have done; treatment among Christians, let alone with people outside the church, are often hurtful and ugly; and Godly purposes are clouded by earthly desires... **AND...**

Churches are reaching across differences to share in fellowship and worship, ministers are deepening connections with one another, camping ministry is expanding into new opportunities, education is reviving and edifying, new ministries are developing; local churches are impacting their communities; leaders are leading from faith in public arenas; relationships are being restored; brave conversations are emerging; people are generously responding to needs. **GOD IS AT WORK in ABC Wisconsin.**

Personally I feel my roots are growing stronger; the Spirit is watering my passions; at times I get a taste the of sweetness of God’s fruits, and I am not weary, most of the time, even as I recognize daily bumps along the journey. This joy in ministry has everything to do with the privilege of serving in this region. My heart is filled with thanksgiving, and I yearn for the will of God to prosper among us.

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Vision Casting: This year began the implementation of the 2017-2020 ABC/WI Strategic Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Managers at their November, 2016 meeting. This guiding document was developed as we faced staff retirements, needs and opportunities were surfaced, and vision was clarified. As I have been visiting churches and sharing in various settings, I have casted out the phrase **“Together Living Faithfully Through Christ Today”** and have invited people to consider how this lives true in their own walk and faith communities. On a regional level, we frame our pursuit of this vision by aiming to become **an effective resource that compels and equips our ministers and ministries toward four imperatives—rootedness, collaboration, growth, and transformation—**by serving in the areas of **church and ministerial resourcing, camping, education, and the POST** (an experimental ministry with hoped-for widespread impact.) Following are just some highlights from this year in each of these areas.

Church and Ministerial Resourcing

Rootedness: At the heart of our Baptist associational principle is the voluntary willingness of autonomous churches and persons to join in covenantal relationship with one another; the reasons for connection are varied. The strength of our region is determined by the participation of our members along with the systems we create to support these relationships. Recognizing that about one-third of our

sixty-four churches are falling short of the five markers of cooperation (as defined by our denomination), and individual members of the clergy are on the margins, it is a high priority for region leadership to continue to clarify the value of our voluntary association with one another. If there is value you receive, then trust that your mutual engagement adds value to another and to the whole. If there is ambiguity, then let's continue to discern. If denominational connection is not providing any value and thus not worth any effort to sustain, then why continue to keep the organizational ties? At the region office, we seek to honor and include those already part of the family, yet there is urgent ministry to be done. Our efforts of rootedness are intended to clarify value, strengthen our connections, and move forward in intentional, relevant ministry with those who truly seek the associational experience.

We have begun to reach out to inactive member churches, are building upon our resources to educate on American Baptist roots and framework for ministry, and clarify our own purpose as a regional hub so we can clearly communicate a starting point for valuable relationships region-wide. Rootedness was also the starting point for our 2017 annual gathering.

Collaboration: The **Commission on Congregation Missions** utilized the newly compiled list of ministries of member churches (populated by 2015 annual reports) to seek *new* opportunities for joint mission. Their first efforts have been generally met with lackluster interest. The table conversations at the 2017 annual gathering were designed as another effort to bring people together over shared mission interest. While each church may have their own vital ministry and mission, we know that there are concerns about limitations at the local level. A **call to collaboration** is a direct response to these concerns and a proactive way to keep at bay temptations of mission control and territory marking, two very real human tendencies that have no place in the participation of the reign of God. We are not necessarily called to do everything together, but we must display the ability to engage one another in some ways if for no other reason than to display the unity of the church. One area of ministry where there has been openness for connection is mental health education and support in the church.

The **Commission on Ministry** and the **Wisconsin Ministers Council** offer ministerial support and connections in various ways. Region staff led a summer series of **minister meet-ups**, which drew together close to thirty ministers to discuss topics like social media ethics and leadership/mission integrity, and to introduce our newest pastors to one another and to the region. We continue to be in regular conversation with ministry partners like the **Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, Tudor Oaks, campus ministries at UW-Milwaukee and UW-Madison, Housing Ministries of American Baptists in Wisconsin (HMABW), Milwaukee Christian Center, Project Focal Point, Central Seminary, ABC of Metro Chicago**, local vendors, and several others to seek out resources and connection points for our churches and ministers. A highlight from this past year was a day-long experience in March that was collaboratively designed and hosted by **CENTRAL Wisconsin, HMABW, the Ministers Council, New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, and many individuals** beyond these organizations – a day exploring the “Call of God,” an Anointing Service for ministers, and a fellowship meal.

As one of your liaisons to our larger denominational family, we facilitated the process for individuals to attend the 2017 national Mission Summit and Orientation to ABC Life event; hosted **MMBB** workshops, supported connections to the **AB Foundation** and **AB Extension Corp.**, and have arranged for several individuals to participate in a network-building event in Brookfield, WI later this year hosted by **American Baptist Home Mission Societies** as part of their Aligned Action Network Initiative. Local churches also continue to connect directly with our international missionaries and through long standing partners with one another for worship, fellowship, and mission.

Growth: We are perpetually working toward building up resources to help churches and ministers in their growth, such as a **resource bank** and **administrative support** for new and/or immigrant churches.

We are in early stages of considering processes for **new ministry starts**. Several of our clergy have referred churches to our office, who are exploring **affiliating with ABC**, which is appreciated.

I am in conversation with two of our churches regarding building upon a **sister-church relationship** they began last year, encouraging them to consider learning opportunities across their differences and ways they can impact their communities together. While this can easily be an example of collaboration, I am very hopeful about the possibilities for spiritual growth and transformation.

Transformation: **The Circuit** initiative, which is intended to support small churches for revitalization or legacy discernment, continues to be in development. We have begun to build in practices in the **search and call process** to explicitly address implicit bias. We continue to assess our **administrative processes** to ensure that ministry and mission defines our support structures, and not the other way around.

The POST: **The POST** is an experimental community of faith of that was conceived with consideration to various individuals on the fringes of the ABC/WI family, people that are not currently fully engaged with existing congregations for a variety of reasons, and the possibilities of mission throughout the state.

A group of six individuals have been meeting online since May 2017, almost weekly, to experiment with format, platform, and interaction. We reside in three different states and time zones; our ages span about thirty years; we are diverse in gender, race, theological bent, family-composition, vocation, and living situation; yet we all have connections with ABC/WI. We pray together, share our faith challenges, and discuss our hopes for church and society. We have begun to empower one another for ministry (one person will soon be serving our region as our new webmaster). We are experiencing all four imperatives interchangeably, even in our modest beginnings.

The POST is gearing up to send out a new invitation to others who do not yet have a regular church home for their own personal growth to join us for our **upcoming Advent Series**. (Likely Monday nights at 8 PM CT via Zoom videoconference).

Camping and Education: 2017 has been a year to welcome new members to our region staff. While both Carolyn and Kim have been with our camping ministry for many years, they both have taken on new roles. The energy they bring to the Camp Tamarack ministry is contagious, in the best possible way. We have also welcomed a whole new team to CENTRAL Wisconsin, seminary site of Central Seminary. These able staff persons have provided more information in their reports below.

Support Areas: Staff, Governance, Office Facilities, Communications, Financial Resources

Staff: A major emphasis in our support areas has been to implement a new staffing structure. Unfortunately, our Burmese Community Liaison, **May May Latt**, left us this year due to other work opportunities, but we have been able to fill in all other positions with individuals who have shown great interest in the ministry and have ably taken on their job responsibilities. We will continue to strengthen our human resource efforts and staff support so as to build a stronger regional team. Please know that all of our ministers (**Carolyn, John, Patrick, Kim, Jim, and myself**) are available for church visits.

Governance: We are on track to implement a Governance Task Force who will assess and redesign our regional governance structure over the next months with guidance from **Jeff Woods**, ABC Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries and in collaboration with regional leadership. This year we also thank **Ted Hertel, Jr.**, West Allis, First, who has retired from serving as our region attorney; for many years he provided valuable counsel and services, at most times *pro bono*. We also thank **David Russell**, La Crosse, First, who has agreed to be our new legal counsel. We are so appreciative of these professionals who generously offer their gifts and talents to the regional work of the church.

Office Facilities: We have done some rearranging of offices in Elm Grove, to allow for more **collaborative spaces**. Technology and computer equipment have been upgraded to accommodate developing educational platforms and needs, and we have done some basement renovation after a heater and flooding mishap. We sincerely thank the partnership of **HMABW**, who provides computer equipment for CENTRAL Wisconsin and staff support; **Ixonix, First**, who contributed to renovations and referred to us an expert volunteer network administrator for a special project, and the **ABC Computer Center**, who contracts tech support hours with us at a very reasonable cost.

Communications: Our biggest development is the **unveiling of redesigned website – abcwfi.org!** We offer deepest thanks to **Brian Hastings** of Fond du Lac, Memorial for his skills, talent, and patience as he led us in this project. Please feel free to let us know if there are things that you would like available to you through the website. This year we did a **survey series** soliciting feedback on various areas from our constituency. Thank you to those who participated; we will be incorporating your input into our efforts.

Financial Resources: Thanks to the generosity and good stewardship of many people and churches throughout the decades we continue to be able to move forward in ministry without grave financial stress. Of course we can always be stronger to in turn have greater impact, but we are thankful to all those who contribute to the wider mission field through **United Mission, American for Christ, One Great Hour of Sharing, World Mission Offering, Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering, and varied other special giving**. Our **Commission on Finance** continues to consider ways that we can be wise about our resources while also being clear about the driving force of mission and vision.

Now you know why I experience the joy of ministry! Ultimately, all thanks to God!

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Congregations and Pastors: Completed: Marty Carney – Sheboygan Falls, Falls Community; Gerry Krupp – Waukesha, First (Interim). Beginning: Marcus Allen – Madison, Mt. Zion; Marlene Grandinetti – Sheboygan Falls, Falls Community; Chakravarthy Zadda – Waukesha, First

New Churches: Milwaukee, Greater Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist, Kenneth E. Cutler, Sr. (Pastor)

Organizations and Directors: Completed: Deborah Jackson – ABC Ministers Council; May May Latt – ABC/WI Burmese Community Liaison; Scott Anderson – Wisconsin Council of Churches; Manny Santiago – Madison, The Crossing Campus Ministry; Shanna Eckberg – Tudor Oaks Senior Living Community.

Retirements: Ross Peterson – Midwest Ministry Development Center. Beginning: William Shiell – Northern Seminary, President; Margo Stone – Midwest Ministry Development Center; Lee Spitzer – General Secretary, ABCUSA; Diane Jahnke – Tudor Oaks; Kerri Parker – Wisconsin Council of Churches

Milestone Celebrations (communicated with the region office): Church Anniversaries: Beloit, First – 175th; Kenosha, El Calvario – 60th; Eau Claire, First – 156th; Milwaukee, New Hope Missionary – 70th.

Pastor Anniversaries: Phineas Marr – 25th, Kenosha, First; John Walton – 15th, Milwaukee, Calvary; Mark Weisser – 25th, West Allis, First. Ordinations: Eric Lundquist – Waukesha, First. Retirements: Sam Brink – ABC/WI, Region Office, Timothy and Maxine Ashley – Central Seminary, Mark and Debbie Lembke – Camp Tamarack Graduations: Kendrick Allen (MDiv), Bernadette Arellano (MDiv), Howard Brown (DipTS), Carolyn Parker (MA), Margarita Schutten (Certificate), Ronald Nunuk (DMin) – CENTRAL Wisconsin; Marie Onwubuariri (DMin) – American Baptist Seminary of the West

In Memoriam: Norman G. Miller (Wis. Dells, Indian/Eau Claire, First); Brian Tokoph (Fond du Lac, First); Art Basile (ABC/WI Staff); Richard Goins (Eau Claire, First), Joyce Nichols Sa'vage (Milwaukee, Calvary)

STAFF REPORTS



Rev. Carolyn Dugan, Associate Regional Minister – Camping | carolyn.dugan@abcofwi.org

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Rootedness</u></p> <p>As part of a Camp Commission project, earlier this year, I polled past campers and asked them what word resonated with them for Camp. The top three words were friends, family and home. Camp Tamarack is rooted in the connections that come with being a faith home for many people.</p> <p>Over the winter months, I will be sorting and organizing all the files and photos that were in the office and various places at Camp.</p> <p>This ministry has been planted and cared for by so many wonderful people over 50+ years.</p> <p>With such deep roots, it gives us a chance to continue to build our vision while reaching for the sun and branching out into what is needed for the next 50+ years.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Collaboration</u></p> <p>This year we have worked on our collaboration with camp supporters during the updated Spring in to Camp event as well as the upcoming Fall Out of Camp event in October.</p> <p>Our Assistant Minister – Rev. Kim Drost – has been working to establish relationships in the Waupaca area by being visible in the community in various ways and finding activities that we could be supporting that tie to our needs such as the Lake Association and Farmington Town Hall Meetings.</p> <p>There has been the start of conversations with new groups and re-establishing relationships with groups like Rawhide Boys Ranch to see what we can offer as well as where camp can benefit.</p> <p>Both Kim and Carolyn have preached at several churches and had a chance to share our camping experiences as well. If you would like either one of us to come speak with your church about how the Camp can help meet your ministry needs, please let us know.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Growth</u></p> <p>The Basile Retreat Center is a space that is vastly underutilized. Rev. Kim worked with me to draft a proposal that was endorsed by the Executive Committee for us to treat the space truly like a Retreat Center where people will not have to bring bedding, and we will utilize it more as a hotel space during the off season. Stay tuned for updates on using this space in the future.</p> <p>In order to be in compliance with the state regulations we will also be updating rental contracts to reflect their actual needs for certified help for things such as waterfront, kitchen, health officers. This will allow us to guide rental groups in their programming as well as keeping the campers and physical space safe. As a part of this we are looking at metrics and cost in order to more closely reflect our operating budget versus what we charge for camps and rentals.</p> <p>We are also exploring offering different types of camps and retreats for various interests such as naturalist training, self-care, canoe trips and more.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Transformation</u></p> <p>Camp is a place that has and does transform lives. While we recognize that, we also recognize that times do change and just because we have always done something some way doesn't mean that it is meaningful or relevant now. In that spirit, Kim and I have been looking at how we do our jobs now versus how we can do them better to serve the needs of Camp and the Region. In the survey data from this year Camp is a place it seems that once people come, they want to go back – how do we get people to come for that first time? With rental groups, how do we make sure their respect for the space aligns with usage guidelines?</p> <p>This first year in our new roles, Rev. Kim and I have been getting our legs underneath us, learning the workings of the physical camp space and hopefully gaining insights to how we can be better stewards in programming, rentals and care for this outdoor ministry we love.</p>

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Rev. Kim Drost, Assistant Minister – Camping: Facilities and Guest Services | kim.drost@abcofwi.org

Rootedness

It was not until this year I had spent much time contemplating Camp Tamarack's storied history. I have begun to decipher the land, building and equipment records and have been humbled by how much of what we have come from generous donors throughout the years. What a glorious vision those folks must have had!

Collaboration

Working with our forester to discuss our upcoming harvest under the Managed Forest agreement we have with the DNR. Attending Farmington Town Hall meetings, and participated in a county-sponsored Critical Incident Management Initial Response class. We joined the Chain-O-Lakes Lake Association and attended meetings. I just finished my Master Naturalist certification through Hartman Creek State Park and as part of that have met some neighbors.

We are working with a former camper on his Eagle Scout project. He is rebuilding our entrance signs!

Growth

The Basile Retreat Center has the potential to be major revenue generator, which would help assure Camp Tamarack's survival in the future. I created a proposal to purchase bed linens and towels so that we could operate the Basile more like a hotel to enhance the rental experience.

Transformation

The property grounds and spaces need a lot of care: cabin screen doors fixed/repaired, kitchen door re-screened, screens were built for the Director's cabin and the door was rebuilt. All the tractors have had major maintenance to engines and implements, plus new weed eaters were purchased and chain saws assessed. The Craft Barn exterior and the front fascia on the John Gray was scraped and repainted, and the Basile was deep cleaned.

Many projects large and small were completed, and some larger projects were started. Every building at camp needs something done to it. Rev. Carolyn and I have compiled a "To-Do" list for every building that we hope will make the buildings nicer to look at and more user-friendly. Our goal is to make sure the Camp facilities are able to meet the needs and expectations of the people who will be using it.

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Rev. Dr. John A. Jones IV, Associate Regional Minister – Education | john.jones@abcofwi.org

ROOTEDNESS – COLLABORATION – GROWTH – TRANSFORMATION

The period since January 2017 has been marked by numerous and significant conversations in an effort to cultivate rootedness and collaboration. The last three months have brought into stark relief the potential tension and difficulty in negotiating growth and transformation while maintaining both rootedness and collaboration. I am growing into this position and learning that I am not the one responsible for balancing all of these imperatives. They all demand more of me and of the region than we can deliver on our own. And for that reason, I'm profoundly hopeful about the future because our efforts of faithfulness can only bear fruit through God's support.

The Central Wisconsin Collaborative – an initiative meant to guide the efforts of the CENTRAL Wisconsin seminary site – has been instrumental in my own education during this transition to the new M.Div. curriculum. As I look forward to and try to develop the many different possibilities for theological education in the region outside of the M.Div. degree, the ongoing presence of our graduates in ministry positions challenges us all to draw on our roots as we grow and develop new opportunities for our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

- Story telling class and event: The story telling course that culminated in the February 11 event at Pilgrim Rest Memorial Baptist Church continues to be the subject of some reflection and comments in the region. A similar course/offering directed primarily at Lifelong Learners and interested parties may be in order for 2018.
- Call event: On March 25, at Greentree Apartments Community Learning Center, 30 persons gathered to explore ministerial vocation through a panel discussion and small group breakout sessions. The event was well received. It moved far along the path toward the goal of CENTRAL Wisconsin being a "safe place" for serious theological and pastoral reflection. Another similar event is in the works for Spring of 2018.
- Commissioning: On May 21, four CENTRAL Wisconsin graduates and one Hispanic Lay Institute graduate were celebrated during an inspired worship service at the eighth annual commissioning service. Joyce Nichols-Savage, a 2010 graduate, delivered a powerful message of hope and encouragement, just weeks before being called to eternal Sabbath rest. We anticipate 2 graduates in May 2018.
- Convocation: On September 9, several students, faculty, and alumni gathered for a cookout, co-hosted by the Ministers Council that served as a community "Convocation" event – gathering together the called. Rev. Dr. Trinette McCray provided the devotional, a guided reflection on the community of the called. This new format for "Convocation" looks promising.
- Student Recruiter and Assistant Minister for Education: Student Services, Ericka Davis and Patrick Roberts respectively, started in these positions the week of June 5. In the months since, they and I have been learning responsibilities and tasks that help cultivate closer connections among students and between the seminary and churches and pastors. See reports below.
- Duties as Site Coordinator: Regular Academic Senate meetings and reports to the Provost; site administration (faculty recruitment, scheduling, reporting, and teaching); hosting first class sessions; advising students for course selection; advising potential students;

3 Things for 2018:

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- New Curriculum offerings: Beginning January 2018, we will be offering the first classes in the new curriculum on our traditional Friday night/Saturday morning schedule, hosted in the classroom in the ABC-WI Elm Grove offices, and connected to the global seminary.
- Another Call/Discernment event, to be offered in Spring 2018.
- Develop offerings outside M.Div. curriculum for Theological Education in SE Wisconsin: especially Certificate Programs for lay ministry.

Mr. Patrick Roberts, Assistant Regional Minister—Education | patrick.roberts@abcofwi.org

I have been learning about our four imperatives – rootedness, collaboration, growth, and transformation – in my new position in service of the seminary and region. Among the activities in student services that have shaped 2017:

- Support for Commissioning service 2017
- Participation in the Camp Tamarack regional staff quarterly meeting
- Leadership and participation in the Cookout/Convocation for seminary students, alumni, family, and Ministers Council
- Pulpit supply
- Distributing and processing tuition grant applications
- Volunteering to participate in worship services at Taycheedah Correctional Institution (through connection with one of our alumni)
- Participating at UWM onsite campus ministry recruitment event

Ms. Ericka Davis, Student Recruiter | ericka.davis@abcofwi.org

Rootedness – Growth – Collaboration - Transformation

These four imperatives set a foundation that fosters strong relationships, as well as creative programming, educational support, and post-graduate success. This foundation is rooted in ministry and in CENTRAL Wisconsin's commitment to serving those responding to a call to ministry.

As Recruiter, I am excited to play an intricate role in a process that supports and encourages those who have been called by God to serve in ministry. In addition, I am excited about the collaborative efforts that include myself, my colleagues, and students/future clergy as we work together to implement these imperatives by making clear the Central Seminary mission, our vision, while making certain our ideals align as we grow together in Christ.

In the future, I look forward to spreading the Central Seminary mission, building relationships, expanding our student base, and moving our ministerial programming forward.