

“STATE OF THE REGION”

American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, October 2015 Annual Meeting
Report from Rev. Marie Onwubuariri, Executive Minister, and Region Staff

Opening Reflections

Fourteen months into my role as your still-fairly-new Executive Minister, I continue to appreciate the theme that was selected for the 2014-2015 year: *Synergy in Mission*. Sometimes it takes time for synergy to build up, particularly in a midst of transition, yet I have been blessed to see and feel synergy already in motion in parts of our ABC/WI family. I give thanks to God for those of you who have welcomed my family and me with Christ-like spirit, and who participated in regional life this past year.

Though we begin the 2015-2016 period with our Annual Gathering theme: “Listen, the God of All Generations is Speaking,” *Synergy in Mission* will continue to be a central thrust in the years ahead. In fact, my hope is that our synergy and our mission are intentionally inclusive of all generations. Our annual themes will continue to build one upon another, *Synergy in Mission* being at the heart of our American Baptist value of cooperative ministry. I remind you of the word I introduced to you at last year’s Annual Gathering: *Bayanihan (buy-ah-nee-hahn)—“a Filipino term that reflects the popular adage, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,’ in that it illustrates how the strength of a communal unity can achieve together what they would not have been able to achieve apart. Overall, Bayanihan is a Filipino value that highlights the mutual support community members give one another regardless of their differences.” *<http://abroadinmanila.wordpress.com/values/goodtokno/bayanihan/>

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General Reports

The ABC/WI Executive Committee and I shaped a framework for the breadth of the role of the Executive Minister, using the foundational work of the 2014 EM Search Committee. In the coming year I will continue to touch on all the areas, recalibrating procedures and setting new patterns. Both the Board and I will use this framework to envision and evaluate our regional life, holding all accountable to our call and commitment. Following are highlights from this past year, organized into the five broad categories of this framework. Detailed progress reports that are given to the Board are available at the region office.

Region-to-Church Communication: We have tried to focus the content of the monthly bulletin insert (“Wisconsin Baptist”) on items of potential interest to congregants and broadened the author pool of the lead article to region ministerial staff and the Region President. This past summer we included reflections from the five region delegates to the 2015 ABCUSA Mission Summit and the two participants in the Young Preachers Academy. We also began a monthly e-newsletter for pastors, ministers, and lay-leaders focusing on opportunities for *synergy in mission* across our state and denomination. I have personally met with either the congregation and/or the pastor of over fifty of our sixty-one churches, and have met with or visited all of our current Wisconsin-based ministry partners. We created a Facebook page and Twitter account (@ABCofWi) as venues to share announcements and stories from the region office, churches, and individuals engaging in Kingdom work.

Pastoral/Ministerial Support and Care: Over forty ministers participated in a series of six gatherings at Rev. Marie's house in the winter for a time of getting acquainted, sharing joys and burdens, and meal fellowship. This year Ron Harbold, who has served for several years as Burmese Community Liaison (thru the AB Volunteers in Mission program), stepped down from this particular role. We thank Ron for his passion and service. In May of this year, May May Latt took on this position and has been instrumental in working with a Karen church that is the process of incorporating and joining the ABC. In addition to myself, the region ministerial staff team includes Sam Brink, Carolyn Dugan (Camp Tamarack), Timothy and Maxine Ashley (CENTRAL Wisconsin) and May May Latt (Burmese Community Liaison). We all avail ourselves to provide support to the pastors, ministers, and seminarians with whom we work. I have also been involved with the rebuilding efforts of the Ministers Council of Wisconsin, an affiliated ministry whose existence is for the support, care, and growth of ministers.

Growth and Integrity of ABC/WI Regional Ministry: In familiarizing myself with our congregations, Camp Tamarack, CENTRAL Wisconsin seminary extension, affiliating ministries, partnering organizations, and our sustainability outlook, our Board and I have been in discussion about preparing for a strategic planning process that would touch the various parts of regional life, including our structure and function of our Associations. Our staff continues to work with churches in a consultative capacity on topics such as pastoral vacancies, church vision, and ministry development and effectiveness. ABC/WI has been chosen to be one of three ABC regions to pilot an educational campaign about the United Mission fund: "United Mission Is the Vehicle." While the official campaign season is occurring during fall 2015, we hope to continue to converse with pastors and churches about the importance and value of covenantal relationships and synergistic mission, and how these are supported through faithful and sacrificial giving. I am thankful to the many who have given of their time and talents to serve on regional boards and commissions, as representatives to our ministry partners, who live out their commitment to associational life even without an official role or title, and who have faithfully and sacrificially supported the work of the region and denomination with financial resources. My prayer is that as individuals serve the larger body, they in turn experience joy, deepen in faith, and grow in skills.

Administration: We have made some strides this year in creating and revising documentation that will help us be more efficient, objective, and synergistic in our service to our constituency. To those who have been patient with us in this year of transition, we thank you. Our strategic plan will also evaluate the function of the Board, commissions, and committees, since it continues to be a challenge to match available individuals with particular interests and skills with the positions that our current bylaws require. Furthermore, ministry in today's society calls for dynamic organizational systems that energize mission, rather than force or stifle it. While in practice I have seen that we can function responsibly and responsively, it appears our documented structure is better suited for a former day.

Mission beyond ABC/WI: For the past several months I have represented ABC/WI to the larger denomination in the committee on the "United Mission Is the Vehicle" campaign. I have also been asked by ABCUSA General Secretary A. Roy Medley to serve on a new Taskforce of Racism and Race-based Violence. I am slowly returning to my Doctor of Ministry project and dissertation research, while also co-editing a forthcoming congregational resource on Racial Justice and Intersectionality.

Closing Reflections: Psalm 85: 6-13 (NRSV)

⁶Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? ⁷Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. ⁸Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. ⁹Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. ¹²The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

FOR THEIR DEDICATED WORK THIS PAST YEAR, THANK YOU TO THE STAFF MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS WHO OFFER YOURSELVES TO THE JOINT MISSION OF ABC/WI.

May we keep each other in steadfast prayer. *May the Lord be praised!*

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Congregations and Pastors: Andre Pirtle – Milwaukee, Church on the Porch, (Co-Pastor); Leonard Thompson, Sr. – Madison, Mt. Zion (Interim); Karen Sundland – Wauwatosa, Underwood Memorial (Interim); Antigo, First – Withdrew from ABC/WI and ABCUSA.

Organizations and Directors: Shanna Eckberg, Executive Director – Tudor Oaks Senior Living Community; Anna-Lisa Hunter, Campus Minister, Crossroads United Campus Ministry Student Center (UW-La Crosse)

Milestone Celebrations (with regional staff participation): *Church Anniversaries:* Kenosha, El Calvario—58th; Milwaukee, Calvary—120th. *Pastor Anniversaries:* John Walton, Jr.—13th, Milwaukee, Calvary; Archie Ivy—20th, Milwaukee, New Hope. *Ordinations:* Brandle Morrow – Milwaukee, Metropolitan (Interim). *Retirements:* Chuck Lamson, Tudor Oaks. *Other: Melva Bishop Hewing, Madison, Mt. Zion, completed the American Baptist Chaplaincy endorsement process*

In Memoriam: Andy Davison

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Staff Reports

Sam Brink, Minister of Church Resources & Mission Support, Elm Grove Office | sbrink2872@aol.com

On August 15, I began my 18th year with the region. As with past years, it has been a year of opportunities and challenges but a year in which the shape and form of the region under Marie’s leadership began to take form as she leads us into the future.

This year I had the opportunity to work with the Commission on Congregational Missions. With their help the region was able to provide a work mission trip in cooperation with American Baptist Home Missionary Societies – ‘Til the Work is Done. So the first week in August, thirty-two people from the region went to New Orleans to continue work on rebuilding projects from Hurricane Katrina. This August marked the 10th anniversary of Katrina. We joined over 200 other ABC participants from across the country. For stories of the week and progress go to www.abhms.org and click on “Volunteer” (right-hand column). If you would like to go next year – same time, same place – let me know.

The work of the Commission on Congregational Missions is to help our congregations make connection through the wider mission of the region and denomination. If you have mission opportunities in your area or if you are looking for areas where your congregation can be engaged with Christ in the community, contact me.

Mission From the Gospels: This year saw the completion of the resource that I have worked on with Ron Carlson from American Baptist Home Missionary Societies. It is a resource that comes in two forms. In one form, you have a Christian Education format and small group discussion guide. The second format is focused more on helping your mission teams grow in their understanding of God's call to mission and engagement with your community. For an introduction to this resource check out www.missionfromthegospels.com. The resources are free to ABC of WI congregations. The CE version has been translated into Spanish and work is in process to have it translated into Chin, Karen and Korean. If you are up for a challenge I would love to work with an association or a group of congregations, helping them create a mission team in their community. Contact me for more info.

As we move into the fall, the region has been invited to participate in an experiment to help congregations better understand how we sustain mission work both here in the region and throughout the denomination. New resources are being developed to help congregations better understand United Missions, the source of support that touches all ABC/WI and ABCUSA ministry. If you would like more information or if you would like me to speak to your congregation to help in this United Mission conversation please contact me. This is a great opportunity to be part of the larger ABC story.

From Carolyn Dugan, Director of Camping Ministries, Camp Tamarack | carolyn.dugan@abcofwi.org

2015 has been a busy year for Camp Tamarack and the Region. We started in February with the Winter Youth Retreat and our theme was "In Christ a New Creation" based on 2 Corinthians 5:17. It was great to have many of our summer campers back together again for learning, fun, and fellowship. I also believe the Winter Youth Retreat was much needed by our volunteer leaders as well. We all need to be reminded that we are loved by God and belong to this creation. At the Winter Youth Retreat we announced a t-shirt decorating contest for our summer camper t-shirts as well as the addition of a youth representative for our Commission on Camping.

The summer seemed to fly by with all our camps basing their messages on "Taste and See that the Lord is Good". I have never seen so many food themed activities, but we also learned that tasting isn't always literal; it can also mean trying new experiences. We had several rental groups this year with many returning and several new rentals looking to experience God in our beautiful setting.

As 2015 wraps up I want to thank ALL of the summer staff and volunteers that make the camp experience possible! We are looking forward to 2016 and the hope that a new year and camping season brings! You can stay up-to-date with our camping news on FaceBook at "Camp Tamarack - ABC of WI" or at www.camptamarack.org. Look out for the flyers on the 2016 100 years of Baptist camping in Wisconsin celebration, spruce up weekend, and youth camping schedule, which are all already in circulation.

Timothy and Maxine Ashley, Site Director and Coordinator for Student Services, CENTRAL-Wisconsin

Central Baptist Theological Seminary—Wisconsin (or CENTRAL-Wisconsin for short) is now in its second decade! In these years we have grown from an idea in the mind of Dr. Roy Nabors and other Milwaukee pastors to a school that offers two fully accredited masters degrees, a diploma, and a certificate. We have an excellent faculty that contributes much to the lives of the students. Thanks go to Maxine Ashley, Adam Bond, Eleanor Cardenas, John Jones IV, Trinette McCray, Ross Peterson, Carmen Porco, Arlo Reichter, Demetrius Williams, and Jamie Washam for their dedication over the last decade. Dr. Reichter came from retirement to rejoin the teaching faculty in this past year as well as the current year. We thank the various pastors and faith leaders who have served as mentors to our students. Marie Onwubuariri, our Executive Minister, and Betsy Kelnhofer from our Region Staff have also given generously of their time to contribute to the seminary over the past year.

Our primary mission is to those persons who already have a bachelor's degree. This includes those who are aiming for traditional pastoral ministry, but extends beyond that to those who wish to learn for personal enrichment of their current professions and those who want to learn more to become better equipped laypersons in their churches. We also train for ministry those without bachelor's degrees at a number of levels. In this last category, I am especially grateful for the work of the Hispanic Lay Institute, its co-directors, James Carlson and José Encarnación, and the excellent faculty.

CENTRAL-Wisconsin is a joint ministry with ABC/WI. We have key partnerships with Community Baptist Church of Greater Milwaukee, First Baptist Church of La Crosse, Housing Ministries of American Baptists in Wisconsin, The Salzmann Library of St. Francis School of Theology, First Baptist Church of Eau Claire (Ruth Baker Fund), American Baptist Home Mission Societies, The Mission Initiative Fund, ABCUSA, Midwest Ministry Development Service, and Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board. The generosity of these partners over the years is notable. We also directly benefit from the American Baptist United Mission fund, like so many good projects in our denomination, and also appreciate congregations who have supported the seminary by hosting commissioning services, inviting student speakers, and including "Seminary Sundays" on their calendar. Thanks to all of these wonderful people.

The courses we have taught and will be teaching in the 2015-16 academic year are: Hebrew Bible 1 and 2, Christian Heritage 1 and 2, Baptist History and Polity, Homiletics, The Practice of Preaching, Christian Ethics, and Ministry Ethics. We invite inquiries about these courses. In the coming years the whole Central Seminary system (now encompassing 9 sites and work in at least 4 languages) will be moving to a new curriculum which will present both challenges and great benefits. Watch for more on the new curriculum coming soon! Our present needs are:

- We need students. If your church has persons (especially those with bachelor's degrees) that are sensing calls to ministry in the broadest sense, have them contact Rev. Marie Onwubuariri. This is a crucial need for the immediate future.
- We need you to think of including a gift to CENTRAL Wisconsin in your church budget and your own private stewardship, and/or have your church sponsor a Seminary Sunday.
- Above all, we need your prayer support. Put CENTRAL Wisconsin on your prayer calendars.