

“STATE OF THE REGION”

American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, September 24, 2016 Annual Meeting
Report from Rev. Marie Onwubuariri, Executive Minister, and Region Staff

Opening Reflections

I quietly rejoiced on my second anniversary as your Executive Minister as I was in the office alone on August 1st. The solitude allowed me time for reflection. What I knew was imminent had come all at once, making this a year of preparing for the retirement of five very significant regional disciples and seeing in real ways the new thing that God is already doing. I do not say this flippantly, but rather with great respect for **Sam Brink, Mark & Deb Lembke, and Timothy & Maxine Ashley**, who all will be retiring this year. They have not only given collectively over seventy years of service to the American Baptist family, each has made memorable marks in our region’s history, adding to a strong foundation upon which the rest of us have a privilege of building: Sam’s prophetic contributions to congregational vitality and missional engagement; the Lembkes’ loving caretaking of Camp Tamarack, and the Ashleys’ devoted development of CENTRAL Wisconsin are all unmatched. I am even leaving out many more ways they have served faithfully beyond these immediate roles. While preparing to bid farewell to them is not easy, I commend them for discerning God’s movement in their lives and in the broader region, and for following. The trusting act of following God away from what has been such a grand part of one’s life toward a new unknown is a true mark of discipleship. Though I have only had the pleasure of working with them for two years, I have known first hand their love for their ministry and have seen their positive impact on many people, directly and indirectly. Please pray with me for their continued transition over the next few months, that their hearts are filled with fond memories and assurance that they have been indeed good and faithful servants.

These transitions prompted an accelerated challenge to seek a clarifying vision and new opportunities for the region’s next chapter. The strategic plan, which was only in planning stage this time last year, is now written. Building upon the themes *Synergy in Mission; Listen, the God of All Generations is Speaking; and All of God’s Creation* has led to the development of a vision and strategic plan for 2017-2020, which the Executive Committee and Board of Managers will be refining this fall for roll-out in January. Following are some highlights from this past year and some introductions to what is ahead.

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Vision Casting and Bi-Directional Communications between regional office and constituency: The **Wisconsin Baptist** has served as the main venue for the staff to share reflections and exhortations around our regional themes to the “person in the pew.” Several of the articles in the past months have included questions that I hope would prompt conversations in your own communities; we continue to include voices beyond our regional staff so that you may hear from one another. Churches and partner ministries have begun to make more use of the monthly **Synergy E-newsletter**, sharing invitations to their various events; anyone in your churches can request to receive this by contacting Betsy in our office. We moved to an email service that allows us to better manage our email list and know the extent emails are being viewed. In my **visits to churches** I have begun to share a clearer presentation of regional ministry, and I continue to enjoy observing and learning from each community. **Social media** communication through Facebook and Twitter has allowed us to share news of happenings around the region with yet another audience. New websites still remain on the wish list, but Betsy Kelnhofner has regularly kept our **regional office and camp websites** up-to-date with current events and documents. Please know that I do appreciate calls and emails regarding questions about regional life and updates of

what is going on from leaders and churches. Discernment of the direction of our diverse constituency is enhanced when I hear from you, so please stay informed via any of the venues we make available and continue to let us know what makes your relationship as a cooperating church, an ABC leader, and/or a partner ministry with ABC Wisconsin of value to you.

Pastoral/Ministerial Support and Care: Three dozen people gathered over five **Minister Meet-ups**, sponsored by the Ministers Council, Sam Brink, and I during the Winter and Spring, discussing mission priorities, mental health, financial health, and pastoral skills and congregational expectations for healthy missional congregations. The **Ministers Council** Wisconsin chapter continues to rebuild and are well on their way to becoming a strong resource for ministerial centeredness, collegiality, competence and all around support and care. **Individual ministers** are always welcome to reach out to regional staff for various needs along their journey, and several do. The **Commission on Ministry** has been a very active group, walking alongside a church in their discernment of endorsing someone for ministry in the ABC and meeting with ministers considering a home in the ABC. More than just checking requirements for credentialing, I have witnessed this thoughtful group have both the integrity of the *ministerial call* and support of the *minister called* at the center of their work. **The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB)** has worked with our region to both promote ways they can assist ministers in financial matters, and in providing information around clergy compensation. I was surprised to learn that many of our churches are not participating in the programs available through the ABC connection with MMBB; if you would like to learn more please contact Sam or me.

Growth and Integrity of ABC/WI Regional Ministry:

The strategic plan (SP) is organized into a framework for regional ministry that a.) actively pursues **core values** found in our mission statement and expressed in these past two years of listening, b.) is organized around clearly defined **areas of ministry and support functions**; and c.) seeks to be **innovative and relevant**, taking into account current day challenges to institutional religion. The SP also includes a proposal for a new staffing approach, which includes a development of a ministerial leadership team that will engage each other across ministry areas for collaboration.

This will be the first year that the Annual Gathering is held at our region camp, **Camp Tamarack**. Carolyn, Mark and Deb have worked hard to get the camp ready for the weekend. Without a congregation to host us, however, we also are relying on additional summer camp staff and leaders to provide much needed support. We are grateful to **Kim Drost (cook), Linda Jolly (assistant cook), Anthony Bianchina, Kurt Kaufman, Zaire Lanier, Nicole Morley, Jessica Sauer, and Chris Smith** for availing themselves this weekend. Franklin Onwubuariri and Jason Mack took the lead to offer a region-sponsored **Men's Retreat** at the camp in April; with the success of this event we look forward to growing our retreat ministry. See Carolyn's report below on our camping celebrations and season this year.

For **educational** resources, Sam led the efforts to provide an **Advent Devotional**, coordinating submissions from writers throughout our region. He also continues to offer the **Mission From the Gospels** curriculum to our churches, along with training and a new online component. I have promoted the seven mission priorities that were named at last year's national ABC Mission Table; I am committed to advocate for the **"Next Generation of Leaders"** by integrating leadership development in our regional work. ABC/WI is an ideal landscape to develop **leaders** with the access to effective ministry models, seasoned leaders, and a regional landscape that provides many opportunities to grow in a variety of callings. Through **CENTRAL Wisconsin** we continue to offer a Master of Divinity program and an access point for a Master of Arts in Theological Studies; we had our 7th class graduate this past May. We are

also seeking ways to extend the educational offerings beyond degree students. Some courses are of particular interest to “special students,” (those who join as **auditors**) such as this fall’s Narrative Theology class, which offers avenues through which the general population can engage. We are also exploring co-sponsorship of **special events and forums** with partners to provide a space for people to consider their active role in society with sound theological and biblical foundations. See Timm’s reports on further updates from the seminary site below.

Sam Brink, May May Latt (Burmese Community Liaison), **Jim Carlson** (Hispanic Community Liaison) and I **resource churches** on a variety of topics and reach out simply to connect. May May, along with volunteer **Karl Byleen** from West Allis, First, have been instrumental in welcoming our two new churches this year. Jim joined our team in July and has already made great efforts to connect with our four Hispanic congregations. Our office staff continues to build up our **resource bank** of sample resources and best practices; I introduced some churches to the Strengthening Your Financial Future for ministry partnership available with the **American Baptist Foundation**; we added an **Annual Church Report Supplement** to learn what ministries churches were engaged in so we might encourage synergy and share appropriate resources (we will share the results in the new church directory). We also just received a \$25,000 **Palmer Grant** that will support two new initiatives: 1) **The Circuit**, a model that will combine church discovery of missional purpose with intentional interim ministry, particularly geared toward specially called ministers and declining churches discerning their future. Recruitment of the ministry team will happen in the next few months, training to occur in early 2017, and invitations for congregational involvement will follow. 2.) **The POST**, a new entity of the region that will experiment with a model of a faith community shaped for those who are open to grow in committed discipleship within the broad ABC/WI geographical and missional context. We are now looking for individuals for the inaugural group, open to those who are not yet engaged in a local congregation but are yearning for a faith community for intentional discipleship, ministry gift discovery and sharpening, and opportunities to exercise their gifts and call throughout our region. Community building will begin in the Spring 2017, and possible deployment to serve our region will begin before the end of 2017. Both these initiatives seek to expand the region office capacity to compel and equip our constituency for service to the community.

Administration: Our ministry areas will only be stronger if our administrative support areas are strong. Research has been done this year to include efforts in the SP to restructure our **regional staffing**, revise our **office space**, strengthen our **financial base**, expand our **communication** capacity, and **redesign** our **governance** structure—all of this so that we can be about *MISSION*. After the November Board of Managers meeting, you can expect to see job announcements for open positions. As the SP begins implementation in January, details of all the other areas will be shared.

Mission beyond ABC/WI: Our office and missional individuals have continued to work with our in-state partners such as the **Milwaukee Christian Center, Project Focal Point, campus ministries, ecumenical and interfaith partners, Housing Ministries of American Baptists in Wisconsin, and Tudor Oaks, as well as our denominational partners**. It is a blessing to extend our hand in partnership for common mission. I am grateful for all those who engage with these sister organizations.

It may seem like a lot of change, but much of the SP is a continuance of the work our region has been doing for years. Those things that will be different, I pray, are not for change’s sake but for the **sake of the living gospel of Jesus Christ**. The ABCUSA Focus Statement found on our national website is “*American Baptist Churches are missional congregations that nurture devoted disciples of Jesus Christ who live their lives in mission and ministry for the healing of the world through the love of God.*”

I anticipate active years ahead, and I am committed to serve you as your Executive Minister with God as my guide, the Holy Spirit as my soul searcher, and Jesus Christ as my model. But I also need you as my fellow disciples. The “*state of the region*” in part or in whole is not all together, all healthy, all functional, or all cooperating all the time. We are ABC Wisconsin by covenant, and our members enter into this covenant in varying degrees. I will continue to listen and do my part to ensure our regional staff fulfills our call to our mission and to this associational endeavor. The vision, the mission, the purpose—any chance of honoring our collective place in the reign of God—is just as much dependent on you.

Closing Reflections: Ephesians 3:18-19

As we approach the end of this year you will hear more about how the following scripture has informed the future vision of ABC Wisconsin. For now, I leave you with these two versions of Ephesians 3:18-19 to ponder:

“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” NRSV

“And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you’ll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.” The Message

I NEVER CEASE GIVING THANKS FOR ALL THE VARIOUS PEOPLE WHO ENGAGE IN THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE OF AMERICAN BAPTISTS IN WISCONSIN. It excites and humbles me to think of the possible growth in the faith and witness that is yet to be realized. May each of us, in our discipleship of Christ, experience fullness of life in Creator God.

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Congregations and Pastors: *Completed:* Stephen Hawkins—Beloit, First (Pastor); Nick Seipel—Neenah, Whiting Community (Pastor); Francisco Najera—Racine, Renacer (Pastor); Kim Drost—Wisconsin Dells (Pastor), Indian; Karen Sundland—Wauwatosa, Underwood Memorial (Interim); Leonard Thompson, Sr. — Madison, Mt. Zion (Interim); *Beginning:* Eric Lundquist—Beloit, First (Interim); Kate Fields—Wauwatosa (Pastor); Elizabeth Perkins—Delevan, First (Pastor); Jim Carlson—ABC/WI, Hispanic Community Liaison

New Churches: Milwaukee, Emmanuel Chin; Lalpek Lian (Pastor); Milwaukee, Myanmar Christian Center; Brang Seng (Pastor)

Milestone Celebrations (communicated with the region office): *Church Anniversaries:* Milwaukee, Iglesia Evangelica Bautista—64th; Fond du Lac, Memorial—60th; Honey Creek, Community—175th; West Allis, First—175th; Milwaukee, Chinese Community—50th. *Pastor Anniversaries:* Mark Clinger—25th, Madison, First; *Ordinations:* Carolyn Dugan—Green Lake, Federated. *Retirements:* Michael Ida—Delavan, First.

Other:

In Memoriam: Charles Thornhill (Milwaukee, Mt. Moriah)

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Staff Reports

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

On August 15 I completed my 18th year and began my 19th and final year on the staff of ABC/WI. The year has been a busy one as we continue to move in new directions under the leadership of Marie. I began the year by dedicating some time to go over the statistics we have on hand from our annual reports submitted by our congregations. I gathered information for Marie and the Board of Managers to use to help us better understand our missional life as a region. Again, I was impressed that so many of our congregations financially support mission outreach as well as engage in mission outreach in their local communities. Our region will continue to grow strong if we continue to financially support AND engage in mission outreach. Along with several other leaders from the region, I helped in the facilitating of a one-day retreat for the General Board of ABC/USA during their meeting in Green Lake.

This year we saw several transitions in our pastoral leadership. It was my privilege to be able to have the opportunity to help congregations say good-bye to pastoral leaders and to help congregations install new pastoral leadership. I have worked with Marie to help congregations through times of transition. While we said good-bye to some very capable leaders, we are also welcoming new leaders who will bring new gifts for ministry not only to their own congregation but also to the wider ministry of the region.

This year, working with Marie and in partnership with the Minister's Council, several clergy gatherings were held. I was able to host one of the gatherings and help with the leadership of the discussion. While I no longer serve on the Board of Directors for the Milwaukee Christian Center, I still volunteer time to serve on the Resource Development committee for MCC. We are blessed to have two Centers in Project Focal Point and MCC, which reach out to help those who face struggles day in and day out with the love of Christ. Thank you for your support of these ministries.

I continued this past year to develop material for congregations that are looking for ways to help educate disciples and grow in their outreach into their communities with the good news of Jesus the Christ. Working in partnership with the American Baptist Home Missionary Societies, I have provided leadership training for the congregations in Cleveland, Ohio, and in the Topeka, Kansas area. The Mission From the Gospels resource continues to evolve as we work with the different faith communities in our denomination. It is my hope that I will be able to offer an online/in person training in the use of the MFG resource this fall. ***If your congregation would be interested, please contact me and we can talk about how it might work for your congregation.*** The resource is free to our ABC/WI congregations.

As I approach my retirement, I want to thank all of you for your part in making the love of God come alive in this region. The ministry of love is very powerful, and as John reminds us: when you encounter love you encounter God. While I retire from my regional ministry I do not retire from my faith and my desire to help where ever I end up to unfold before people the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. May God bless each of you as you, too, seek to be the person God has called you to be. Thank you for eighteen and half years of ministry together.

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

2016 has been my 5th year as Director of Camping Ministry and the most active. We started the year with the Winter Youth Retreat where we explored the meaning behind #nofilter as Christians and had many different activities including a photo scavenger hunt and an evening worship where we talked about how we do filter ourselves and that we don't want to lose who we are as we apply all the filters we think we need to.

The camping season began with a celebration weekend of 100 years of camping in Wisconsin as American Baptists. It was a wonderful weekend of worship including: music led by the worship team of Iglesia Bautista El Calvario, an All Ball game of staff versus retreaters, fundraising with a silent auction run by Nola Branton, and the sale of the refurbished dining hall benches. The best part of the weekend was the fun and fellowship. As part of this celebration the Commission on Camping challenged the individuals and churches of WI to help raise \$15,000 so we could give each registered youth camper \$100 off their camping fee. We had a wonderful response to this challenge with a church having an ice cream social and many more creative ways of raising the funds. Thank you to everyone who helped make this happen. We are still a little short of our goal, but the year isn't over yet.

The season seemed to go by very quickly, but there are moments from each camp that come to mind as we used Matthew 6:21 as our theme scripture and there were so many treasure-related activities and ideas that campers were a part of. Thank you to all the Directors, Pastors and volunteers for their hard work! I also want to especially thank the summer staff that stepped up their game this year and did a great job of being the backbone of the camp program.

I hope everyone is having a great time at the Annual Gathering as many months and hours have gone in to planning and preparing. Camp Tamarack is truly the perfect space to explore God's creation. Thank you to all who have supported Camp Tamarack this year in any way, shape or form; it is appreciated more than you know.

Timothy Ashley, Site Director, CENTRAL Wisconsin | timothymaxineashley@gmail.com

This has been a year of transition at CENTRAL Wisconsin. For one thing, we are transitioning into a new system of partnership for supporting the mission of education through the creation of the Central Wisconsin Collaborative (CWC), made up of a team of interested partners who meet in order to discuss and plan recruitment, networking, and support for the future of the site. The whole Central Seminary system, made up of at least nine sites across much of the country, has adopted a new MDiv curriculum that will shape the seminary's approach to theological education for the immediate and medium term future. We made the decision that here at CENTRAL Wisconsin that we would recruit now to the roll out of the new curriculum in Fall 2017. This means that the current year has been and next year will be spent in finishing students who began on the old curriculum as fully as possible, and planning for the roll out of the new curriculum. These are exciting and challenging days for CENTRAL Wisconsin.

I will retire as Director and Maxine as Coordinator of Student Services on December 31st. I was privileged to be the founding Director of CENTRAL Wisconsin, and it has been our privilege, through the years since 2005, to welcome students, faculty, and partners into this ministry of theological education. Reverend Dr. John Jones will succeed me as Director on January 1, 2017, although Dr. Jones has already been working with me for several months. A successor to Maxine will be named in due course. Dr. Jones, and Rev. Marie Onwubuariri are working together with others in the Seminary and the Region on the future plans for the site, such as the way in which the new curriculum will roll out here. All this will

probably mean some changes from the past, while at the same time honouring our traditions. Pray for the new team and for our work here in this region. Once again, it has been a privilege for Maxine and I to serve at CENTRAL Wisconsin, in close cooperation with the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin. I thank everyone who has contributed in any way to the work that has gone on here, whether from the Seminary in Shawnee, KS, or on-site faculty, students, or our strategic partners. I am excited by the possibilities for the future. I have great trust in the leadership of Dr. Jones and Rev. Onwubuariri. Please give CENTRAL and these leaders (along with faculty and students) your support through prayer, through sending students, and through your giving. May God guide the ABC of Wisconsin and Central Seminary into a bright future.