

## “STATE OF THE REGION”

American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, October 12, 2019 Annual Meeting, Staff Reports  
“Together Living Faithfully Through Christ Today” | Ephesians 3:18-19

**Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri, Regional Executive Minister | [marie.o@abcofwi.org](mailto:marie.o@abcofwi.org)**

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1-2 NRSV*

### **Opening Reflection:**

*“I envision a church—people from all walks and cultures of life on a journey together. This church would seek to recognize God in creation anew; would uniquely and authentically offer their spiritual worship in their various expressions; would exist and function so that individuals, families, and communities experience reconciliation to God and to one another; would desire transformation from self-centeredness, injustice, and destruction and grow toward service, wellness, and wholeness—personally, communally, and systemically, so that God’s good and acceptable and perfect will is discerned and lived out. This church would be modeled after Jesus Christ and filled with God’s Holy Spirit. This church can be local, regional, national and/or global, but I know that this is the church in which I am called to be a servant leader.”*  
*[Inspired by Romans 12:1-2]*

The above is an excerpt from my **call narrative** written at least a decade ago. It describes a God-given yearning within me for community—for congregation—for church. It describes what I envisioned, even then: **A people who would...**

- choose one another and endeavor to engage side by side and face to face;
- desire reconciliation, transformation, and justice on all levels of human interaction and aspects of creation;
- be authentic in their worship, nurturing character reflective of God’s character;
- continually rely on their source of purpose, power, and perseverance, that is Christ and the Holy Spirit.

For years this yearned-for vision has been quite clear. What has been elusive is whether there would necessarily be any confines of locality, dwelling, or organizational identity. To say that “this church can be local, regional, national and/or global” has been, and continues to be, both ambiguous and compelling. As I reflect on the state of the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin in this past year, God has brought me back to this vision, as if to invite me to look around, to pause, and to see that what he has told me of before *is* springing forth—an Isaiah 42:9 glimpse with a John 7:38<sup>1</sup> invitation for a Romans 12:1-2 church.

Yes, I see **this people, this church right here in ABC Wisconsin**. We are a church who is local, regional, national and global endeavoring to journey side by side and face to face in ministry, mission, and worship, with Christ at the center and the Holy Spirit guiding us along the way. **We are a people, a church that is growing into a revised plan for the collective “us.”**

In so doing, **we are experiencing growing pains**. The unfolding of a God-given vision always involves growing pains. Isaiah 42 speaks of the conditions into which God’s new thing comes about—there is overturning involved, a redefining of hope amidst generational distress, a need for boldness and gentleness; it will take grit. Jesus’ promise in John 7:38 is given within a narrative filled with opposition, misunderstanding, askewed expectations; Jesus embodies and promises *source*. God’s vision comes with a price. For God, it cost the life of a Son. For us in this time of regional association, it is costing us the comfort of our customs, the safety of our segregation, the predictability of our piety. It is stressing our complacencies, our theologies, our practices, and our relationships. It is calling us to reconsider what it means to choose togetherness versus apartness, abundant life versus hopelessness, faithful expression versus normative expectations; movement versus stagnancy; Christ-centeredness versus Christ-marginalized, and urgency versus idleness. **Together Living Faithfully Through Christ Today.**

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 42:9 and John 7:38 are the theme scriptures chosen by the Program Committee for the 2019 Annual Gathering

God's vision comes with a price...and it comes with a promise. This is not a starting point and an ending point but rather a continuous cyclical experience of the cross and the empty tomb—the Cycle of Gospel Living<sup>2</sup>—sacrifice and redemption; powerlessness and powerfulness; letting go and receiving anew. Both the cross and the empty tomb were God's will—*good, acceptable, and perfect*.

***God's plan results in both joy and pain. God's purpose contains past, present, and tomorrow. ABC Wisconsin, what God has told is springing forth. Believe in Christ and out of our hearts will flow rivers of living water. Remember this, however: the wellspring, that is the Spirit, is of God, not of us. It is uncontainable. Amen.***

**General Reports:** What follows are highlights of our ministries: supporting churches and ministers, providing camping and educational opportunities, pursuing innovative initiatives, and strengthening the networks in which we work.

The **American Baptist Men's ministry** on the regional level has been revisioning for several years, with the support of the region office. Franklin Onwubuariri has worked with others to have an annual men's retreat at Camp Tamarack and hold events at local churches, has tried to reconnect with the national ABMen organization, and has had many conversations across the region. This year, a new governing committee to revive ABMen has been recruited, and they are hopeful to rebuild upon the synergy created over the past few years. Our **New Wineskins Endowment Fund** established in late 2017 was the source to birth a special event held in March called "Day of Missional Innovation," which then led to our first New Wineskins grant program resulting in the funding of three new projects; this development was overseen by the **Commission on Finance**. The **Commission on Congregational Mission (CCM) and the Commission on Ministry (COM)** both engaged in substantial ministry this past year. CCM led an emphasis on relevant approaches to biblical teaching through workshops, resources reviews, and support for a Christian Education project in Chin State, Myanmar and continues to **invite our churches to consider this mission project**. COM has put a significant effort to revise an ecclesial process to handle **clergy misconduct** allegations, as part of their commitment to ministerial excellence and ethics. The **Circuit Team**, an approach to interim ministry began in 2016, is now fully engaging with select congregations in pastoral transition. The **Board of Managers** affirmed a statement in their May 2019 that expresses a commitment to undergird our mission statement by intentionally **equipping ourselves for healthy and constructive conversations around our diversity and differences**; they also affirmed the work of the Governance Task Force in presenting a revised proposal **to changes to our governance and ministry structure**. ***Thanks to all who have actively pursued our mission over this past year.***

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**Congregations and Pastors:** **Completed:** Mark Clinger—Madison, First; Brian Hastings—Fond du Lac, Memorial; Brang Seng—Milwaukee, Myanmar Christian; Timothy Ashley—La Crosse, First. Kate Fields—Wauwatosa, Underwood; **Beginning:** James Garnett—Neenah, Whiting Community (Installed Feb '19); John Czech—Hudson, First (Transitional); Thomas Dewitt—Janesville, First; Zachary Vincent—Fond du Lac, Memorial (Interim); Michael Newheart—Madison, First (Interim); Stanley Cung—Milwaukee, Emmanuel Chin (Installed Feb'19); May May Latt—Milwaukee, Myanmar Christian (Interim); Patrick Roberts—Kenosha, First (Installed Jul'19); Walt Hoshaw—Beloit, First (Installed Aug'19)

**Milestone Celebrations (communicated with the region office):** **Church Anniversaries:** Milw., Progressive—30<sup>th</sup>; Milw., Myanmar Christian—5<sup>th</sup>; Milw., New Hope—72<sup>nd</sup>; Milw., Mount Zion—100<sup>th</sup>. **Ordinations:** Phun Tling (Milw., Chin/Chin Baptist Churches, USA); Victoria Nelson (Milw., Metropolitan Missionary)

**In Memoriam (ABC/WI Clergy and Staff):** Mary Link (Aug'18; ABC/WI); Merlin W. Bradley (Sep'18; Hudson, First); Tommie L. Mims (Sep'18; Milw., Calvary); Llewellyn S. Walker (Oct'18; Delavan, First); John Wade Davey (Jan'19; Neenah, Whiting/Wis. Dells, Indian); William Horseman (Mar'19; ABC Clergy; Wyocena, Community member); Joe Wallace (Jul'18, ABC Clergy; La Crosse, First, member).

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<sup>2</sup> See Eric Law. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1993)

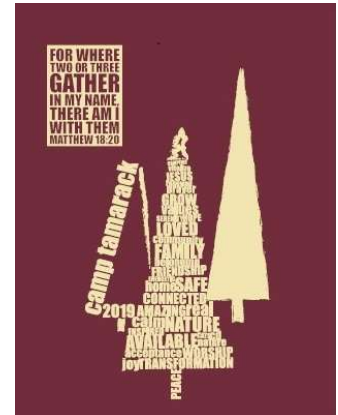
## **CAMPING**

**Rev. Carolyn Dugan, Associate Regional Minister – Camping | [carolyn.dugan@abcofwi.org](mailto:carolyn.dugan@abcofwi.org)**

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This year the theme of Collaboration morphed in to the idea of Connectedness, and various ways of connection were explored through avenues of:

- Connections in the Bible between the Old Testament and New Testament
- What it means to be connected as a Christian in terms of accountability/fellowship/prayer and in the world.
- What it means to be connected in a community such as being whole-hearted, vulnerable, and belonging, whether it be in person or virtual groups.
- How are we connected to creation? Topics included what is our responsibility and what choices do we make.



A spider web was a symbol of this connectedness, and there were various ways it would manifest. One cabin decorated their bunks with yarn as a symbol of them all being tied together as a group, and then they tied in reflections and prayers from the week. It was great to see how the campers and leaders took the ideas and turned them into something that had meaning to them. They do listen and hear what we are saying during worship and conversations.

Reflecting on the years of Rootedness and Collaboration so far, it is interesting to see how campers remember activities from year to year. This year, they checked on the Tamarack trees they planted in 2018, and it gave us a chance to discuss creation and what makes things grow, how root systems need to be nurtured during the winter, and how that transfers to building roots for our faith.

This year, we had some weather events around the camp including many trees down during July, and with the connections that have been made, we were able to call together a “chainsaw brigade” for the emergency clear up, plus we had several people want to give back and share their time and talents as they came up on their own to help clear trails and spaces.

With new connections made in the Waupaca area, we are getting new rental requests for local businesses to use our spaces for meetings and gatherings.

This year we have been grateful to receive several donations that are a result of previous connections over the camp history. There is an endowment set up for the Tamarack Lodge by the Chinese Community Church of Milwaukee that will help with some upgrades as well as yearly upkeep of the space. We have also received several individual donations, which also included collaboration on ideas for camp improvements and supplies—in 2020, we will have a Gaga ball pit built by the pavilion!

Camp Tamarack cannot help support ministries around the Region without all the support we receive! We are blessed to be able to offer programming and space for retreats and rentals. Please reach out to Rev. Carolyn Dugan or Rev. Kim Drost with any questions or inquiries. Camp continues to be a place to “Be Still”, to make connections and at the same time, disconnect from the busyness of the day to day.

## **EDUCATION**

**Rev. Dr. John A. Jones IV, Associate Regional Minister – Education | [john.jones@abcofwi.org](mailto:john.jones@abcofwi.org)  
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The educational ministry efforts of the ABC/WI continue to evolve as part of the Region ministry and our explicit values of ROOTEDNESS, COLLABORATION, GROWTH, and TRANSFORMATION.

**ROOTEDNESS:** This year the CENTRAL Wisconsin seminary site celebrated its 10th graduating class with two graduates, providing an opportunity to acknowledge both the many graduates currently doing ministry in the area and the visionary founders who made these educational efforts possible.

**COLLABORATION:** The Region's various educational efforts are born out of collaboration. The seminary site is a collaborative effort among the Region, Central Baptist Theological Seminary (CBTS) in Shawnee, Kansas, and Housing Ministries in Wisconsin.

**GROWTH:** The Learning Community that finds its focus in the seminary site has grown through collaboration with the Ministers Council, the Commission for Congregational Mission, the Commission on the Ministry, as well as pastors in the area. Students and alumni are serving in positions in churches as well as through the ABC/WI region structure.

**TRANSFORMATION:** A result of the shift in M.Div. curriculum delivery and reduced numbers is that current students do not have regular interaction with colleagues nearby. The educational ministry efforts of the Region need to be broader than the seminary program, and the collaboration between the seminary site and the partners mentioned above creates more educational opportunities to be available to more people. As our seminary partner, CBTS, is going through a transformation, we in the region are finding new ways and new models for delivery of quality educational experiences.

Aside from regular student services of advising, grants, and opportunities for community building and spiritual formation, the following activities represent efforts toward these same four values:

- The Hispanic Lay Institute continues to offer classes to train lay leaders in our Spanish-speaking congregations. The directors report that graduates are stepping into leadership roles and serving well in those congregations.
- The Teaching Pastors Forum series was developed as a way to offer Pastors and ministers an opportunity for theological reflection in service of their ministries, building on earlier collaborations between Ministers Council and the Region office in the Minister Meet-Ups series. This offering has created opportunities for collaboration with pastor Demetrius Williams of Community Baptist as one teacher/facilitator and pastors Archie Ivy of New Hope and Walter Lanier of Progressive each hosting a forum at their respective churches. In one well-attended offering, Housing Ministries served as host and Ministers Council as co-sponsor.
- Region educational efforts made small contributions to the work of the Commission on Congregational Mission, which claimed an emphasis on Christian education for 2019.
- We also contributed to the work of the Commission on the Ministry as part of the Region's ongoing effort to compel and equip ministers of excellence.
- Celebratory events like the Commissioning Service and the Convocation/Cookout gather seminary students, alumni, and faculty together to help remind us all of the larger Learning Community that serves God in this place.

Please continue to keep this work, our students, and the mission that is theological education in Wisconsin in your prayers.