

WomenWord



American Baptist
Women in Ministry

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

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March On!

Dear Partners in Christ,

I would like to share with you the following poem I wrote as part of our **MarchOn** initiative:

MarchOn!

The sound of one voice may not be much; the step of
one foot may not go far.
But when your voice is added to my voice and my
voice is added to another,
a melodious movement emerges,
many feet move,
a multiplicity of women **marches on**.

The strength of one arm may not be much; the step of
one foot may not go far.
But when your arm is linked with my arm and my
arm is linked with another,
an unbreakable bond emboldens,
many feet move,
a multiplicity of men **marches on**.

The hold of one hand may not be much; the step of
one foot may not go far.
But when your hand holds my hand and my hand
holds another,
a sacred strength empowers,
many feet move,
a multiplicity of women and men **marches on**.

The beat of one heart may not be much; the step of
one foot may not go far.
But when your heart beats with my heart and my
heart beats with another,
passion pulsates everywhere,
many feet move,
a multiplicity marches on...
WE march on and on...



It only takes one foot to take a step but it takes you and you and me—it takes **WE**—to make a movement. **Together** we can move forward towards the full partnership of women and men in ministry. This issue of *WomenWord* is about the many new ways in which we are moving forward, i.e. a new advisory team, women in new positions, new resources and new initiatives. “Behold, I am doing a new thing!” says the Lord (Isaiah 43:19). Indeed, God is doing a new thing amongst us! I hope you will join us in **Marching On!**

Your Partner in Christ,
Patricia P. Hernandez, National Director

ABWIM'S TEAM EFFORT

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Rev. Judy Allbee, Rev. Mary Hulst, Rev. Charles Adams, Rev. Patricia Hernandez, Rev. Lauren Ng, Rev. Dr. Alice Greene, Rev. Mary Young, Rev. Jackie Saxon, Rev. Karen Yee, Rev. Holly Bean, Rev. Steve Bils

By Holly Vincent Bean

In the last two years, a vision has been realized for the office of American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM). Patricia Hernandez's ministry as ABWIM's National Director will soon begin its third year and, with the energy, love and commitment Pat has shown so far, we can all look to the future with hope.

I was fortunate to be part of the envisioning for ABWIM that occurred in 2010 and 2011. Along with Alice Greene, Lauren Ng and, led wisely and well by Mary Hulst, we formed a small Steering Committee. We were charged by General Secretary Roy Medley to re-imagine and plan for women in ministry work to be successful and sustainable. It was clear to us from the start that partnership and broad support were crucial for anyone who might be called to be ABWIM's director. The new national director could not do this work alone and so we planned that ABWIM work would have an advisory team built in. When Pat Hernandez was called to the position in 2011, she knew she would have a team beside her for advice, support and hands-on involvement.

In May of 2011, when Pat began serving as ABWIM National Director, the advisory team was composed of both Steering Committee and Search Committee members—Holly Bean,

Liliana da Valle, Alice Greene, Mary Hulst, Lauren Ng, Jackie Saxon and Karen Yee. Roy Medley was and is now considered ex-officio on the team. We needed those who had been working so closely on recent ABWIM matters to support Pat in the early days of her tenure. We also needed to expand the group before long and develop guidelines for team membership. At its first meeting in October 2011, we made plans to do just that.

In 2012, the ABWIM Advisory Team gained four new members: Charles Christian Adams, Judy Allbee, Steve Bils and Mary Young. Our first meeting on May 1, 2012 marked a milestone, as the team was fully constituted with a set of guidelines and ready to move ahead. We now have a diverse team in terms of geography, gender and ethnicity. We now have regional ministers and seminary faculty as well as pastors and former national staff. As convener of the group, I feel privileged and grateful to be able to work with these strong and experienced ABC leaders. The current list of ABWIM Advisory Team members and some background information on each of them is on the ABWIM website, available through this link: <http://marchonabwim.weebly.com/who-we-are.html>.

From the beginning, the ABWIM advisory team has seen itself as a working group, one that not

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A New Boldness in Ministry



Rev. Debora Jackson

How is it that a little known pastor from Massachusetts becomes the Executive Director of the Ministers Council? Are new things emerging for women in ministry? Perhaps, but maybe more correctly, women are exercising a new boldness in ministry that encourages us to walk in our preparedness, knowing that we are called for such a time as this. At least this is my story.

I am second career clergy, having first distinguished myself as a software technology professional. I loved my profession, yet in the midst of a successful career, I experienced the undeniable call to the preaching ministry and was compelled to prepare for it through seminary education. For the longest time, I believed that I would be a corporate executive on the weekdays and an evangelist on the weekend, but God quickly showed me that that was my plan and not His for my life. God literally gave me an offer I couldn't refuse, closing the technology start-up company that I helped to establish with the only "job offer" forthcoming being a call to be the senior pastor of a church. I submitted, giving up my desire for a corporate career, but I brought those skills to the church, where I committed myself to my congregation.

However as I served, I knew that there was another work for me. From the moment that I submitted to God's call on my life, I knew that I was called to ultimately serve as pastor to pastors, working with leaders to help them be more effective in their ministries. I served my church faithfully, but always knowing that there was something else for me. When I received the email of the job posting for the Executive Director of the Ministers Council, I felt as though I was reading my own bio. Every requirement for the job was a skill that I had either as a pastor,

corporate executive or consultant. I knew that the job was for me, but I had to exercise boldness to go for it.

You see, as I asked people about the job, many were discouraging. I know that they were only trying to protect me through counsel that suggested things like, "But you're an unknown," "I think there are others in line for the job," "Maybe this is too much of a reach for you." But I was bold enough to believe that what God had for me was for me. So I was not discouraged; I applied for the job. And when I was called to Chicago to interview, I had the audacity to believe that the job was mine. God had prepared me, so I could go forward in boldness.

I offer the same advice to you, my sisters in ministry. There are discouraging voices who do not necessarily mean you harm, but nevertheless can be dissuasive. But I say to you persevere and don't be discouraged. Prepare yourself in your ministry and faithfully serve as you are called with expectation. Then exercise your boldness and walk in your preparedness. What God has for you is for you.

—Rev. Debora Jackson, DMin, Executive Director,
The Ministers Council, ABCUSA

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A Public Affirmation of Women's Gifts



Rev. Dr. Alice
Burnette Greene

The 2012 ABCIS report shows that slightly less than 10% of ABC churches have women serving as senior pastors. Yet, our seminaries have been reporting for many years a more balanced percentage of men and women seminary graduates.

Do you support women in ministry? If you do, we'd like to know. And we'd also like for others to know of your support. **"Celebrating the Gifts of Women in Ministry"** is a letter of support created by the Women in Ministry Advisory Team to gather signatures of American Baptists who support women as ministerial leaders for our churches. The project seeks to measure the significant support we believe already exists for women as leaders in our churches.

Publicly acknowledging the support for women's ministerial gifts is important because women in ministry face many formidable "glass ceiling" barriers. The 2012 ABCIS report shows that slightly less than 10% of ABC churches have women serving as senior pastors. Yet our seminaries have been reporting for many years a more balanced percentage of men and women seminary graduates.

In response to this kind of data, the Reverend Dr. Charles C. Adams of the Hartford Church in Detroit, a member of the ABWIM Advisory Team, suggested the letter of support. Dr. Adams envisioned getting the signatures of recognized leaders in order to encourage others to sign. He states: "This letter reaffirms our commitment to promote and encourage equality of opportunity in our churches. History has taught us that these movements must be deliberate and determined, thoughtful yet with a profound sense of urgency."

"Celebrating the Gifts of Women in Ministry" will publicize the names of those who support women's leadership, with the hope that those who may be unsure will be encouraged to think about, discuss and explore supporting women's

gifts for ministry. For those who want to know more, a wealth of information is available to provide biblical and moral support for the inclusion of women in all levels of ministry. A good place to start is on the ABC website: http://www.abc-usa.org/what_we_believe/abc-organizations/abwim/

"Celebrating the Gifts of Women in Ministry" will be publicly launched on April 25. The goal is to gather 10,000 signatures, in order to show the denomination and others around us that ABC-USA is "on fire" when it comes to supporting and celebrating women in ministry.

Patricia Hernandez, the National Director of ABWIM, conveys the Advisory Team's excitement over this effort: "We hope to ignite a movement which will bring us closer to a world in which both women and men are able to fully utilize their God-given gifts and fully live out their God-give calls. Our ultimate goal is the full partnership of women and men in ministry in which all God's gifts and all God's calls can be fully lived out for the good of all and the glory of God!"

Women in ministry need your support! Want to sign? Just click on this link: http://www.abc-usa.org/what_we_believe/abc-organizations/abwim/openletter/

—Rev. Dr. Alice Burnette Greene

Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling: Equipping and Encouraging Female Pastors



Rev. Christine A. Smith

*“The journey of writing
Beyond...”
(Excerpts from the
Introduction of Beyond
the Stained Glass Ceiling:
Equipping and Encouraging
Female Pastors, by Rev.
Christine A. Smith)*

Having served as an associate minister at three churches over the course of approximately 25 years, (including time before, during and after completing the Master of Divinity degree) I was finally called to serve as the senior pastor of an American Baptist church at the age of 42 (2006). Prayerful, excited and full of faith and expectation, retrospectively, I don't think that I understood the challenges that lay ahead.

The church had approximately 35-40 “active” members, was predominantly Euro (I am African American) and most members were over the age of 65. The congregation had been without a pastor for almost three years. The previous pastorate ended on a difficult note. They'd had a host of interims prior to calling me (The search committee received several letters of rejection from male pastors. I was told by our local, interim executive minister that this was the last, best attempt to try to keep the church alive). Finances were rocky. The building was in need of repairs. Together, could we turn the “ship” around? Despite our many differences and challenges, together, we (congregation and pastor) were hopeful that our journey, although difficult could be a learning experience filled with victory and joy. “Hope and Change” however, are not always the most necessary ingredients to accomplish successful transformation. We both soon discovered that so much more was needed...

About five years ago, during the Speak Until Justice Wakes Conference (2008, ABCUSA) Rev. Kasey Jones, senior pastor of the National Baptist Memorial Church in Washington, D.C., and I began comparing notes about our experiences as female senior pastors. Out of that discussion grew a desire and decision to learn more about how other female clergy are faring as they pursue ministry opportunities or

serve as senior pastors. We wanted to hear their stories—their challenges, victories, testimonies, and words of wisdom. In *Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling: Equipping and Encouraging Female Pastors*, we celebrate the good news that God has opened the eyes of some congregants regarding the legitimacy and divine prerogative of God to call females to the holy vocation of pastoring. However, there is still much work to be done.

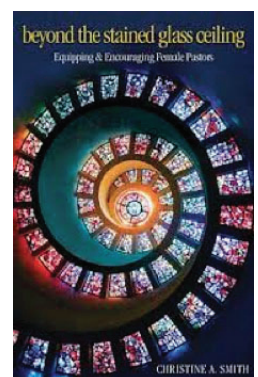
Contrary to some reports, female clergy have not yet arrived. While a few denominations such as United Methodists, the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and American Baptists Churches USA have accepted and called women to serve as senior pastors, many qualified and well-equipped sisters still struggle to have their gifts of preaching and pastoring recognized. Among those who have become senior pastors, remnants of the stained glass ceiling persist.

According to the Barna Group, women represent just 5 percent of all Protestant senior pastors. According to a 2008 *Christianity Today* article, this number has risen slightly to 9 percent. However, female pastors are much more likely to be seminary-trained (86 percent have a seminary degree, compared with 60 percent of male pastors); are more than twice as likely to have been divorced (31 percent, compared with 12 percent among male pastors); have less experience in the pastorate (nine years in full-time paid ministry, compared with a median of 17 years among men); last less time in a given church than do men (three years per pastorate, compared with almost six years among men); and receive much lower compensation. Historically, women have faced a variety of obstacles preventing them from being placed in the role of senior pastor.

Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling speaks to female clergy who are seeking or are established in senior pastorates. It also hopes to engage supporters and advocates in this conversation who will encourage, equip, support, and strategize on behalf of the women of God, seeking to “serve the present age, [their] calling to fulfill!”

by Rev. Christine A. Smith, Senior Pastor of Covenant Baptist Church, Wickliffe, Ohio

*“Hope and
Change,” however,
are not always
the most necessary
ingredients
to accomplish
successful
transformation.*



*Beyond the
Stained Glass Ceiling*

Congratulations to Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford!

*I am incredibly
blessed to be
serving with
and among
gifted pastors and
region staff,
as together
we discover
what it means
to serve a very
needy world in
this time
and place.*



Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford

The Region Board of American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky (ABC-IN/KY) called Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford as the Executive Minister of ABC-IN/KY. She began this new ministry in March 2012. With over 30 years of pastoral ministry and leadership in our American Baptist family, Ford is already well connected throughout ABC-IN/KY. She served for 13 years as the Associate Executive Minister for Mid-American Baptist Churches, where she worked with 125 churches in Iowa and Minnesota as they face the challenges of ministering in the 21st century. She served as stewardship facilitator with American Baptist Churches USA, serving alongside regional staff, churches, pastors, and ecumenical partners to nurture generous disciples to serve as the hands and feet of Christ. Her work as the national coordinator for the ABHMS Missional Church process, helped churches and individuals experience life-changing international mission encounters. Ford is a graduate of Ottawa University and Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and has

completed additional studies at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in the area of ministry and technology. She was ordained by Prairie Baptist Church in 1982. Ford has been married to Rev. Homer Ford for over thirty years. Homer and Soozi have two daughters, Ashley and Holly, both of whom make their homes in Sioux Fall, South Dakota. In her free time, Soozi enjoys reading mystery novels, knitting, walking, and gardening. ABWIM congratulates Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford and is grateful for the amazing work she does to serve pastors and churches to work together to build the Kingdom of God.

When asked about how she is enjoying her job, her response was "I am humbled by the opportunity to serve God through the ministries of ABC of Indiana & Kentucky, and am curious to see how God will continue to shape and form me using the experiences of this part of my life's journey. I am incredibly blessed to be serving with and among gifted pastors and region staff, as together we discover what it means to serve a very needy world in this time and place. We are in the midst of challenging times and all of us (myself included) must learn new skills to enable us to effectively minister in a rapidly changing environment. Yet I am confident that our generous God is already providing everything we need and is going before us, if only we will be faithful."

—By Rev. Karen Yee



ABWIM'S Team Effort (cont.)



Rev. Holly Vincent Bean

only consults with the national director but also initiates and carries out projects to support her efforts. Every member of the team embraces this expectation. What follows are some of the team's accomplishments.

Thanks to the efforts of Lauren Ng and Jackie

Saxon, the ABWIM web presence has been enhanced and enlivened with the theme of **"March On! Shining the Spotlight on American Baptist Women in Ministry."** They have created this "collective cheer" for all **American Baptist women in ministry and their supporters as part of an effort to encourage support and monetary contributions to the work.**

Thanks to Mary Hulst's work, ABWIM is developing a comprehensive list of women in ministry contacts in different areas of the country. Eventually, we hope to strengthen the women in ministry networks that already exist and develop interconnections at a national level.

Thanks to Charles C. Adams' idea and its development by Alice Greene, Karen Yee and

Mary Young, ABWIM has announced "Celebrating the Gifts of Women in Ministry," an online letter for American Baptist leaders to sign as a public statement of their support for the ministerial leadership of women in ABC churches. In its early phase, this letter attracted over 200 signatures. It is now available online and, if you have not already done so, you can sign it, too! Simply click on the following link: http://www.abc-usa.org/what_we_believe/abc-organizations/abwim/openletter/signatures/.

Thanks to Karen Yee, we have revived *WomenWord* with this issue!

Thanks to Jackie Saxon and Lauren Ng, we have great plans for ABWIM's presence at the upcoming Mission Summit. In Overland Park, in June, we expect that all who are—or are supporters of—women in ministry will be able to share fellowship and celebrate the call of God in their lives.

The ABWIM advisory team could not accomplish much if it were not for a strong working relationship with Pat Hernandez, our ABWIM National Director. Her grace and willing partnership supports our growing collaboration. We are all hopeful for the future of this ministry. Praise be to God!

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Get Your Stole On!

As part of the **March On!** movement of American Baptist Women in Ministry, the Get Your Stole On! campaign invites women in ministry to wear their stoles or clerical collars every day for the month of March! No matter where we are, we are Women in Ministry. We may not always look like it but then again, what **SHOULD** a woman in ministry look like? Oftentimes, if we are not behind a pulpit, people simply cannot believe that we are women who have experienced a calling to become set-apart ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in whatever capacity that may be. So **Get Your Stole On!** in March. When people ask, tell them who you are and whom you serve. Invite them to support you and your sisters in Christ by giving toward



March On! (www.MarchOnABWIM.org and click on "donate"). Share your story and share the light of the Gospel Truth. **Get Your Stole On!**



An American Baptist Biennial Gathering
Overland Park/Kansas City, June 21–23
www.americanbaptists2013.org

Help represent ABWIM's presence at the Biennial/Mission Summit in Overland Park, Kansas City this June 21-23!

Join us for the ABWIM "After Party" Event on Friday night for an evening of delicious food, celebration, and connecting with other Women in Ministry. Sign up when you register for the Biennial/Mission Summit.

<http://www.americanbaptists2013.com/>

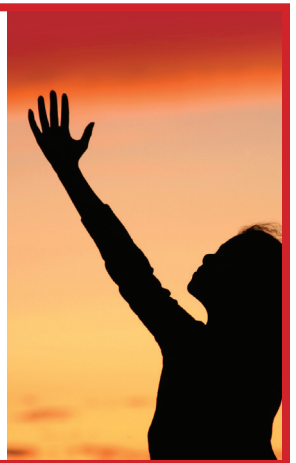
Be sure to stop by our exhibit booth to learn more about ABWIM and how we can grow to support you and your ministry.

See you in Overland Park!

NEW RESOURCE FOR AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

ABWIM is pleased to announce the release of a new resource, **"Responding to God's Call: Freedom for Baptist Women"** which will be available at the upcoming Mission Summit. Dr. Molly T. Marshall has been a long-time friend, colleague, mentor and advocate for many women in ministry. In this resource she brings together her passion for theological vocation with her ardent desire that all may freely follow God's call. "My approach in this brief brochure is to offer a theology of humanity that celebrates equality and a theology of vocation that is inclusive of male and female. It is my hope that this theological reflection will assist congregations and individuals in responding to God's call."

Be sure to stop by the ABWIM table in the exhibit area at the Mission Summit to see this and other resources.



AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA



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Women in Ministry

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The ABCUSA Office of Women in Ministry seeks to educate, advocate, support and celebrate, on behalf of the women serving in American Baptist professional church leadership. Education furthers a better understanding of theological and biblical material supporting women in leadership roles in the church, as well as the many ways women have given leadership to the church throughout history. Advocacy seeks equal access for women to positions of church leadership in the search and call process. Support for women ministering in—and seeking—leadership positions encourages and empowers them. Celebrating the gifts of women in ministry encourages greater appreciation of those gifts within church life which, in turn, strengthens the witness of the church as a whole.

WOMENWORD

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