



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

A Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 25 ~ October 5, 2006

From the Executive Director

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I met Rev. Diane Hooge in August, 2005, at the meeting of the Welcoming Church Program Leaders (WCPL), where Diane was serving as AWAB's representative to the WCPL. I was struck initially by her stature, poise, composure and wisdom. Later, I was tickled to see her whiz out of the parking lot driving her sporty red Miata! The next day, over lunch, Diane described to me her sense of joy and privilege working as pastor of Judson Memorial Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, a welcoming and affirming congregation with a wide diversity of people and ministries.

Jump ahead one year. Diane and I recently reconnected over breakfast at a retro diner in St. Paul, MN. Diane shared with me:

- *Her training through Parker Palmer in creating "Circles of Trust."*
- Judson's engagement with the community through Art Sunday, annual Street Festival, and "My Green Eyes," a rock opera written by Randy Baker and Doug Weatherhead and directed by Pam Joern, all members of Judson. Judson presented "My Green Eyes," a take-off on the parable of the Prodigal Son, three nights in a row to a packed house. "It was great..." exclaimed Diane. "...people using their gifts and talents in ministry, totally free to be themselves – gay, straight, whomever! I celebrate that people are coming to Judson because it's a safe place!"
- Her thoughts about Judson and University Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN (W&A), finding a new regional home in Rochester-Genesee Region of the ABC/USA.* "For six years I've had to brace myself before regional gatherings because of the struggle to be freely who we've been called to be. It finally reached a point where if we had stayed in the region, Judson would be compromising its soul. It is such a relief to be part of a new region which honors our Baptist principles and where we experience being welcomed and supported. We have finally found a place of belonging!"
- Her energy for the Welcoming & Affirming Movement. "I'm always looking for 'the energy.' I found it in the W&A Movement - last night's installation service for Rebecca Voelkel, for instance.** Being a part of the W&A Movement has been life giving! Sitting with others and discussing our theology and practices of inclusion have gotten me out of the rut that one often experiences when the region of one's own denomination is not supportive. I'm looking forward to a visit with First Baptist Church, Seattle (W&A). They've invited me back to do something on hospitality."
- Her vision for AWAB. "I'd love for AWAB to focus on what really helps the local church, to focus on the functional theology of living together. How can AWAB churches build infrastructure to expand ministries of inclusion? How can AWAB churches discover and use inclusive curricula for children and youth? How can AWAB churches create more inclusive liturgies? Can AWAB help me with tools to re-think how I might create ritual in worship such as the infant dedication of a lesbian couple?"

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About Associational

Associational is published monthly by the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, an organization of churches, groups and individuals that advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons with Baptist churches.

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I'm wondering if we could poll AWAB clergy to see if they would be interested in staying on for two days after the biennial so that we can really listen to one another answer questions like 'What are we learning in the W&A Movement?' 'What are we collectively seeking?' 'How is the Spirit moving in our communities?' 'What's energizing to us that might be shared with the larger Movement?' 'Might something new emerge from our time together?'

I also think it would be important for us to visualize timelines of major development in AWAB and in American society to help envision the future."

I was extraordinarily energized and invigorated by my conversations with Diane! *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another* (Prov. 27:17). May we continue to expand ministries of inclusion for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, allied people through our personal life-giving relationships!

**The University Baptist Church and Judson Memorial Baptist Church both of Minneapolis MN were voted into the American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region on June 28, 2006. After years of alienation from their region (Mid-America ABC) and more recent actions by their region to not recognize ordinations from both churches of GLBT clergy, a decision was made to explore the possibility of a new home. Both Metro-Chicago and Rochester Genesee Regions were considered for a potential new home. Both regions were open to receive these congregations.*

***United Church of Christ Minister Rebecca Voelkel was installed as Pastor, Teacher and Leader of the Institute for Welcoming Resources (IWR – www.welcomingresources.org) at a beautiful service of worship titled "Hospitality & Justice – Acts of Resistance in the Time of Fear, on August 22, 2006, at Lyndale United Church of Christ, Minneapolis, MN.*

Lovingly, Rev. Ken Pennings
Executive Director

Powerful Letter from American Baptist Churches of the South – A Must Read!

Friends and Churches of ABCOTS:
September 15, 2006

Our American Baptist family is wonderfully diverse, reflecting the intricate design of our Creator. Part of this diversity is our differing theological understandings. We don't all agree, and we don't have to agree: we are Baptists! Recently American Baptists, like other Christians in the United States, have struggled over finances, structuring, styles, and theology, especially regarding the ministry of the church with homosexual persons. On July 17, 2006 our General Secretary Dr. A. Roy Medley, sent out a "Call for American Baptists to Live Lives of High Moral and Ethical Responsibility" noting the official position of ABCUSA (in a resolution adopted in 1992) that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" while calling all American Baptists to Christ-like compassion and ministry to all persons. This letter has raised concern among those congregations who sincerely dissent from the 1992 resolution with regard to their place in our denomination.

With all due respect to Dr. Medley and our prayers for God's guidance in his leadership through these troubled times, the leaders of the American Baptist Churches of the South wish to reassure all churches, clergy, and congregants of the region of our continuing commitment to historic Baptist biblical principles, including soul freedom and the autonomy of the local church. We respect the spiritual freedom and moral and ethical integrity of our people and not only recognize, but prize the differing views we share as we seek God's truth together on matters that so deeply affect the lives of God's beloved children. We agree with the call to moral and ethical behavior in human sexuality and to compassionate ministry to all persons while recognizing we do not all agree on biblical teachings or Divine will in these matters. Throughout our history God has used conservative voices to preserve the church from error and prophetic voices to move the church past error. Consequently, we believe it is important precisely in the time of controversy not to exclude the voices of either side but to let the debate and spiritual experience of the churches continue as God's Spirit leads us towards the healing truth. On matters where the churches are not in clear agreement and the search for God's will continues, we believe it best to follow the wisdom of Gamaliel in Acts 5: "If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them--

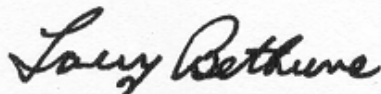
in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" (Acts 5:37-38).

Therefore, we celebrate the diversity God has given our region and call our people to continue this important spiritual journey with mutual respect and humility as we seek God's guidance together and continue our common ministry of the gospel of Christ. And we will not exclude any churches who are loyal members of the ABCOTS family because of their prayerful and principled stands on important matters of our time. We believe in God's good time, the Spirit will bring us clarity on these matters and that in the meantime God longs for us to remain in loving relationship as brothers and sisters in the American Baptist family.

Prayerfully,



Dr. W. L. Parrish II, Executive Minister



Dr. Larry Bethune, 1st Vice President

AWAB Council Seeking New Member

Article I.

The AWAB Council is seeking someone with interest and gifts in finance to join the Council as the Chair of the Finance Team. The job is not as demanding as it sounds! Please consider this opportunity to join a dynamic, energetic organization that is growing. Email Ken Pennings at ken@wabaptists.org to nominate yourself or another for this exciting position.

AWAB Development Team Seeking New Members

Would you be willing to serve on AWAB's Development Team? C. Burton Bagby, of Houston, TX, has agreed to chair the Development Team. Serving on the Team will require a two-year commitment and participation in monthly meetings by way of conference calls. The team will move in at least three directions: 1) identifying and approaching major donors, 2) providing opportunities for planned giving (estate planning, etc.), and 3) grant-writing to

foundations. Contact Burton at cbbagby@sbcglobal.net or 713-721-0202.

2006 Regional AWAB Gatherings: Expanding the Welcoming Church Movement 12-Stop Tour

- Flyers and Reg. Info at www.wabaptists.org

October 14-15: Northwest Gathering. Hosted by Seattle First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington. Contact Elizabeth Patrick lizpatrick@comcast.net, 206-459-0206 for more information.

October 20-22: Texas AWAB Retreat. Hosted by University Baptist Church, 2130 Guadalupe St., Austin, TX 78705. Contact Bill Cox, (512) 619-4909, bcoxal@yahoo.com.

November 3-5: Philadelphia Area Gathering. Hosted by Drexel Hill Baptist Church, 4400 State Rd., Drexel Hill, PA 19026. Contact Harry Rickards (610) 259-2356, rickardsh@msn.com.

Events Sponsored by AWAB's Partners

Complete calendar of events at: See www.welcomingresources.org (calendar)

October 11...Filmmaker Lina Hoshino and the PANA Institute's project on Civil Liberties and Faith present the premier showing of "In God's House: Asian American Lesbian & Gay Families in the Church" at 7:00 pm in the Chapel Building of Pacific School of Religion (PSR), 1798 Scenic Ave (corner of LeConte Ave), Berkeley, CA 94709. Doors open at 6:30 pm. Parking is available in the PSR lot, on Scenic Ave. near the corner of Virginia St. Reflection, conversation and refreshments to follow the showing. For more information: PANA Institute, 510-849-8244, shcolligan@psr.edu.

October 14-15... A Weekend Retreat with James Alison. Together with the Coalition of Welcoming Congregations, California Central Coast, and the Bay Area Coalition of Welcoming Congregations, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies is pleased to co-sponsor a special retreat weekend with Catholic priest, theologian and writer James Alison, October 14 – 15 on the Pacific School of Religion campus. Attendance is limited for this event and registration is required. For more information, go to www.clgs.org.

October 21-22... Interfaith Conference: *Transforming Faith - A Transgender Witness*, at First United Methodist Church, Corvallis, OR. Sponsored by The Community of Welcoming Congregations and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies. Keynote: Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Plenary Speakers: The Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson, The Rev. Malcolm Himschoot, The Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis. Concert by the gospel choir Transcendence. Contact: The Community of Welcoming Congregations, PO Box 14948, Portland, OR 97293, 503-665-8741, tara@welcomingcongregations.org

November 4...The Bay Area Coalition of Welcoming Congregations announces a weekend workshop from 10:00am to 1:00pm at Fremont United Methodist Church (2950 Washington Boulevard in Fremont, California) entitled **Asian American Allies of LGBT People of Faith**. This workshop will feature the following panelists: Belinda Dronkers-Laureta (API Family Pride); Rev. Nobu Hanaoka (Bethany United Methodist Church, San Francisco); Jeffrey Kuan (Associate Professor of Old Testament, Pacific School of Religion) and Rev. Michael Yoshii (Buena Vista United Methodist Church). To register for this no-cost weekend workshop, please contact Bernie Schlager at (510) 849-8298 or bschlager@clgs.org.

April 27-28, 2007...Revive Us Again! Revival of our Spirit, Revival of our Baptist Principles at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton, Mass. This is a gathering of progressive Baptists from around the country, ready to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are gathering to say that we are Christian, we are Baptist, and we believe our Baptist Principles are foundational to our understanding and

sharing of the Gospel. We are gathering to say that we can be both progressive and evangelical! **Friday, April 27th, 7:00PM:** Healing Service and Worship at First Baptist Church in Newton Centre. A time to acknowledge that we have been hurt, that we have been broken by the divisions in our churches and denomination, and to come together to seek healing from Christ. **Saturday, April 28th, 9AM-9PM:** Bible Study and Discussion Groups on Engaging Scripture and Soul Freedom, Progressive Evangelicals, How to Have Meaningful Dialogue. Evangelism in Progressive Churches, Teaching Baptist Principles to our Children and Youth, Reviving Baptist Principles and Spiritual Life in our Congregations. Afternoon Forum: Update on ABC-USA, and Where Do We Go from Here? A time of reflection and discussion. Closing Revival Worship at First Baptist Church in Newton Centre. We will gather in prayer and praise and celebration as only Baptists do it! There will be limited affordable on-campus rooms available. More information will be made available soon.

Associational is a periodic e-newsletter of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, a network of 67 churches and hundreds of individuals who have joined together to advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within Baptist communities of faith. Please forward this e-newsletter to interested friends. Copy relevant information into your organization's bulletin and newsletter. To subscribe, send an e-mail to subscribe@wabaptists.org with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line. To be removed from this list, send an e-mail to unsubscribe@wabaptists.org with REMOVE in the subject line. To read back issues of Associational, go to: www.wabaptists.org/associational.htm.

To learn more about the Association, go to: www.wabaptists.org.