

January 2022

Email: [Sally@abcgrr.org](mailto:Sally@abcgrr.org) or [Nancy@abcgrr.org](mailto:Nancy@abcgrr.org)

### New Year's Greetings!

As we begin the New Year of 2022, it seems almost unbelievable that we are now entering what would be the third year of a Global Pandemic. The latest "variant" of the Covid-19 virus is called "Omicron." Many people may not realize it, but this is the 15th letter out of 24 of the Greek Alphabet. I want to share a scripture focusing on the first and last letters, "Alpha" and "Omega."

Jesus refers to Himself as the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 22:13 (NKJV). "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

Perhaps we need to be reminded that regardless of what we will face in the upcoming year, Jesus Christ will be there in the beginning AND will be there at the end! Not only will God be at the beginning and end of the year but was also at the beginning of Creation and will also be there when time is complete. All we are facing now may not be understood in totality by any of us, but if we know the "Alpha" and "Omega," we can rest assured God will be exalted!! God is good, all the time!

We continue to appreciate your faithful prayers and support for the ministry within the Great Rivers Region as we forge ahead in faith this year! I pray that our thirst and hunger for the things of God will only intensify as the days, weeks, and months of this New Year come and go.

May God richly bless you this year, and we, here at the GRR, appreciate you very much!

A Word from Rev. Patty K. Bilyeu,

Acting Executive Minister,

*Patty*



Congratulations to Rev. Joe Sanders upon his installation as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Champaign at Savoy. Joe, his wife Brenda, and their children came to FBC this past fall. The GRR is excited to welcome them back home.

†

### **Reminder to our Pastors:**

GRR Listening Clergy Health Webinars: Coming Out of the Rabbit Hole will be Thursday, January 27 at 1:00pm and 6:30 pm led by Dr. Kristina Gutierrez. Choose what time works best for you. Links to the webinars will be forthcoming in your email.



Rob Kirbach



Brian Romanowski

**The Ministry of Staff Relations** is pleased to announce the appointment of Rev. Rob Kirbach and Rev. Dr. Brian Romanowski as Co-Interim Associate Executive Ministers for the Great Rivers Region, ABCUSA. Both positions will be half-time.

Rob currently serves as the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Highland, Illinois, and serves the GRR as the Area Assistant for Area IV. In his role as Co-Interim Associate Executive minister, Rob will serve Areas IV and V plus those churches in Area II that lay west of I-55. An Interim Area Assistant for Area IV will be appointed to replace that portion of Rob's responsibilities.

Brian currently serves as the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Mahomet, Illinois, and has been quite active with disaster relief in The American Baptist Men's ministry. In his role as Co-Interim Associate Executive minister, Brian will serve Areas I and III plus those churches in Area II that lay east of I-55.

†

## Great Rivers Regional Scholarship Programs

These scholarship programs exist in the Great Rivers Region to assist young people who are members in Great Rivers Region American Baptist Churches to secure a college and/or seminary education. Scholarships are for any college student (regardless of major) or seminary students under the Gernenz-Shurtleff/Wilcoxon Scholarship. Ministerial students attending ABC-related schools and seminaries in preparation for ministry can apply for the Harold O. Long Scholarship.

All application information and materials **MUST BE RECEIVED** in the GRR office **by April 1, 2022**. Once this date has passed the scholarships will not be available; please make sure that all documents are postmarked by the deadline above to be accepted.

To receive an application for these scholarships, write to **GRR Scholarships**, P.O. Box 13457, Springfield, IL 62791, or phone 217-726-7366 or email [sally@abcgrr.org](mailto:sally@abcgrr.org) for forms.

## CRI December Update

In 2021, several churches in the Church Revitalization Initiative have made great strides in Revitalization. It has been a real blessing to work with pastors and church leaders who have made a commitment to Revitalization. This past year we have seen churches make bold moves trusting God for the results. Pastors and churches are finding that Revitalization is a process. Or as I like to say, 'it is not a 100-yard dash, it is a marathon for those that understand and see the importance of looking at Revitalization one strategy at a time.' As we look to 2022, I am excited about what God is doing with our pastors and leaders and churches across the Great Rivers Region.

Pastor Dan Dewitt shares this about his church: *In many ways, FBC Rantoul is no longer the exciting, vibrant church it once was. The key leaders realize we need to "do something" soon or natural attrition will take a terrible toll on our church and its ministry. That is why we have chosen to be part of the Church Renewal Initiative. We have a great heritage, but if we do not find a way to revitalize our church, we will not have an exciting future. The Deacons and Deaconesses have been meeting with Wally Holt to study and discuss the book, "For a New Generation" by Lee Kricher. We are committed to trying to find a way to once again be a spiritually healthy, strong church with an active ministry in the community. We need to find a way to reach the "new generation" with the message of God's love. We have not found any quick fixes, but we are being challenged to carefully evaluate what kinds of changes must be made to be a vibrant church once again.*

Please continue to pray for all our pastors and churches in the Great Rivers Region and may God richly bless us as we look with great anticipation to what God has in store for us in 2022.

CRI Coordinator  
Wally Holt

†

## Scholarship Renewal Reminder

This is a reminder that all RENEWAL applications **and all documents** for the 2022-2023 Great Rivers Region Scholarship are due in our office **no later than April 1, 2022**. This deadline is firm.

The mailing address is on the renewal application, or, if you prefer, you may email the application to [sally@abcgrr.org](mailto:sally@abcgrr.org). RENEWAL applications are only for those who have previously applied and been awarded a scholarship from GRR.

# SCHEDULE FOR GRR LISTENING FORUMS

American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region

Part of The Search Process for the Position of Executive Minister of the Region

The Executive Minister Search Committee for GRR has chosen to set up several listening forums across the region, both in-person and via zoom. Hopefully, this will provide enough options, dates, times, and places to make it possible for those who wish to offer input with the committee to do so. Each of the sessions will be facilitated by one or more members of the search committee. The plan calls for a session of about 90 minutes with ample opportunity to have input about your concerns for the region and our new leadership. Below is the list of Listening Forums by date. All sessions are open to anyone in the region. Please plan to attend and share your thoughts.

## LISTENING FORUMS VIA ZOOM

Copy and paste the provided link in your internet search bar or login via Zoom

**Saturday, January 29, 6:00 p.m.** Leaders: Patrick Embley and Carmen Jordan

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85609917941?pwd=TWNSbGsxNmpBYlJEd1ZvUkF2cWxuQT09>

Meeting ID: 856 0991 7941 Passcode: 005899

**Saturday, February 5, 10:00 a.m.** Leaders: Carmen Jordan and Patrick Embley

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85796777006?pwd=SVhCMmlvMGxRMXVBeHdSY1JhQ3gxZz09>

Meeting ID: 857 9677 7006 Passcode: 733209

**Saturday, February 5, 10:00 a.m.** Leaders: Leslie Limbaugh and Noah Porzelius

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86064496137?pwd=SVlreUpkbytFOFNWVZPM2xwSzNJUT09>

Meeting ID: 860 6449 6137 Passcode: 165481 (simultaneous with in-person session)

**Sunday, February 6, 4:00 p.m.** Leaders: Andre Britten and Noah Porzelius

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87335913235?pwd=bUFWNUhBeUgvTlF6bDIhKzJRWVHVSz09>

Meeting ID: 873 3591 3235 Passcode: 327163

## IN-PERSON LISTENING FORUMS

**Saturday, January 29, 2:00 p.m.**, Bloomington, IL

First Baptist Church of Bloomington, 2502 E College Ave, Bloomington, IL

Leaders: Andre Britten and Noah Porzelius

**Sunday, January 30, 2:30 p.m.**, Jacksonville, IL

First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, 1701 Mound Rd, Jacksonville, IL

Leaders: Patrick Embley and Carmen Jordan

**Saturday, February 5, 10:00 a.m.**, St. Louis, MO (simultaneous with zoom session)

Antioch Baptist Church, 2401 Annie Malone Dr, St. Louis, MO

Leaders: Leslie Limbaugh and Noah Porzelius

**Sunday, February 6, 3:00 p.m.**, Dekalb, IL

First Baptist Church of Dekalb, 349 S 3rd St, DeKalb, IL

Leaders: Carmen Jordan and Patrick Embley

**Sunday, February 6, 2:30 p.m.**, Centralia, IL

First Baptist Church of Centralia, 319 E 2nd St, Centralia, IL

Leaders: Leslie Limbaugh and William Mitchell

## **Important Message from the Region:**

The Rivers Biennial Growth Conference will now be held

**October 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022**, in Springfield, IL.

The Ministers Conference will be on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

Further details regarding the conference will be forthcoming.

## **2021 Annual Reports**

**2021 Annual Reports** will soon be mailed to all churches. Please complete the form, make a photocopy for your church records, and return the 2021 report to the American Baptist Great Rivers Region office **by March 31, 2022**.

**PLEASE NOTE: WE WILL NOT BE UTILIZING THE ONLINE OPTION—HARD COPIES ONLY**

**Update/Complete the Following:**

- ***Church Information.*** If there have been any changes to your church contact information, **please make the changes to the form.**
- ***Church Membership and Finances.***
- ***Current Professional Staff (PAID STAFF only).*** Please make changes as needed.

The “**2022 Mission Contact Person Update**” forms will be sent with the annual reports. Please have the person who oversees the monthly missions complete this document.

Thank you for completing these reports in a timely manner. If you have any questions, please call the Region office @ 217.726.7366.