

Our Vision: *Healthy congregations engaged in effective Christian ministry locally and globally*

Our Purpose: To challenge, assist, represent and empower American Baptist congregations in Illinois & Missouri



A WORD FROM OUR REGION EXECUTIVE MINISTER REV. PATTY BILYEU

Are you ready for Christmas? If you are like me, your answer is “not even close!” I have friends who have their Christmas tree up and their whole house decorated before Thanksgiving, or shortly thereafter. Some of them even have all their shopping done and most of the presents wrapped. Not me. Over the next few weeks, I will try to get the boxes and bins unloaded and the decorations up in time. For now, I want to focus my attention on the Season of Advent.

For most Christians, we trudge into December holding the tension of fast-paced Christmas preparations and the liturgical invitation to “wait.” Though the root of the word “Advent” is about a coming, our themes and songs shift us to a slow and labored-holding pattern. We wait for our lives to get easier. We wait for wars to end and violence to cease. We wait for God to make all things right... What if we paused this Advent? Pausing includes making space for intentional and deliberate times for reflection and contemplation.

What if we awaited this Advent? Awaiting is an active form of waiting—holding anticipation and expectation. Instead of stagnant delaying, this involves moving toward what one is hoping for or needs. Awaiting extends its open hands toward the places where we trust God to meet us. During the Season of Advent, we will be examining the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love in most of our churches. We will also be exploring the texts, images, symbols, and stories that this sacred season offers to us—approaching them as doorways into the mystery of the God who comes to dwell among us. May the words and images that emerge in this season offer entryways into the story of the One who came into the midst of darkness to be with us as we cross the threshold into Advent. I invite you to ask yourself these questions: What do you need to carry with you? What do

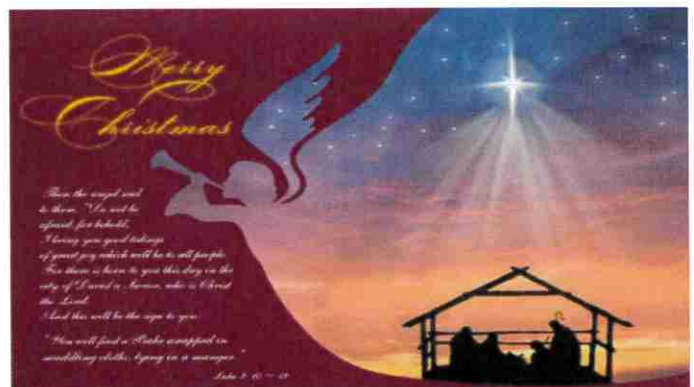
you need to let go of—so that you can receive what lies ahead?

I strongly encourage you to be a part of Advent celebrations so that you can prepare your minds and hearts for the coming of the Christ Child. Attend worship, look at the lights, sing carols, drive through a living nativity, and bask in the moments. May you experience the fullness of God’s love during this special season and always.

Blessings and Peace, Patty



Your GRR Staff (missing Wally!) Wish You a Very Merry Christmas! At the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum on December 5th.



Church Revitalization Initiative

I am so blessed to be working with pastors and leaders across the Great Rivers. I see many pastors and church leaders who have made a commitment to church Revitalization, which is no easy task.

The Bible says in Numbers 13:22-23 (NLT) ²³ When they came to the valley of Eshcol, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes so large that it took two of them to carry it on a pole between them! They also brought back samples of the pomegranates and figs. Did you realize that Moses sent a 12-member team of spies into the promised land? That team of men spent 40 days in the Promised Land and saw some pretty amazing things. Everything they saw was "giant-this and "giant that." The Bible tells us that they brought back a cluster of grapes that was so large that it took two men to carry it on a pole between them. These grapes were an example of the giant size faith that Joshua and Caleb displayed. In his book called the *Honey Word Bible*, Emmett Cooper said: Their faith in God stayed strong and fresh like a juicy grape, while the hearts of their spy buddies shriveled up like dried grapes, otherwise known as raisins. If you are not trusting God for something right now, your faith might be close to getting "raisin sized. We must not allow this to happen to us. We must ask God to help us keep our faith in "grape shape"! So, the next time you pop a grape in your mouth may your spiritual juices be flowing.

Please continue to pray for our CRI pastors and their church leaders as move their churches through Revitalization.

Wally Holt
Church Revitalization Coordinator

†
*** Mainstream and All GRR contact**
beginning in 2024 *

Please make sure the Region office has all updated email contact information for pastors and church leaders. Beginning in January 2024, no hard copies of the Mainstream will be mailed. **All** GRR office correspondence will come through email. Thank you for your help!

†
For those planning to join the Costa Rica Trip in February 2024! It is taking months for passport renewals to be processed. Send renewal applications ASAP.

The Mainstream is a monthly publication of the American Baptist Churches of Website www.abcgrr.org. To subscribe/unsubscribe to The Mainstream



SAVE THE DATE
GREAT LAKES LEADERSHIP
Retreat
April 23-25, 2024
Cedar Lake Ministries
Cedar Lake, Indiana
A Ministry of the Church Renewal
Ministry Training by Fresh Expression Ministries
American Baptist FRESH EXPRESSIONS

Time now to register for the Great Lakes Leadership Retreat at www.abc-mi.org/greatlakesleadershipretreat

†



Congratulations to FBC, Macomb on the installation of their new pastor, Rev. Jon Lobos!

†

UPCOMING EVENTS!

SKWIM 2024!!! Save the Date!
January 12-15, Green Lake Wisconsin!

Great Lakes Leadership Retreat!!!
April 23-25 -- Register Now!

the Great Rivers Region, P.O. Box13457, Springfield IL 62791. Phone:(217)726-7366 please send an email to sally@abcgrr.org Phone:(217)726-7366