

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 THE
ASSOCIATE
EXECUTIVE MINISTER,
REV. ROB KIRBACH**

Increasingly, my extended family are moving to Florida. It began during my childhood with my grandparents and my grandpa's siblings wintering in the Sunshine State -- something my parents are now also doing in their retirement. Then, one-by-one, aunts, uncles, and cousins started buying homes in and around Bradenton and St. Petersburg.

The weather in Florida is quite a bit different than in Greene County, IL, where the roots of my family tree were transplanted from Luxembourg four generations ago. One of my cousins who recently made the move to Florida admits she does miss the changing of the seasons. There is something undeniably special about the rhythm of the year marked by the changes in seasonal climate.

Ministry is also measured in seasons. Seasons of growth, seasons of decline, seasons of challenge, seasons of rebuilding and revitalization, seasons of celebration, seasons of reflection... you get the idea.

Sometimes a church responds to a new season of ministry with great anticipation and excitement. Such is generally the case when a congregation calls a new pastor. Other times seasonal changes trigger feelings of anxiety and fear. And many times, drawing from our natural desire for consistency, congregations find themselves resistant altogether to seasonal changes in ministry.

No matter the current season of your congregation's ministry, the GRR staff are delighted to accompany you on your journey. Ecclesiastes 3 tells us there is a season for everything under the sun. And it is our goal as a region staff to be a resource and partner for your congregation through all its seasons too. We celebrate with you, we pray for you, we grieve alongside you, we help guide you through seasonal transitions, and we delight in partnering with you to support, challenge, and encourage you in all the seasons of your ministry.



Area V Assistant, Rev. Dr. Delano Benson, preaches the evening message at the ABMen's Annual Gathering in Edwardsville on August 4

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**** Mainstream for 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.

Church Revitalization Initiative Report

July 2023

In the book, *Daybreak with God*, we find these thoughts: *It is easier to thank the Lord after we have seen His work. We have something to go back to and rejoice over. It is not as easy to be thankful for what we do not see or haven't experienced. God wants our thanks, and He has provided us with a never-ending supply of reminders of why we should be grateful to Him. Starting the day off with an attitude of gratefulness leaves little room for complaints and much room for grace to flourish.* How have you been starting your day?

Pastor Clark Irwin, FBC Carthage, shares about a special event at his church: "We hosted and participated in an incredible "back to school" event for K-8th graders in our school district. Driven by a local Kiwanis club, kids were able to walk away with an armload of goodies. How much? About \$11,000 worth of supplies had been collected from the library, banks, all the churches in town and individual donations. 81 kids each received a pair of new shoes, a backpack, 2 pairs of pants, 2 shirts and every kind of school supply imaginable. The teachers from 3 area schools supplied us with a list of needed items. About 40 volunteers worked roughly 6 hours on the day of distribution: not counting the week before setting up our gym making it a mini mall. We had 5 dressing rooms so the kids could make sure everything was perfect! Each child was also given a certificate for a free haircut. The volunteers walked the kids around, so they got to pick out their clothes and supplies. We had a guest room for the parents to enjoy donuts and coffee while the kids loaded up on free stuff! Our own chief of police purchased pizzas for the volunteer's lunch.

There was a pre-registration process, so we knew what sizes we needed. This is our 6th year of participating in/hosting this event, and it gets bigger every year!" If you have any questions or want more details about hosting an event like this, feel free to email Clark at cwirwin63@gmail.com

Wally Holt,
Church Revitalization Initiative Coordinator
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American Baptist History & Polity Course is August 18-19! See abcgrr.org for registration information.

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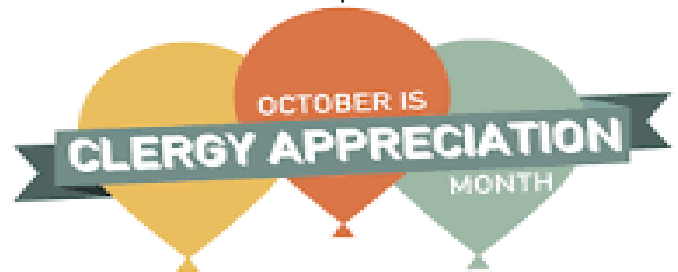
For those planning to join the Costa Rica Trip in February 2024! It is taking months for passport renewals to be processed. Send renewal applications ASAP.

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



Steve Willis is retiring this month after a remarkable 40 years of pastoral ministry at First Baptist Church of Newton, IL!!!

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UPCOMING EVENTS!

- **Area I Annual Meeting** is Sat., Sept. 23 9:30-3 at Blackhawk Camp
- **Area I Youth Retreat** is at Blackhawk Sept.29–Oct.1
- **Patty Bilyeu's Installation** will be Oct. 14th!
- **ABY The Gathering** will be Nov. 10-12th!

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