

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 EXECUTIVE MINISTER, REV. PATTY BILYEU

When I went to seminary in the early 90s, it seemed that there was a running commentary from professors that there would be a clergy shortage in my lifetime. I was in my early 20s, not overly concerned about this, and I was so excited that God had called me to serve in the ministry. Fast forward to my work over the past several years in regional ministry, I have become increasingly concerned about the rising clergy shortage. The reasoning back in the 90s for the impending shortage was that Baby Boomers would all reach retirement age around the same time. While this is the case, we are also seeing pastors “jump ship.” Currently, across Protestantism, there are 3 open pulpits for every 1 pastor! We see this in the ABC and the Great Rivers Region.

Though there isn't an official national registry for all clergy in America, an October study from the Barna Group found that 38 percent of pastors were at least considering leaving the full-time ministry. Worryingly, the concern is even higher among Millennial pastors, 50 percent of whom were considering quitting. Among the reasons for leaving, clergy members claim that the job, which has always been demanding, grew to be unbearable during the pandemic. Relationships were frayed due to deepening political divisions within the Church and the fight over social distancing protocols, which led to pastors struggling to keep themselves and their churches above water. Those parishioners who left during the pandemic will not be returning. We continue to deal with this impact on the everyday life of local churches.

Where does this take us for 2023? First, love your pastor. Pastors never studied Pandemic 101 in seminary. Each pastor has tried to be creative in reaching people for Jesus Christ. The church is so

“Old” or what seemed “common” ways of reaching people in the past, do not work anymore. Second, encourage your pastor. Go to lunch with your pastor. Send a text or email with a prayer or kind word. Recognize the hard efforts your pastor puts into connecting with the congregation and the community. Third, listen to your pastor. Most pastors currently serving are reading every document possible on the post-pandemic church. That means things are going to change to meet the needs of a fast-changing world. Fourth, recognize those in the congregation that have gifts for ministry. Seminaries still depend on the local church to “call out” and send those whom God has called for pastoral ministry. Ultimately, we still have the BEST message to share...the love of God that brought us salvation through Jesus Christ! Partner with your pastor in this NEW DAY to lead others to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ!

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## Church Revitalization Initiative Report

### January 2023

It is hard to believe that 2022 is now in our rearview mirror. In 2022 God was alive and well, blessing our churches and pastors. Many pastors and churches have been moving forward carefully as they follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their Revitalization commitment. In a January 3<sup>rd</sup> article written by Max Lucado called *Ponder the Power* he says: *“Despair can be a dangerous season. But it can also be a developing time, a time in which we learn to trust God, to lean into his Word and rely on his ways. The choice is ours. And to help us choose the wise path, God gave the story of Esther. For fear of the death of his people, Mordecai cries out to Esther to intervene. He said, “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place...who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”* (Esther 4:14). There are many pastors and congregations in CRI churches that God is singling out as he did Esther - that they have been put in this place for such a time as this! My encouragement is to allow God to unleash the power within you to face it. Shift your focus away from the challenges and ponder the power of your almighty God!

Here is an excellence example of God at work in a CRI church:

Pastor Rob Collins from FBC Peoria has this to say about where his church is in the Revitalization process: “A New Year is in front of us, and we are very thankful to be working with the Church Revitalization Initiative as this year begins. CRI has not solved all our problems, but it has provided input, reflection, counsel, and support as First Baptist of Peoria continues the work of ministry in our city. We are working to adapt our goals to the new obstacles that have arisen just as we give thanks for the victories already won. Our work with CRI has focused primarily on rethinking the way we approach child and youth-aged ministries. We are no longer large enough to support a programming approach, just as well in the vastly changing world; perhaps a new approach is exactly what is needed. At least that is where our prayers have led us. As it is the season for resolutions, we make this one: First Baptist will strive to listen for God’s guidance, lean on our ABC community, embrace our CRI network, and be open to wherever God may be leading us. Blessings everyone and happy new year!”

I am excited about what is taking place in our CRI churches. We need to continue to raise up these pastors and churches in prayer as they continue in CRI in 2023.

Wally Holt  
CRI Coordinator

It is 2023! And both Scholarships and Grants will soon be available on our website.

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Rev. Susana Manso was installed as pastor of the Primera Iglesia Bautista, Elgin on Sunday evening, January 8. GRR Staff Bill Steger, Brian Romanowski, Rob Kirbach, and Patty Bilyeu participated in this joyful celebration! Best wishes to Susana and the congregation for many years of fruitful ministry!

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**ReSource Leadership Conference May 18-19.** Go to <https://www.resourcelc.org/> for registration and hotel information.

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### Where is the Exec?

- 1/1 FBC, Jerseyville (Preaching)
- 1/8 FBC, Stonington/Old Stonington Baptist Church (Preaching)
- Primera Iglesia Bautista, Elgin (Pastor Installation)
- 1/15 FBC, Elgin (Preaching)
- 1/22 Bethel, Caseyville (Preaching)
- 1/29 FBC, Savoy (Visit)
- 2/6-2/11 Leadership Training, Boston