

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

We are American Baptists!

I have been American Baptist my entire life. I was born on a Monday and my parents handed me over to two wonderful ladies in the church nursery of the First Baptist Church in Toledo, Ohio the following Sunday. Being blessed with a Christian home and dedicated Baptist parents, it was always impressed upon me of why we worshipped a certain way. Even after attending an ABC seminary, I still need to remind myself of our ABC History and Polity of why we share Jesus as we do.

There are over a million members of some 5,500 American Baptist Churches. In 1638, radical Roger Williams established the First Baptist Church in America in Rhode Island. Having fear of being just like the Church of England, Williams founded the ABC on the guarantee of absolute religious freedom. With that being said, here are 10 Important Facts about Being ABC that have been written by the Office of the General Secretary for ABC/USA.

1. American Baptists believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and that Bible is the divinely inspired word of God that serves as the final written authority for living out the Christian faith.
2. The local church is the fundamental unit of mission in denominational life.
3. American Baptists partake of two ordinances (commands from Christ): believers' baptism with full immersion of those who are spiritually mature and The Lord's Supper which is the sharing of bread and juice to symbolize Christ's broken body and shed blood for our sin.

5. American Baptists take seriously the call to evangelism and missionary work across the USA and around the world.
6. We support religious freedom and respect the expressions of faith of others. This includes the separation of church and state and advocating for people everywhere to be guaranteed the right to worship free from discrimination.
7. American Baptists acknowledge that God's family extends beyond our local churches and that God calls us to cooperative ministries. We find ways to work ecumenically and worldwide.
8. We have been called to be Christ's witnesses for peace, justice, and wholeness within a broken society.
9. American Baptists celebrates the racial, cultural, and theological diversity witnessed by its membership. This makes us stronger by focusing on the unity that comes in Jesus Christ.
10. We heed the Biblical call for renewal and to be a vital witness. While we are informed by history and tradition, we realize God leads and transforms us to meet the challenges of a changing world.



April is the special emphasis for the **America For Christ Offering**. Your gifts to AFC support the Great Rivers Region, churches, and community organizations across the US and Puerto Rico. It also provides grants and training for Chaplains, aid for children in poverty, helps create

4. We believe that committed individual Christians can and should approach God directly and that individual gifts of ministry should be shared. innovative ministries to develop church leaders, and promotes discipleship.

## Church Revitalization Initiative Report

### February 2023

This month I found an interesting article in our Daily Bread. I thought I would share with you. *Jack knew how to put trains on the right track. In nine years of work he never missed a track switch as locomotives drew near the Uitenhage, South Africa, station, indicating by their whistles the direction they were to go.*

*Jack was also a chacma baboon. He was cared for by railway signalman James Wide, and Jack in turn took care of James. Wide had lost both his legs in a fall between moving rail cars. He trained Jack to help him with tasks around the house and soon Jack assisted him at work also, learning how to respond to the incoming trains' signals by pulling corresponding levers for their tracks.*

*The Bible tells of another animal that helped someone in a surprising way—Balaam's donkey. Balaam was a pagan prophet serving a king who intended to harm Israel. As Balaam was riding his donkey in route to assist the king, "the Lord opened the donkey's mouth" and it spoke to Balaam ([Numbers 22:28](#)). The donkey's speech was part of the way God opened "Balaam's eyes" (v. 31), warned him of imminent danger, and kept him from harming His people.*

*A railway baboon? A talking donkey? Why not? If God can use these amazing animals for good purposes, it is not at all far-fetched to believe He can use you and me as well. Looking to Him and seeking His strength, we can accomplish more than we ever thought possible. Here is a great example of this in one of our CRI churches:*

*Participating in the Great Rivers Region's Church Revitalization Initiative has been inspirational on many levels. One of the things I, and our church, have been doing as a result is intentionally praying for evangelism and spiritual growth, both individually and collectively.*

*We are seeing God answer our prayers, as disciples are learning to walk more closely with the Holy Spirit, and seekers are increasingly being called to our services and fellowship events. Our church is experiencing growth in non-student, older adult participation which, being a campus church, has often been a challenge for us in the past. People also tell us that, by emphasizing prayer and Bible preaching and teaching, we are gaining a reputation that is attractive in our community. We give credit to God for all of this, as CRI has reminded us that, by focusing on Christ and inviting him to lead us, God gives new birth and eternal life to those he calls. It's an exciting time of unity, love, and energy. Thank God for his movement in ABC-GRR and CRI!*

*Pastor Brett Smith  
University Baptist Church, Champaign*

Please continue to pray for our pastors and churches in the Church Revitalization Initiative that they will follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I want to remind you of the June 10<sup>th</sup> CRI pastors retreat at FBC Peoria.

Wally Holt, CRI Coordinator

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

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**Annual Reports** from Churches are due in the office by March 30<sup>th</sup>! An updated directory will be produced when the updated information is received. We will also update the GRR and the ABCUSA systems.

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Pastor Joe Sanders, wife Brenda and their 3 children at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum on March 10<sup>th</sup>!

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Pastor Joe Sanders' ordination at FBC Savoy!

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### **ABCGRR Area II Gathering 2023**

On a Mission of Love, March 19, 2023 – 2:15 pm, First Baptist Church, 1701 Mound, Jacksonville, IL 62650

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**ReSource Leadership Conference** May 18-19. Go to <https://www.resourcelc.org/> for registration and hotel information. First Baptist Church, 1602 S. Prospect Ave., Savoy, IL 61874

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