“Love the Hell Out of ‘Em”

I continue to be energized by the commitment, creativity, and care of our larger-AWAB family. Thank you to our member congregations, ministries, and individuals who support the ministry AWAB has been and will continue to be about.

As you read through this issue of Welcoming Spirit, I trust you will sense with me the incredible collective welcoming and affirming work we engage together. Of late, I’ve been living with the thought expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “We’ve got to love the hell out of people.”

Having once been accused of not giving folk enough “hell” in my sermons, I know in truth that humanity always needs more love. Loving the “hell” away from people is what I think Jesus did and it seems to me fitting for us to do likewise.

AWAB stands on the side of love. May we keep at this together, always.

Rev. Brian Henderson, DMin
National Coordinator
brian@awab.org
Are We There Yet?

If you did not have an opportunity to join the recent online service recognizing the 25th anniversary of ABC Regions’ dis-fellowshipping five welcoming and affirming American Baptist churches, you can still watch it on our AWAB website. While it recalled past pain for many in the LGBTQ+ community, it also called each of us to again take stock of what has and has not changed since those events. For the most part, those five churches have found more sympathetic affiliations and are thriving today. Certainly we, as AWAB, find ourselves operating more in the mainstream of the Baptist denominations whose churches we represent. We are “in the room” at denominational annual meetings and other gatherings. This did not happen by accident, but rather through the constant, passionate and committed work of hundreds, probably thousands, of individuals during these past years. We are grateful for this progress.

At the same time, our nation has witnessed the continuing struggle for equal rights that our African-American brothers and sisters have been fighting and enduring for over 400 years. Anti-discrimination laws have been passed, we have African-American Senators and Congresspersons, and have had a black President in the White House. These brothers and sisters are “in the room” as well. For that progress we are also grateful. But…

A wise professor I had in school once said that you cannot legislate morality. You can pass laws that block certain actions, but that will not change hearts and minds. Was he correct? The sobering events of the past four years have shown that there are many hearts and minds that have not been changed by that legislation and new social awareness. It also appears that the coming four years may bring a more hopeful expectation for real equality for those living in our country. What I do believe is this. Whatever progress has been made toward more racial and LGBTQ+ equality can only continue through the constant efforts of people with love in their hearts who are willing to devote their time, energy and talent to making God’s world a place where all feel valued and treasured for who they are.

Friends, I think you know the answer to “Are We There Yet?” Blessings to you as we work together to change that answer to “Yes!”
UPDATE ON THE AWAB HISTORY PROJECT

Did you know that in 2023 we will be celebrating 50 years of combined ministry between American Baptists Concerned and the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists? To mark this pivotal point in our history, AWAB has commissioned Dr. Delane Tew (member of AWAB congregation, Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, AL) to write our story. Throughout 2023, we will celebrate this half-century milestone. More about this to come. For now, here’s a report from Dr. Tew:

I was able to conduct a significant amount of research during December and January while I was out of school. I took a three-day trip to Atlanta to the American Baptist Historical Society. There I was able to find communications between ABConcerned and AWAB leaders and the leadership of the ABC/USA. Also, correspondence among other ABC leadership. These offered another prospective on the issues facing the LGBTQ+ community. I plan another trip in March. I have also spoken with and emailed several past AWAB leaders and received material that they had. Speaking with church leaders from various welcoming and affirming churches has also been a rewarding activity. I have received published histories and printed Task Force reports from several congregations.

A scan of both denominational and secular press proved fruitful. I continue to expand my knowledge of the overall LGBTQ+ movement in America to show the context in which ABConcerned and AWAB began and grew. Let me again ask if you have any past records, hard copies or electronic files, it would be very helpful if you could send those to Janet Cole or to me. These could be correspondence, newsletters, meeting notes, retreat programs, church policy statements, etc. Also, consider writing down your experiences in the welcoming and affirming movement and sending those to me. Thank you in advance for your contributions. Dr. Delane Tew may be reached at delanetew@gmail.com; Janet Cole may be reached at janet@awab.org.

With Appreciation for Reba Cobb

The AWAB Board wishes to thank Reba Cobb (Louisville, KY) for her years of service as AWAB’s Board Treasurer. Under Reba’s leadership, AWAB’s finances are in good order and the organization is poised for expanding its ministry in the coming years. Reba will continue on the AWAB Board for another term. We are glad to welcome Board Member Dave Hunt (Milwaukie, OR) as AWAB’s Board Treasurer.
Thank You For Your Support

By Dave Hunt, Board Treasurer

Thank you so much for supporting AWAB. Your generous partnership enables us to love, include, and affirm LGBTQ+ folk as relentlessly and unconditionally as God loves us. We take seriously the charge to be faithful and frugal stewards of the resources with which God and you have entrusted us, which has been capably demonstrated by the long service of our outgoing AWAB Board Treasurer, Reba Cobb.

Please let us know how AWAB can help you and your congregation promote understanding and acceptance in your community and better connect with other welcoming and affirming Baptist churches. AWAB couldn’t do our work without you. Thank you for your partnership in growing this ministry and movement.

2020 AWAB Grants

In the second half of last year, AWAB’s Board reallocated part of its 2020 Budget to provide $500 grants to member congregations as they had need. These grants assisted with basic monthly bills as well as ministry outreach projects. In total, AWAB awarded 8 grants. The United Church of Granville in Granville Ohio, has provided us pictures showing how its grant supported the congregation's Safe Youth Gathering and monthly lunches on the Square program.
Reflections on W&A Ministry

By Tim Schaefer

I was a teenager when I first experienced God's call on my life to pursue ministry. Growing up as a pastor's kid, I was certainly aware of the challenges and frustrations that come with the job. But I also had the privilege of seeing the positive impact my dad's ministry had on people's lives. I realized at an early age that at its best, the Church can bring liberation and hope to marginalized and oppressed communities.

More than anything, this was the work I wanted to do, but my hopes and dreams to pursue ordained ministry and undertake the work of justice came to a crashing halt when I came out as gay. It was the late 1990's, and few (if any) denominations were ordaining openly gay clergy or allowing them to serve as pastors. Recognizing the many hurdles that stood in my way I reluctantly ignored God's call and followed a different path.

Nearly two decades passed before those feelings resurfaced. Once again, I experienced that call from God, and the timing felt right. More and more churches were opening up their doors and inviting their queer siblings to participate more fully in their congregational life. The path to ordination for openly gay people was still difficult but no longer seemed impossible.

None of this would have been possible without decades of justice and advocacy work by organizations like AWAB and their congregational partners. You did this. Your work paved the way for queer clergy to seek ordination and serve congregations without hiding our identities or compromising our values. I give thanks for AWAB congregations like Royal Lane Baptist Church, who ordained me and prepared me for ministry; and First Baptist Church of Madison, who called me to serve as their pastor.

Continued, next page
Reflections on W&A Ministry, continued

This is an exciting time to serve as pastor of a welcoming and affirming Baptist church. Together, we are breaking barriers and building a more inclusive Church. And even though our work is not yet finished, we should take a moment to celebrate these milestones.

But we must also acknowledge the challenges we face. The threads of discrimination and oppression are woven into the tapestries of our nation; they are deeply embedded in our institutions. Too often, we believe we have “arrived” at full inclusion when we hit key milestones, but there is still more to be done. As justice-seeking congregations, we must always be on the lookout for those policies and practices that center heteronormativity. As queer-affirming congregations, we must also recognize that oppression is intersectional. We must understand the exponential harm experienced by queer members of the BIPOC community. Full inclusion of queer people must involve the work of anti-racism.

This is my challenge to us all as we continue our justice work. Together, let’s celebrate our milestones and successes. Together, let us also recommit ourselves to the goal of full inclusion, recognizing that there is still much work to be done.

Rev. Tim Schaefer serves as Senior Pastor for First Baptist Church of Madison, WI. He is the congregation’s first openly gay Senior Pastor. FBC has been a member of AWAB since 1994.

Latest W&A Resource Available

AWAB is pleased to promote a recent publication by long-time AWAB supporter, the Rev. Dr. Bill Stayton. Kathy Stayton, the woman to whom Bill is married, is a former AWAB Board member.

Brian Henderson, AWAB National Coordinator, writes, “Sinless Sex: A Challenge to Religions is a helpful resource for anyone interested in understanding, exploring, and celebrating the complexities and beauty of human sexuality and gender identity. If ever there was someone to offer insight and wisdom into what can often be taboo subjects, Dr. Stayton speaks with pastoral and professional care. This is a must read for us all.”
25th Anniversary Commemoration

To commemorate the 25th Anniversary of five ABC Congregations disfellowshipped by their regions (Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of Berkley, San Leandro Community Church, New Community of Faith, United Church of Granville) AWAB members and friends gathered via Zoom on Wednesday, January 27, to celebrate the past, present and history of our W&A movement. Over 100 people participated. Many thanks to Jim Hopkins, Nancy Hall, Rick Mixon, and Brian Henderson for organizing the event with the support of many AWAB members and friends.

For this commemoration, Rev. Dr. Dale Edmonson wrote a new hymn, “Affirmed By Our Maker.” (See following page.)


This event also was reported on by Baptist News Global. To read this story visit: http://bit.ly/BNG-25years

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Equality Act Faith Endorsements 2021

Despite significant steps forward, LGBTQ+ Americans lack basic legal protections in states across the country. The patchwork nature of current laws leaves millions of people subject to uncertainty and potential discrimination that impacts their safety, their families, and their day-to-day lives.

Our nation’s civil rights laws protect people on the basis of race, color, national origin, and in most cases, sex, disability, and religion. But federal law does not provide consistent nondiscrimination protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Equality Act would provide consistent and explicit nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people across key areas of life, including employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service. Additionally, the Equality Act would update the public spaces and services covered in current law to include retail stores, services like banks and legal services, and transportation services. These important updates would strengthen existing protections for everyone.

The Faith for Equality coalition mobilizes religious organizations, leaders, and activists to secure passage of this landmark civil rights bill. To add your congregation/ministry’s name to this endorsement list please visit: http://bit.ly/AWAB-Equality

By decision of the Board, AWAB is endorsing the Equality Act.
Affirmed by our Maker

© Dale Edmondson, 2020

FOUNDATION, early American melody

1. Affirmed by our Maker, we come without fear,
   for Jesus invites us to find welcome here
   who told of God’s justice and peace that will last.

2. When churches condemn us and parents cast out,
   we cling to the good news: God’s love conquers doubt.
   forgiveness is known, and our praises resound.

3. The way of our Maker we now celebrate,
   with welcome and blessing to banish the hate.
   is woven of people no longer afraid.

as part of a stream of great prophets long past,
We come to the table where friendship is found,
The many-hued fabric God’s wisdom has made

(coded by m. Theo · engraved 2021-02-05 by Lilypond version 2.22.0)
AWAB Membership

Membership in AWAB allows your congregation: (1) to be part of an association of Baptist communities that publicly commit to being welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ members and friends; (2) to keep informed of how other W&A congregations are engaging in meaningful ministry; (3) access to resources to enhance your local W&A ministry; and (4) opportunity to search for LGBTQ candidates for ministerial positions.

“AWAB has faithfully provided the church with wonderful educational and welcoming resources—all the while, nurturing and growing our vital network of connections.”
—The Rev. Dwight Davidson, United Church of Granville, OH

New Member Churches since 2019:

- Chico First Baptist Church, Chico, CA
- Circle of Faith, St. Petersburg, FL
- First Baptist Church, Greenville, SC
- First Baptist Church, Littleton, MA
- First Baptist Church, Pottstown, PA
- First Baptist Church, Salt Lake City, UT
- Grace Baptist Church, San Jose, CA
- Grace Baptist Church, Statesville, NC
- Grace Baptist Church, Tacoma, WA
- Jacksonville Campus Ministry, Jacksonville, FL
- Pine Street Church, Boulder, CO
- United Campus Ministry, Billings, MT
- University Baptist Church, Charlottesville, VA

Why should my church join?

AWAB offers a support system for your ministry so that you have alliances and connections within the greater Baptist community and are not left feeling isolated. AWAB’s intention is to provide value that addresses your needs as a member church. AWAB provides a voice and image of God’s love that opposes the often exclusive narrative associated with Baptists.

AWAB is led by its Board:

Bob Sittig  
Chair, Seattle, WA

Dave Hunt  
Treasurer, Milwaukie, OR

Sheila Chace  
Secretary, Ithaca, NY

Donnie Anderson  
Providence, RI

Reba Cobb  
Louisville, KY

David Key  
Athens, GA

Rick Mixon, Emeritus  
Palo Alto, CA

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www.awab.org

@affirmingbaptists  
@affirmBaptist
• AWAB offers support during COVID-19—including COVID-19 Support Gatherings via Zoom

• While national gatherings have been moved to online platforms, AWAB staff, Board, and members have been actively present—if you’re connecting with folk via any of these times, please share how AWAB has been meaningful to you

• Does AWAB have your most current information? Please email church and personal contact information updates to janet@awab.org

• Your financial gifts to AWAB help us continue to do together what none of us can do on our own. Thank you for your support. To donate now go to: https://awab.org/support

• If you have any documents, photos, or stories to tell about AWAB’s history, we want to know! Please contact email our National Coordinator, Brian Henderson, at brian@awab.org, or our Administrative Coordinator, Janet Cole, at janet@awab.org.

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