Sharing God’s All-Inclusive Love

These continue to be interesting times filled with challenge for so many. And so, it is such a comfort to be part of our AWAB family. I continue to be encouraged and inspired by the work of those engaged in W&A Baptist ministry throughout the continent. Thank you for the ministry you do on behalf of LGBTQ+ individuals and their families.

As you read through the pages of this newsletter, I trust you’ll sense the energy and enthusiasm that can be felt and experienced even as we face the ongoing cultural, religious, and social obstacles that confront W&A ministry today.

Someone once said, “I hope a day will come when organizations like AWAB will no longer be necessary.” Well, while this is a great aspiration, I believe organizations like AWAB will always be necessary because the all-inclusive love of God will need always to be proclaimed and reaffirmed generation after generation.

Thank you for the ways in which you support the W&A work AWAB is about and thank you too for the many ways you share God’s all-inclusive love with everyone.

We can do more together than any of us can do on our own!

Rev. Brian Henderson, DMin
National Coordinator
brian@awab.org
I am grateful for our National Coordinator, Rev. Brian Henderson, who does a remarkable job of advancing the mission and goals of AWAB. His communication skills and dedication have been essential to the progress we have made in the past several years. In addition to appreciating the efforts that Brian brings, I am also thankful for the active participation of each member of our Board of Directors who brings ideas and actions that serve the AWAB community. We are a diverse group, living in every sector of our country, and representing multiple Baptist denominations. I give thanks for the hard work of these dedicated spirits.

I am pleased to announce that during our February meeting, we welcomed to our board Rev. Clifford Matthews Jr., Senior Pastor of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Those of you who joined us for the AWAB Annual Meeting this past October might be familiar with Rev. Matthews, as he delivered the homily, and the choir from St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church blessed us with wonderful stimulating music. In addition to his eleven years of service at St. Luke, Rev. Matthews is presently serving as a Therapist at Perry Counseling and Healing Recovery in Charlotte. His skills in both church and social work bring useful talents to the AWAB mission. Please join me in welcoming Rev. Matthews to our board.

While the path is not entirely clear, it appears that our nation is heading toward greater opportunities for gathering and togetherness. We here at AWAB are looking forward to those opportunities to visit with you and have in-person events in the coming months that will continue to advance our mission, “The Radical Welcome and Love of God in Jesus Christ through being the Ministry of Reconciliation and building up the Beloved Community where all will be one.”

Thank you for your interest in, and support of AWAB.

Gratefully,

Bob Sittig
AWAB welcomes the Rev. Clifford Matthews, Jr., to its Board of Directors. Rev. Matthews is Senior Pastor of AWAB member congregation, St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC.

Beginning in late August, AWAB will welcome Jordan Conley as its Seminary Intern. Jordan hails from Eastern Kentucky and now lives in Louisville, where he's a Baptist minister, member of AWAB congregation Crescent Hill Baptist Church, a student at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky and a funeral director. Jordan will work closely with the National Coordinator and Board on intentional projects to help expand AWAB’s reach to Baptist congregations around the country.

W&A SWAG AVAILABLE!

As your congregation celebrates pride this year, know that AWAB can provide you W&A swag. Contact Janet Cole, Administrative Coordinator, at admin@awab.org if interested.
AWAB is pleased to offer a 6-week course based on Dr. Stayton’s latest book, *Sinless Sex: A Challenge to Religions*.

Have you ever had a discussion of sex and religion and felt pulled apart internally? Have you ever wondered if you could be sexual and religious at the same time? Have you ever had to choose between your religion and expressing your sexuality?

These are not new questions. Most of them have been asked in one way or another from the beginning of modern religions. It is difficult to be in a conversation about sexuality without religion coming up or in a conversation about religion without sexuality coming up as a topic.

This 6-week course will attempt to address the importance of reconciling these difficult, but important, areas of human experience.

The course will run weekly via Zoom:
Tuesday, June 8, through Tuesday, July 13, 4-5:30 pm PDT.
The course will accommodate up to 20 individuals.


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**About the instructor:**
Bill is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches of the U.S.A. He is also a licensed psychologist and AASECT certified sexuality educator and therapist. He is a retired Professor in the Department of Community Health and Preventive Medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA.
An Unparalleled Force for Change

by Rev. June Joplin
Associate Pastor of Programs and Congregational Care, MCC Toronto

Laverne Cox has said that “It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist.”

I have a complicated relationship with being seen, with being visible.

In the months before I came out last June, some of my trans peers advised me to prepare to spend some time in the spotlight. One friend insisted that my story would be interesting enough to get media coverage. Another suggested that I should be ready to appear on national television—an idea that struck me as ridiculous at the time. Another friend—one whose own coming out had attracted media attention—cautioned me about the importance of saying “no.” Sometimes I wish I had followed her advice more closely.

I’m not the first pastor to come out in mid-career; I’m not even the first trans woman pastor to transition in mid-career. There are other stories out there like mine.

In learning about some of those other stories, a recurring theme I discovered was a lack of visibility. Often, a pastor’s coming out and subsequent termination became behind-the-scenes negotiations. Values like discretion, comfort and safety were prioritized. Rightly or wrongly, visibility was subordinated to so-called proper procedure (something many Baptists idolize).

When it comes to LGBTQ+ inclusion in faith communities, values like discretion, comfort, and proper procedure have been preventing meaningful change for decades.

I felt duty-bound—called, even—to come out in a way that assaulted those values. I wanted to make waves, to disturb just as much as to inspire. Each of these seemingly opposite tasks is part of faithful pastoral ministry.

It wasn’t an easy choice, and it hasn’t always been an easy path. Many of my friends have heard me talk about how I wish my life had more space for “June the person” (who wants to disappear) and less for “Rev. Junia the story” (who feels called to be visible).

Visibility can be complicated; it can be exhausting. Sometimes it feels like a choice; sometimes it doesn’t. Being seen can come with risks, but it can also be an unparalleled force for change.
A GENEROUS GIFT FROM FBC PALO ALTO

Dave Hunt, AWAB Board Treasurer

AWAB celebrates an amazing financial gift from the First Baptist Church of Palo Alto, California. FBC was established in 1893, before Palo Alto was even a city. The members of this congregation long claimed the banner as a progressive American Baptist church with a history of "deeds over creeds." They fought for love, justice, equity, and compassion—and battled against oppression and inequality.

When they decided to sell their church building last year, they generously chose to invest those resources in AWAB and other local, national, and international ministries that carry on their values. AWAB founding member Rick Mixon served as pastor of FBC Palo Alto from 2006 to 2020.

Since this congregation met in a saloon in their early days (legend has it that when the saloon ran out of beer, they would turn water into wine), we raise our glasses today to celebrate over 125 years of the First Baptist Church of Palo Alto’s welcoming and affirming witness which now lives on through their legacy gift to AWAB.

50 Year Anniversary History Project Update

by Delane Tew, PhD

My recent research has been focused on the beginnings of ABConcerned. In 1972-73, Rodger Harrison felt the time was right to begin an organization focusing on the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in the ABC/USA. He had witnessed several developments in the ABC that led him to believe there was a more open atmosphere developing in the denomination. One of these was the Task Force on Alternative Lifestyles. Though this group was not discussing the LGBTQ+ community, it was urging churches to be open to nontraditional families. I found information on this Task Force and on other statements adopted at the biennial meetings that document his ideas. I want to continue to urge you to see what documentation you might have from any of ABConcerned or AWAB history. (Continued, next page)
WHY I GIVE TO AWAB
by Reba Cobb, Board Member

I give to AWAB because it matters.

It matters to churches that are faithfully following Jesus’ model of inclusion for all. AWAB provides member congregations with a vital network of connections, community and solidarity. We support churches with seminars, national gatherings and resources online and in print. AWAB helps member churches to figuratively hold hands as the beloved community.

It matters to LGBTQ+ individuals who are struggling with identity issues or who are discerning their call to ministry. Our online presence can be a lifeline to people feeling isolated and alone. Thirty years ago, if a young person announced their LGBTQ+ status to unaccepting parents, there were few sources of support. No internet resources, no easy way to find a church, few allies. Today AWAB provides all these instruments of help along with a measure of hope.

It matters to society that a Baptist group demonstrates affirmation and support of LGBTQ+ individuals and the churches that welcome and affirm them. Because of the heteronormative nature of our society, our very existence is important and yet we do much more than simply exist. AWAB is a prophetic voice amid the cacophony of negative cries from some Baptists.

It matters to me in living a life of integrity that I support my deeply held values with my money. I hope you will join me by giving an annual donation to AWAB. It matters!

History Project Update, from previous page

Please consider sending material you have to the AWAB office in Louisville or directly to me. It will be saved in a permanent archive for future generations to see.

Also, if you have pictures from ABConcerned or AWAB events over the years please share them with us too. Archival items can be sent electronically to admin@awab.org or to delanetew@gmail.com. Materials can also be sent to AWAB’s mailing address: AWAB, PO Box 7834, Louisville, KY, 40257. Thank you in advance!

In 2022, AWAB will celebrate with a published book its 50 years of combined ministry and it will plan other anniversary events at national gatherings.
A New W&A Baptist Congregation in the Making:
CEDARBRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH, GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

We are a new Christian community starting in Eastern NC. We are a Baptist church that is fully open and affirming. We welcome people of every age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic situation, intellectual and physical ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The story behind our name helps tell our story and explain what kind of community we want to be. Cedars symbolize nature, creation, strength, protection, and healing. In ancient times, cedars were used to make ships so people could GO places, but also as a symbol of grandeur in temples and palaces. While cedar wood was used for foundational pieces in architecture due to its strength, it was also used to wrap doors to show off status. We love the idea of ripping off the former status symbol and using it as scrap (but sturdy) wood to build bridges... to reach and meet with others, especially those who have been distanced as a result of the status symbol Church has been and often, still is. We’re ripping off the doors, leaving them wide open, and using them for a much better use—to build bridges. Hence, "Cedarbridge Baptist Church.” (Continued, next page)
We aren't interested in being a status symbol or an insiders’ club. We want to go, serve, and meet people where they're at. We want to be a safe place for rest and refuge, especially for the weary. We want to be a bridge that makes a way to bring people together.

Ezekiel 17:22-23 says, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches.”

On Thursday, April 29, the Rev. Dr. Susan Sparks, Senior Pastor of AWAB member congregation Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York, NY, helped convene a Zoom meeting with leaders of Cedarbridge Baptist Church and AWAB. AWAB is thrilled to see this new congregation thrive into existence.

Please show Cedarbridge Baptist Church your support by visiting its website at: www.cedarbridgechurch.com. You can also “like” them on Facebook and Instagram.
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

Shella Chace
Secretary, Ithaca, NY

Donnie Anderson
Providence, RI

Reba Cobb
Louisville, KY

David Key
Athens, GA

Clifford Matthews, Jr.
Charlotte, NC

Rick Mixon, Emeritus
Palo Alto, CA

Contact Us

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@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.

Soar with Us!