

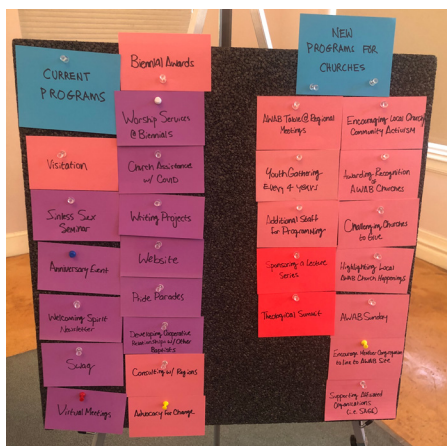
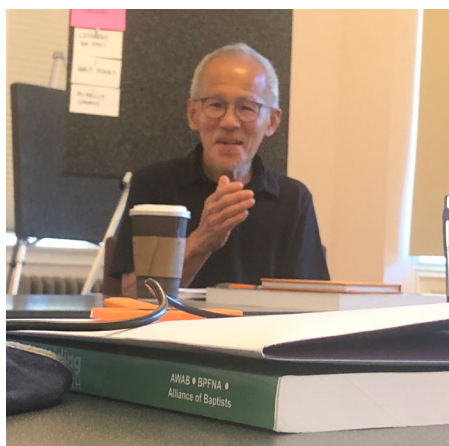


A SEASON FOR GRATITUDE AND COURAGE

The year-end holiday season can't help but awaken a feeling of gratitude in us. The very name "Thanksgiving" calls us to recognize and appreciate the blessings in our lives. Near the top of my list, following family and close friends, are the relationships I have with kindred spirits who are on a journey to make our world a world of equality and justice. The board members and staff of AWAB are in that group for me. Their dedication and loyalty to the AWAB mission was apparent at the recent annual board retreat held in Berkeley, California this past September.

We gathered at The Berkeley School of Theology, formerly the American Baptist Seminary of the West, to envision a future plan for AWAB. Thirteen board and staff members participated in rich, in-depth discussions regarding those areas that would make AWAB the most relevant and effective in the coming years. Our meeting was facilitated by Rev. Dr. Don Ng, a retired Pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church in

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San Francisco and Past President of American Baptist Churches, USA. His method of storyboarding our discussion points was very effective for our understanding of the significant priorities for our organization and those tasks necessary to meet those goals.

By the third day the walls of the library at the seminary were covered with multi-colored file cards that revealed five primary goals and hundreds of sub tasks necessary to achieve those goals. The five action items are:

1. Update the Purpose and Mission Statement of AWAB
2. Develop Resource Programs for Member Churches
3. Establish a Placement Program for LGBTQ+ Clergy and Seminaries
4. Expand the AWAB Board, Focusing on Diversity
5. Develop an Ongoing Financial Support Program

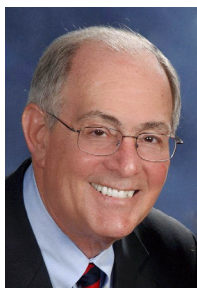
Each one of these primary objectives were fleshed out with many well thought-out action items.

A week or so after the retreat was over and everyone had an opportunity to digest a great volume of information, we matched each of the primary objectives with a board member based on skills, interest and the time each had available to work on this program. This is where my gratitude kicks in. We had five enthusiastic board members volunteer to take the responsibility for developing one each of the five priorities. I am deeply grateful for the dedication and loyalty of the board and staff of AWAB.

I also have additional gratitude for you, our members and member churches. Without you AWAB would not exist. While I am thankful for your support, I also stand in admiration of your courage. Every member

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church of AWAB has gone through difficult times for acceptance in their congregation, their denomination and their community. By member churches I'm talking about the people in those organizations who had the courage to fight for equality and respect for all who come. I understand, and do not take lightly, the headaches and heartaches that go along with the work necessary to bring everyone into God's Kin*dom. It is courageous work. Thank you.



So let us enjoy this season of gratitude and courage and bring that spirit into the coming year as we continue God's work together.

Gratefully,

Bob Sittig

Bob Sittig, Board Chair

Bethlehem, Bedlam, Beloved

It's hard to believe we've entered into yet another season filled with holy days for several faith traditions. As Christian communities, we're preparing again to celebrate the birth of the Christ child and how through that story, love is shared with a crazy world. Perhaps it's more than coincidence that the town in which the Christ child was born was named Bethlehem, or more accurately, town of bedlam, craziness, and chaos. Into the bedlam and craziness of even our lives today, love still comes.



Love comes to so many through the welcoming and affirming ministry of congregations and ministries such as yours. As we move from one year to the next, be encouraged. Your dedication to sharing love with all of God's beloved, including LGBTQ+ folk, does not go unnoticed. Thank you for helping the hope and love of God be born again and again through the ministry you offer. May you witness this love being born over and over through AWAB and your support this season.

Sincerely,

Brian

Rev. Brian Henderson, DMin
National Coordinator
brian@awab.org

A Request for My Kids

I was enthusiastically loved and affirmed by the Baptist congregations in which I grew up. Admittedly, I was a white, cisgender, straight male (and a preacher's kid).

But neither of my kids were granted that same automatic welcome and affirmation. My two children are both smart, funny, loving, compassionate, diligent, amazing people. But my son is gay and my daughter is bisexual. My wife and I joined an AWAB congregation to ensure that our two kids (and all queer kids) would be fully welcomed and affirmed in their Christian walk, baptism, marriage, ordination, service, etc.

A lot has changed during the past 30 years as AWAB has grown from just 10 member churches to over 125 congregations in 36 states/provinces. AWAB today:

- Provides support, education, and theological expression to Baptist congregations and organizations as they become more welcoming and affirming while honoring Scripture and Baptist heritage.
- Strengthens connections among congregations, which empower them to stand in support of LGBTQ+ people.
- Offers support to individuals and families experiencing difficulties reconciling sexual orientation and gender identity with serving in every aspect of Baptist life.
- Advocates for a faithful Baptist voice in support of LGBTQ+ full human and civil rights.

But let's face it: a lot remains the same as 30 years ago as LGBTQ+ kids in our congregations and communities too often face discrimination, limitation, rejection, and outright hostility. The good news is that we can do something about it through AWAB.



The important work of AWAB only happens because of our support. Please consider a generous year-end gift today to undergird AWAB's ministry: <https://awab.org/support>

Do it for my two children. Do it for your kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, and neighbors. Thanks for your partnership in extending welcome and affirmation to all of God's children.

Dave Hunt
AWAB Board Treasurer

AWAB OFFERS SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Becoming a welcoming and affirming church is the end of the beginning of welcoming the LGBTQ+ community into full participation in life of our congregations. There is so much to learn about not only the struggles (many of which have been brought on by the church), but also the joyous self-discovery experienced by so many in our community. One of the great joys of AWAB's ministry is helping congregations expand their understanding of the community they seek to welcome into their fellowship.



Recently Rev. Art Wright, pastor of the Williamsburg Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, reached out to AWAB's National Coordinator, Rev. Brian Henderson, for such help. Already a welcoming and affirming church and an AWAB member, they were seeking help with understanding the way pronouns are understood and used in the transgender community. Brian connected them with the Rev. Dr. Donnie Anderson, a transgender woman and AWAB Board member.



Dr. Anderson met with the pastor and a group of about 15 members of the congregation via Zoom to discuss pronoun usage. After setting a theological foundation, Dr. Anderson facilitated a conversation that resulted in answered questions and greater understanding of not only the use of pronouns, but of what it means to identify as a transgender/gender-nonconforming person.

AWAB is always happy to engage in these kinds of conversations to help congregations live into the reality of being welcoming and affirming. If you would be interested in such a conversation, please contact us.

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES!

Have you checked out the latest open ministry positions posted on AWAB's website? Check them out at:

awab.org/ministry-opportunities



Remembering World AIDS Day

by Jordan Conley, Seminary Intern

At one of his crusades in 1993, Rev. Billy Graham asked the crowd, “Is AIDS a judgement of God?” He paused, “I could not say for sure, but I think so.” Graham later apologized, but he wasn’t alone. He had given voice to what many Evangelical Christians believed—that AIDS was

a punishment from God. Scores of prominent Evangelical leaders echoed Graham’s dangerous rhetoric, turning a public health crisis into a right wing campaign on sexual morality. LGBTQ+ folk were broadly categorized as recipients of the wrath of God, no better than the wicked citizens of Sodom & Gomorrah in Exodus.

Today, nearly 30 years after Graham’s comments, significant progress has been made in the fight against AIDS. Public education has significantly reduced the stigma surrounding AIDS. Scientific innovation has birthed medical treatments that would have been hard to imagine in the 80’s and 90’s. But even so, there is more to do.

We’re reminded of the work that lies ahead as we recognize World AIDS Day on December 1st. Since 1988, World AIDS Day committed to increasing awareness of HIV, speaking out against HIV stigma, and calling for an increased response to ending the HIV epidemic in this country, and around the world.

By working to raise awareness of HIV, speaking out against stigma, and holding decision makers accountable for equitable and just policies that address this epidemic, we are becoming active participants in God’s kin-dom. We’re calling for our communities to have ‘eyes to see’, and following in the call of Jesus to loose healing in our world.

How might we, as an AWAB family, participate in this work? Perhaps we could contact our local representatives, urging them to consider funding that would help end the HIV epidemic. How might our churches raise awareness? Perhaps by publicly recognizing World AIDS Day and highlighting the importance of continuing the work of ending the stigma. Perhaps even by wearing a red ribbon on December 1st. Whatever steps we take can lead us to a future without the HIV epidemic, and as those

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who have been called to deliver ‘good news’, a future where the HIV epidemic has been eradicated is very good news.

As our National Coordinator Brian Henderson often reminds us, “there’s far more we can do together than any of us can do on our own.” Together, our AWAB community encompasses Baptists from coast to coast. Together, we can articulate a vision of a world of justice, a world that works together to finally end the HIV epidemic. May we envision such a world, and join our hands and hearts together to make it so.

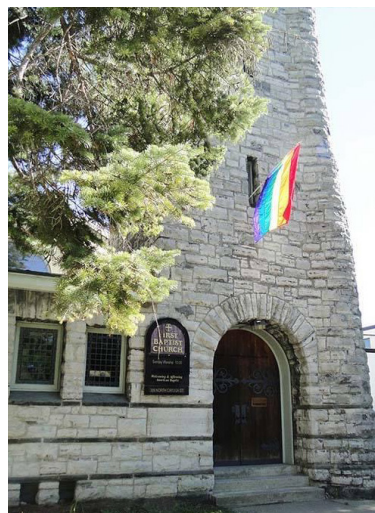
Welcome new AWAB members!

At its November meeting, the AWAB Board welcomed into membership the following:

- Royersford Baptist Church, Royersford, PA
- First Baptist Church of Chelmsford, MA
- Queer Conversations at Central Baptist Church, Lexington, KY
- Crossing Lines Africa, Uganda
- Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, AL

Congratulations

First Baptist Church of Ithaca, NY, on your 200th anniversary celebration!



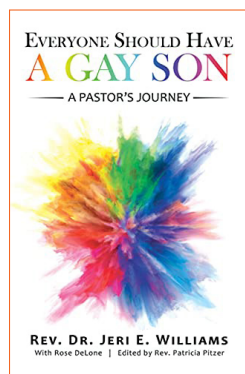


AWAB PASTOR/AUTHOR FOCUS

Since Rev. Dr. Jeri E. Williams (The Green Church, Glen Mills, PA) is an American Baptist pastor, people assume having a gay son must be devastating and contradictory to her beliefs. In some extremes, people even recommended conversion therapy or disowning her own son. But in reality, having a gay son has driven her to be even stronger in standing up to the bullies and to demonstrate she would do anything for him, just as she would for any of her children.



In an effort to stop the hurt and help people love one another, no matter who we are or whom we love, she presents an insightful exploration of how one small church has made an overwhelmingly large difference in the lives of many of God's children who have been ostracized by the church-at-large. *Everyone Should Have a Gay Son* shares Williams' story, a story that's been guided by the Holy Spirit, in hopes that you'll find your own pathway on the road to acceptance.



Everyone Should Have a Gay Son reveals a pastor's journey beyond the church's exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community to a stance of inclusion—from growing up thinking homosexuality is a sin to an absolute belief that it is not.

To order Rev. Williams' book: https://www.amazon.com/Everyone-Should-Have-Gay-Son-ebook/dp/B096ZCP75J/ref=sr_1_7

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

New Member Churches since 2019:

- Chico First Baptist Church, Chico, CA
- Circle of Faith, St. Petersburg, FL
- Crossing Lines Africa, Uganda
- First Baptist Church, Chelmsford, MA
- 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
- Queer Conversations at Central Baptist Church, Lexington, KY
- Royersford Baptist Church, Royersford, PA
- Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, AL
- 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 <i>Chair, Seattle, WA</i>	Reba Cobb <i>Louisville, KY</i>
Dave Hunt <i>Treasurer, Milwaukie, OR</i>	David Key <i>Athens, GA</i>
Shella Chace <i>Secretary, Ithaca, NY</i>	Clifford Matthews, Jr. <i>Charlotte, NC</i>
Donnie Anderson <i>Providence, RI</i>	Rick Mixon, Emeritus <i>Costa Mesa, CA</i>

Contact Us

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Got Swag?

If your congregation or ministry is preparing to celebrate Pride or if you simply would like to have some AWAB swag, know that AWAB will send you what you want **free of charge!** Check out some of our newest items above, and then simply contact [Administrative Coordinator Janet Cole](#) and your swag will be on its way!