A TIME TO BE HEARD  By Bob Sittig, Board Chair

In our Spring Newsletter I wrote about “Two Steps Forward,” an article that recognized that there will be setbacks in achieving our goal of equal treatment for all of God's children. The text suggested that we must continue making progress toward that goal in order to offset the challenges that come along on our journey. The recent activity from the United States Supreme Court represents a significant challenge to the mission of AWAB. Regardless of where you stand on reproductive rights, the threat to all of us has to do with curtailing personal rights. In the almost fifty years of advocacy by American Baptists Concerned and AWAB, great progress has been made in the creation of rights for the LGBTQ+ community. That progress has not only been made by changes in legislation, but also changes in attitudes in our churches, schools and other social arenas. Any decision by the Supreme Court that has an impact on personal rights has an impact on the LGBTQ+ community.

Many Pro-Choice organizations are rallying across our nation to object to the probable decision the court is about to make. It’s time for AWAB members and our allies to actively support these efforts to ensure that the Court and the nation know of the strong objection we have to personal decisions being challenged by our legal system. It is truly a time to be heard.

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Our democratic system of government relies on the people to make known their desires by the people they vote for in fair elections. The trickle down result of this process determines the judges who make significant decisions that impact our lives. With mid-term elections coming up this fall, we must also be political activists in our communities. It is truly a time to be heard.

I spend a lot of time expressing my outrage over recent events to my friends and family. I believe we have a tendency to engage with folks who align with our beliefs. I think they call that “preaching to the choir.” As uncomfortable as it might be for me and you, we must get out there with non-choir members and make our outrage known. We mustn’t complain about that which happens to us, when we haven’t made a lot of noise about what it is we want. It’s truly a time to be heard.

AWAB will continue to advocate for equality and freedom of choices for all in God’s Kin-dom. Thank you for being on that journey with us and for making yourself heard.

With gratitude,
Bob Sittig

The following letter was authored by Rev. Erica Cooper, pastor of Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, AL. The letter was signed by clergy throughout Alabama to express care and support for transgender children and their families.

We Care: An Open Letter of Support to Transgender Children and Their Families

We understand that the recent state legislation limiting access to critically needed care and support for transgender and gender-diverse children and their families is a devastating loss for you and your families. As clergy and faith leaders in the state of Alabama, we want to express our sincere love and concern for your physical, emotional, and spiritual health. While we may not fully understand your unique experiences, many of us know what it is like to feel rejected, left out, cast aside, bullied, targeted, and denied access to civil rights.

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We also know the vital importance of hearing voices of love and support. That is why we want to make sure you know that we care.

**We care about your physical health.** While we may not fully understand the biologics or therapeutics regarding transgender medical care, as we are not specialists in this area, we support the doctors and healthcare providers who are. We also support the efforts of the American Academy of Pediatrics' pursuit to ensure comprehensive care and support for transgender and gender-diverse children and their families in a safe clinical space.

**We care about your emotional health.** While we may not fully understand the psychiatric, neurological, behavioral, or mental health therapeutics regarding transgender mental health care, as we are not specialists in this area, we support the doctors and healthcare providers who are. We also support the efforts of the American Psychiatric Association's pursuit to provide appropriate mental health services to transgender and gender-diverse children and their families in a safe clinical space.

**We care about your spiritual health.** As faith leaders in the State of Alabama, we recognize there are diverse faith perspectives regarding LGTBQIA+ issues, even within the same religion, denomination, and congregation. We also recognize that religious leaders, institutions, and ideologies have caused great physical, emotional, and spiritual harm to the LGTBQIA+ community. The religious voices against you are often the loudest ones. We repent for this spiritual malpractice, and we regret not raising our voices louder for you to hear our support above the clamor. We hope that you might hear our voices now.

As individual specialists in the areas of religious belief, congregational leadership, spiritual care, and theological studies, we have concluded that:

- You are loved by God.
- You belong in this world.
- You are beautiful.
- You are wonderful.
- You are not alone.

Should you need a safe space to explore your faith, please know you have a home in any of our communities. Should you need prayer or encouragement, we are here.

—Rev. Erica Cooper  
Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, Alabama
NOTES FROM THE NATIONAL COORDINATOR

With defiance, courage, and conviction, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and allied individuals reacted on June 28, 1969, to the police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. This outcry for justice prompted Craig Rodwell, Fred Sargeant, Ellen Broidy, and Linda Rhodes, to propose on November 2, 1969, the first gay pride parade to be held in New York City.

Fifty-three years later we witness Gay Pride parades, festivals, and events the world over. Famed artist, Vincent Van Gogh, is attributed with the following quote: “Making progress is like miners’ work: it doesn’t advance as quickly as one should like, and also as others expect; but faced with such a task, patience and faithfulness are essential.”

Today, as a community of Baptist LGBTQ+ people may we remember that our work for equality, equity, and justice is not in vain. On account of the patience and faithfulness of others before us, our Pride marches are more than just events. We can be proud of how far our culture and society have come. In healthy and hope-giving ways we can be prideful knowing that each one of us is a beautiful human being endowed with goodness and ability to make this world a more welcoming, affirming, and caring place. With proud spirits, and prideful acknowledgement of our humanity, we need always be prepared to take the next steps to seeing equality, equity, and justice become reality.

These steps will challenge us each to listen more carefully and compassionately to one another. These steps will challenge us to take often the high road of character especially when words and actions of others dismiss and disrespect our human dignity. These steps will challenge us to carry the welcoming and affirming movement for everyone from courtrooms and sanctuaries to our homes and neighborhoods.

As we experience the uncertainties of these days, AWAB is here to help us stand strong and together through all that will be. I trust you’ll see in this issue of Welcoming Spirit the ways our collective efforts are helping making an impact on the lives of so many.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to helping us do together what none of us can do on our own.

Rev. Brian Henderson, DMin
National Coordinator
brian@awab.org
Welcoming the Transgender Community

by Kurt Kaufman, Communications Coordinator

The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists held the inaugural Welcoming the Transgender Community webinar on Wednesday, May 4th, 2022. Facilitated by AWAB board member Rev. Dr. Donnie Anderson, this panel discussion began the conversation between the transgender community and faith communities. Those who attended were introduced to two transgender clergy: the Rev. Erica Saunders, who was one of the first openly trans women ordained to ministry in Baptist life; and the Rev. Dante A. Tavolaro, who was the first trans person to be ordained in the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. Rev. Saunders, Rev. Tavolaro, and Rev. Anderson shared their experiences with being transgender, offered advice to individuals and congregations who are beginning to interact with the transgender community, and answered audience questions around the transgender experience.

When asked to share one thing for all to know regarding the transgender experience, Rev. Tavolaro shared that “Particularly for folks who are just beginning this conversation... just upfront, accept and know and come to terms with the fact that you’re going to fail.” He added that “having that posture of knowing that upfront can help you to be prepared to be corrected, and to help keep a posture of openness to continue to learn and to not get defensive... because [gender expression] is always changing.”

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Rev. Saunders paraphrased the poem “For The White Person Who Wants To Know How To Be My Friend” by Pat Parker for her one thing, noting that “the first thing you do is forget that I’m trans; second, you must never forget that I’m trans.” She added that “while trans folks have a lot of special needs... at the end of the day, we’re just human beings, and being trans is just one thing about us.”

In closing, Rev. Saunders reminded attendees that “we are all made in the image of God. What that means is that in every person we meet, we learn how different love can look, from person to person and situation to situation. From every human being, we learn something different about what is sacred and what is holy.”

A recording of the webinar is below and can be found on the AWAB YouTube channel. Note that this is only the first in a series of webinars on Welcoming the Transgender Community – to be informed of future events, please subscribe to our mailing list.

Check out what Baptist News Global had to report on this inaugural webinar: baptistnews.com/article/three-transgender-ministers-tell-their-stories-and-offer-counsel-to-churches

Randle R. Mixon Award

On Sunday, May 1, AWAB Board Chair Bob Sittig and National Coordinator Brian Henderson visited Glendale Baptist Church to present in person the Randle R. Mixon Award for Christian Service to Rev. April Baker. We are grateful for April's commitment to welcoming and affirming ministry throughout all of her ministerial career. Rev. Baker served on the steering committee of American Baptists Concerned that was responsible for the formation of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.
JOEL DUGAN, TRANSGENDER MAN LICENSED FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

On Sunday, May 1, the First Baptist Church of Pottstown, Pottstown, PA, held a Licensing Service for Joel Dugan. Joel is the first transgender man to be licensed within American Baptist Churches, USA. Pastor of First Baptist Church, Marcia Bailey, Executive Minister of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, James McJunkin, and AWAB National Coordinator, Brian Henderson, among others, participated in this historic service. AWAB member congregations, Royersford Baptist Church and Central Baptist Church of Wayne participated as well.

AWAB celebrates with Joel as he continues in his call to a ministry of inclusion for all. To read more about Joel's story, check out the article published by Baptist News Global here: baptistnews.com/article/pennsylvania-baptist-church-licenses-transgender-man-for-ministry

AWAB congratulates and celebrates with First Baptist Church of Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, as it ordained to Christian Ministry Nathan Brittsan, on Sunday, May 1. Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church hosted this meaningful service. On that same day, FBC Berkeley baptized Melissa Scott. It was indeed a day to celebrate.

View Nathan's service online here: youtu.be/dZhCw1mn-kQ
AWAB joins with many in congratulating American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) on its 40th Anniversary. AWAB also honors Rev. Dr. Margaret Cowden, who served as ABWIM’s founding director.

ABWIM’s conference Radical. Redeemed. Ready: Celebrating Ministering Women will take place June 15–18.

IN MEMORIAM

Norman K. Gottwald, PhD (1926 - 2022), longtime member of First Baptist Church of Berkeley, passed away on March 11, 2022. He was Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at New York Theological Seminary and taught previously at American Baptist Seminary of the West and the Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley). Dr. Gottwald’s most influential book is The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E. (1979), a celebrated study of the origins of ancient Israel as an indigenous peasant uprising. Gottwald pioneered the use of social theory and method in biblical studies.

He was a cherished professor of the Hebrew Scriptures, world-wide lecturer on the critical relevance of the Bible to contemporary social struggles, and a citizen activist in numerous civil rights, anti-war, and pro-labor movements and organizations. As an ordained minister of American Baptist Churches USA, Dr. Gottwald was a strong advocate of popular biblical study committed to social change. He was also a founder of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice (clbsj.org) located in Stony Point, NY.

AWAB celebrates Norman Gottwald’s life and his commitment to welcoming and affirming ministry. We pray God’s shalom for his family during this new season of living.
AWAB Welcomes More Congregations!

We’re pleased to share that our AWAB family keeps growing. At its March and May meetings, the Board officially accepted the following congregations into our membership: Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, KY; University Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD; and Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, VA.
Join AWAB for a service and reception at Royal Lane Baptist Church 6707 Royal Lane, Dallas, TX

Thursday, June 30, at 3 p.m.

Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders
preaching

Aubin Petersen
of Another Story® will receive the Barbra MacNair Award for Christian Witness

The mission of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB) is to create and support a community of churches, organizations and individuals committed to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the full life and mission of Baptist churches. AWAB stands alongside of CBF’s Affirming Network in support of Welcoming & Affirming ministry.

Visit us at CBF General Assembly

If you are attending the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Dallas, Texas, June 28–30, please plan to stop by the AWAB exhibit booth to say hello and pick up some swag. Also, there will be an AWAB service hosted by Royal Lane Baptist Church on June 30, 3pm. Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders will be preaching and the Barbra MacNair Award for Christian Witness will be presented to Aubin Petersen.

Congratulations!

University Baptist in Austin, TX, joyfully installed its pastor, Natalie Webb, on Sunday, May 15.
Help us make our vision a reality.

Join AWAB’s Rainbow Circle today! By signing up for a regular monthly donation from your credit card or bank/credit union (for as little as $8 per month), you can help ensure AWAB is better able to make the welcoming and affirming vision a reality.

As part of the Rainbow Circle, you will receive:

- Quarterly communications specifically for Rainbow Circle Members
- Free or deeply discounted access to all AWAB events
- Special recognition in AWAB’s newsletter and website (unless you prefer to remain anonymous).

Most importantly, you will receive the blessed assurance that you are turning some of your “green” into a colorful rainbow that welcomes and affirms all of God’s children.

Please join the Rainbow Circle:

[www.awab.org/rainbow-circle](http://www.awab.org/rainbow-circle)

Thank you for your partnership!
SAVE THE DATE: INAUGURAL LECTURESHIP

Mark your calendar for an inaugural Lectureship, Monday, September 26. AWAB is pleased to announce that preceding its annual Board Retreat, there will be a public lecture that people can experience in-person and online. St. Luke’s Missionary Baptist Church (Charlotte, NC) will host this event. The Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders will be the inaugural lecturer. Many thanks to the Rev. Cliff Matthews and his staff for providing the space and hospitality to launch this new AWAB endeavor.

AWAB’S SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

For the month of pride, AWAB will be running a handful of social media advertisements intended to increase awareness of our member churches and the Rainbow Circle campaign. These advertisements will be targeted in the hope of reaching those who may be unfamiliar with the concept of a welcoming and affirming Baptist church. It is our hope that this campaign will introduce people to an AWAB member church near them that welcomes and affirms them for who they are, as well as introducing them to an organization that actively stands up for their seat in faith communities.
Sinless Sex Returns!

AWAB is pleased to offer again a 6-week course based on Dr. William R. Stayton's 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 been put in the position where you had to choose between acting out sexually in a safe, fun and experimental way or being religious with your sexual activity limited to marriage and procreation? Have you ever felt spiritual, but not religious? In your religious tradition, if any , did you have positive sexuality education that helped you work through feelings about masturbation, homosexuality, pre-marital heterosexual sex, or safer sex techniques or were you told what you had to feel?

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: Wednesday, August 24, through September 28, 8:00-9:30pm EDT. The course will accommodate up to 20 individuals.

Requirements:

- Register online at: https://forms.gle/x72PEdLfNE2HGPNP7
- Course fee: $50 AWAB members / $75 non-members / $10 Rainbow Circle Members, payable at https://awab.org/support.
- Attend all six sessions

About the instructors:

Bill Stayton holds a master of divinity degree, and doctorates in both theology and philosophy. He is a psychologist, sexologist and theologian. After serving as pastor, hospital chaplain and seminary faculty member, he was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Widener University and Morehouse School of Medicine.

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He received a Gold Medal Award from the World Association for Sexual Health for promoting dialogue with religion and medicine about sexuality. In 2021, he received the University of Minnesota/Program in Human Sexuality Inaugural Award: Distinguished Sexual and Gender Health Revolutionary.

**Kathy Stayton** is retired from teaching orchestral string instruments in both private and public schools. She is a violinist and has served for many years in community orchestras and ensembles. She has led orchestras in elementary, middle and upper schools, as well as teaching private students. Kathy has been an activist in LGBTQQA projects and served as president and board member of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB). She has participated in many Washington marches, justice-oriented programs, including reproductive rights, poor peoples’ campaign, and racial equality. She is a founding member of the Northumberland, PA League of Women Voters. Kathy and Bill have been married for 68 years. They have 4 children, 7 grandchildren, and 8 great grandchildren.

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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Colors of Hope: A Devotional Journal from LGBTQ+ Christians**

*Colors of Hope* draws upon the iconic Pride flag and raises a call to embody our beliefs. Using Gilbert Baker's original flag and its eight colors and themes—sexuality, life, healing, sunlight, nature, art and magic, harmony and serenity, and spirit—readers are invited to reflect, engage, and apply discoveries. The devotions present a range of views, all full of hope, paired with thematic journal prompts and calls to action. The book includes an invocation, introduction, weekly reading, daily reflections, benediction, and list of resources. *Colors of Hope* is an expansive resource for personal growth and collective change. “Hoping in color” brings the joy, beauty, and power of the rainbow to life.

Featuring contributions from Tyler Heston (he/him), Alysha Laperche (they/them), Sandhya Jha (she/they), Nadia Tavera (she/they), Andrew Deeb (he/him), William DeShay C. Jackson (they/them), Melissa Guthrie (she/her), Renair Amin (she/they), Brendan Y. Boone (he/him), Allen V. Harris (he/him), and Marian Edmonds-Allen (she/they).

*Colors of Hope* is available through [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com), [Target](https://www.target.com), and [Chalice Press](https://www.chalicepress.org).
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.

“...why does this organization exist? It needs to exist. There’s [someone], somewhere, who has been told they can’t possibly be a follower of Jesus and be gay. They’re at home, looking for some counter prevailing word, and they’re going to see AWAB. It’s a message that the word of condemnation is not the only word.”
—Rev. Jim Hopkins, Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, Oakland, CA

New Member Churches since 2019:
• Chico First Baptist Church, Chico, CA
• Christ the Liberator Church, Wilkesboro, NC
• Circle of Faith, St. Petersburg, FL
• Crossing Lines Africa, Uganda
• Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, KY
• 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, Baltimore, MD
• University Baptist Church, Charlettesville, VA
• Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, 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
Costa Mesa, CA

Awab Staff:
Rev. Brian Henderson, DMin
National Coordinator
Denver, CO

Janet Cole
Administrative Coordinator
Louisville, KY

Kurt Kaufman
Communications Coordinator
Denver, CO

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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!