

# The Welcoming Spirit



Pride  
Edition



Queer ✦ Baptist ✦ Relevant

## Pride and the Freedom to Be

by **Katie Callaway, Director of Development,  
Baptist Joint Committee**



*Katie Callaway*

When someone asks me what I do for a living, I have often struggled with what to say. I am an ordained Baptist minister. I am a fundraiser. I am a theologian. But, none of those capture the essence of what I do: I work to create religious liberty.

Every time, the response is the same pause.

That pause is indicative of our current moment. Religious liberty has been so thoroughly weaponized by Christian nationalism that people no longer know whether it is a shelter or a sword. And for too many in the LGBTQ community, it has been wielded as the latter.

As Baptists, we know that religious liberty is not a sword, but a shelter.

I'm often reminded of the words of Roger Williams when he founded the colony of Rhode Island to be a "shelter for persons distressed of conscience."

Pride Month is a good time to recommit to being a shelter for one another. As welcoming and affirming Baptists, we are called to be a people who create space—a shelter—for pluralism because we recognize that multitudes exist within our world and even within ourselves. And those multitudes make all of us better.



Christian nationalism is a political project that uses the symbols and language of faith to consolidate power, to deny the multitudes. It does not seek the freedom of conscience for all, it seeks the enforcement of one vision of identity and ethics on everyone. And it has done extraordinary damage to communities, but particularly to marginalized communities like those AWAB serves: to queer families, immigrants, and religious minorities.

Pride is a celebration of and a reminder that the freedom and safety to live authentically is not guaranteed. We do not take for granted the ability to love who we love, to worship where we belong, to be seen and held by a community, to not be forced to choose between our faith and our full humanity. At BJC, we walk alongside congregations and individuals as we all work and witness for religious liberty for all which must be given flesh–incarnated. As people of the Incarnation, we can choose to incarnate—to embody—this fragile freedom.

This Pride Month, I am grateful for AWAB. For the Welcoming and Affirming Baptist community that has refused to let the term Baptist be limited to anything other than the fullness of plurality and authenticity.

Together, all of us are called to live religious freedom because our faith is incarnational. It is lived by Baptists gathering in their congregations to counter local school districts' legislation that centers white, heteronormative Christian narratives. It is lived by the queer Baptist clergy creating true sanctuary for immigrants in their community to be safe from the enforcement of ICE. It is lived every time someone stands up and says: I will not be erased and I will not let them be erased. It is lived every time you and I look with love at the multitudes within the world and within ourselves.

Religious liberty is an active, incarnational reality that creates and cultivates spaces for all of us to thrive. May we all be shelters for those distressed of conscience.



At the Baptist House of Studies at Perkins School of Theology, we believe theology is for everyone. Whether you are discerning ordination, or feel called to leadership beyond the church walls, you will be honored, supported, and equipped to thrive in your calling.

**Program Details:**

- In-person and hybrid degree programs available for increased flexibility.
- Elective classes tailored specifically for Baptist students.
- Learn from diverse students, faculty and staff, representing over 30 denominations.
- Connect with leaders from across Baptist and free church life for learning opportunities and ministry placements.

**100% of admitted  
students are considered  
for scholarships!**



For more information, email [bhsperkins@smu.edu](mailto:bhsperkins@smu.edu)



The Welcoming Spirit is a publication of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Association unless explicitly stated. To submit an article for consideration, please contact our Executive Director, Brian Henderson, at [Brian@awab.org](mailto:Brian@awab.org). or visit our website [www.awab.org/newsletter](http://www.awab.org/newsletter) for more information.

---

## **AWAB**

---

PO Box 7834  
Louisville, KY 40257  
1.888.906.2922  
[admin@awab.org](mailto:admin@awab.org)

---

## **AWAB Staff**

---

Brian Henderson  
Executive Director  
James Rice III  
Communications Coordinator  
Janet Cole  
Administrative Coordinator

---

## **AWAB Board of Directors**

---

Lauren Ng, Chair, Executive Committee  
Jason Mack, Vice-Chair, Executive Committee  
Bob Sittig, Treasurer, Executive Committee  
Erica Saunders, Secretary, Executive Committee  
Cliff Matthews, At-Large, Executive Committee  
Scott Green, At-Large, Executive Committee

Allen Bartlett	Laura Levens
Abigail Medina Betancourt	Kenneth Meyers
Jordan Conley	Aubin Petersen
Evann Hasenauer	Rick Mixon, Emeritus

## Desk & Chair

---

Perspective from the Desk of our Board Chair



**Lauren Ng**  
Chair of the  
Board of Directors

### “The PRIDE of Abundant Life”

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* **John 10:10**

Mom brag coming in hot.

My 15-year-old son, who is finishing up his freshman year of high school, recently delivered his original poem in a theater packed with his teachers and classmates. Not only did he courageously stand before them to share with creativity and vulnerability... he also cinched second place in the poetry contest.

I’m proud of Canon because he is my child, and so—let’s be clear—almost anything he does makes me swell with joy. But I’m also proud of Canon because he is seeing himself as a whole human, valuable and vibrant, inimitable and uncategorizable, worthy of abundant life.

This is Jesus’ purpose for humanity: to move beyond fear and limitation into the kind of life God has always wanted people to experience, a life that is whole and expansive.

As we celebrate PRIDE, this month and every month, may we affirm the full and boundless identities of our LGBTQ+ siblings and loved ones like my son Canon; for each of us is created in the image of the limitless One who came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

## **The Naked Eye**

By Canon Kushner

A sunset drive home  
You're not alone  
All of my tears patched  
One word, one hundred attached

Before I can even understand  
Everyone is holding out their hands  
Attempting to soften my land  
I fall from my place in heaven

With a loving home and warm bed  
I walk with rocks thrown at the back of my head  
The once welcoming church that placed me in the sun  
My leaves whither in shade; We abandon

Abandon all good  
Abandon boyhood  
Abandon myself for one hundred  
Leave the world in tearshed

Somewhere along the way I forgot my name  
My heteronormative dreams are to blame  
I restrict my voice  
For what? For boys?

The same ones who throw rocks?  
Who can't just let me talk?

And it's boys who I hate  
I could never ever relate  
To people who find humor  
In being me, yet I'm forced to live for

And it's girls who sexualize  
My community, and so I realize  
That I am green, white, and blue  
Along with everything I once knew

They say it's my whole personality  
Yet this is far from reality  
Not a quarter, a half, but a whole  
In television I notice  
Me as a supporting role  
I don't condone this

And nor am I the lead  
Just because I'm one in fifty  
Doesn't mean I speak for everybody  
People want answers from me  
But I'm more than the eye can see

---

### **AWAB Launches 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Pride Directory**

AWAB is proud to launch our Pride Directory for the third year in a row, highlighting how welcoming and affirming Baptist churches are showing up for Pride in communities across the

country. We hope this growing directory will be a valuable resource for those seeking connection, celebration, and affirming faith communities. Explore it at [www.awab.org/pride](http://www.awab.org/pride).



## The Executive Summary

---

Views & Inspiration from our Executive Director



**Brian Henderson**  
Executive Director

### “Pride, Protest, and Our Collective Witness”

During this season of Pride, I am proud of the work the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists continues to do in so many ways. This work is made possible by a deeply dedicated staff and an incredible Board of Directors. As you read through this issue of The Welcoming Spirit, I hope you will see how our ministry of welcome and affirmation is carried out not only by AWAB's staff and board, but also by our more than 200 member churches, ministries, educational partners, Rainbow Circle members, donors, and valued partners such as the Baptist Joint Committee, Baptist News Global, and Good Faith Media.

There is always more we can accomplish together than any of us can accomplish alone.

As we enter another season of Pride, let us remember that Pride festivals, parades, and celebrations began as protests against police brutality and the many injustices faced by LGBTQ+ people. Pride remains both a celebration and a call to action.

In a recent note to our Rainbow Circle monthly donors, I reflected on the legacy of Louise Rose, who was appointed in 1973 as the first president of American Baptists Concerned, an organization that helped pave the way for AWAB's eventual formation two decades later.

Rev. Rose was an openly African American lesbian serving on the pastoral staff of an American Baptist congregation just outside Philadelphia at a time when such authenticity and courage carried tremendous personal and

professional risk. Today, more than fifty years later, she lives in the Pacific Northwest and continues to share her gifts as a musician and artist.

Recently, I listened to a performance she gave at a renowned jazz venue in British Columbia. Sitting at the piano, she sang these words:

*"There are no reasons we can't live in harmony,  
as just one people, in just one world, you and me."*

Her music—and those lyrics—moved me deeply.

I also recognize that these are difficult words to live into, both practically and collectively. Yet they speak profoundly to the vision and calling that continue to shape the ministry of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.

So, AWAB members and friends, let us not give up. Let us protest. Let us celebrate. Let us stand with one another.

This month, through Pride-themed worship services, parades, festivals, educational events, and countless acts of welcome and affirmation, our Baptist voice has the power to offer healing, hope, meaning, and belonging to untold numbers of people.

Let us be proud of who we are and how we are called to live—queer people and allies together. Let us continue our collective witness with courage, joy, and love.

AWAB is proud of you.



*AWAB's Pride Edition Logo*

# Reflecting on our 2026 Board of Directors Retreat

by Lauren Ng, Chair, Board of Directors



The AWAB Board of Directors and staff gathered for our annual retreat for a time of connection and community building, shared learning experiences, and of course, some Board business. This year's retreat was in Puerto Rico from May 3-4 and included a visit to Mesa Abierta—an AWAB member faith community—for worship and fellowship over a meal, and a San Juan Anticolonial “de-tour” that highlighted imperialism and resistance in the world’s oldest colony. Overall, the time together was enriching and meaningful and re-energized us for the work and witness that lie ahead of us.

I want to acknowledge Rev. Dr. Jason Mack and Rev. Dr. Clifford Matthews, Jr. for their faithful service on AWAB’s Board of Directors. Both Drs. Mack and Matthews will conclude their terms this December; but as we reflect on another successful Board Retreat with Jason serving as our Board Vice Chair and Clifford serving as an At-Large member of our Executive Committee, I want to thank them now for the many contributions they have made toward the health and thriving of not just our Board, but of our entire AWAB family. Jason and Clifford, we are deeply grateful for each of you.



# Join Us At CBF General Assembly !

Plan to visit AWAB as it hosts along with Baptist News Global and Good Faith Media a breakfast on Friday, June 19, as part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's annual General Assembly meeting



The graphic features a purple and orange color scheme. At the top, the text 'CBF' is in blue and 'Joint Breakfast 2026' is in orange. Below this are two portraits: a woman on the left and a man on the right. Under each portrait is their name and title in blue text. At the bottom, the date and location are listed in white text on a purple background. The footer contains three logos: Baptist News Global, AWAB (Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists), and Good Faith Media.

**CBF**  
**Joint Breakfast 2026**

  
**Skye Perryman**  
President of  
Democracy Forward

  
**Dr. Tony McNeill**  
Musician &  
Vocal Artist

Friday, June 19, 7:00 a.m.  
Hyatt Regency Waterfront,  
Jacksonville, FL.

 Baptist News Global

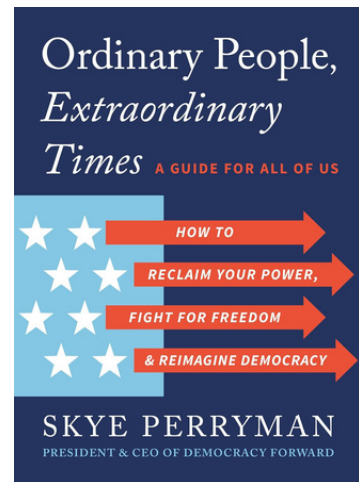
 **awab**  
Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

 goodfaithmedia

## Ordinary People, Extraordinary Times

Written by Skye Perryman

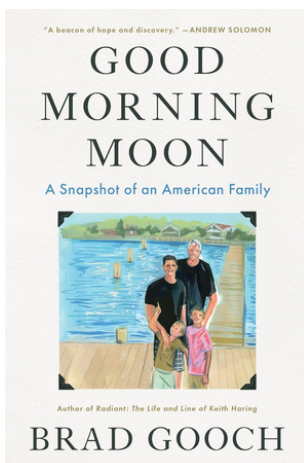
Skye Perryman—TIME 100 honoree and CEO of Democracy Forward and friend of AWAB—offers an urgent, inspiring blueprint for how ordinary people can fight for freedom in extraordinary times.



The future of our country lies in all of our hands. From protecting voting rights and public schools to finding courage in the face of fear, Skye Perryman makes the case that defending democracy isn't the job of lawyers or politicians alone—it's a role for every one of us, seasoned and brand-new activists alike.

Drawing on her frontline experience challenging threats to democracy in courtrooms across the nation, Perryman combines gripping personal stories with practical “how-to” guides that empower readers to take action in their own communities.

Accessible, hopeful, and deeply practical, this inspiring book shows that the path forward begins not in the halls of power but at our kitchen tables, in our neighborhoods, and through the everyday choices we make to speak up, build community, and protect our future.



## Good Morning Moon

Written By Brad Gooch

In a unique latticework of a memoir, Brad Gooch paints an indelible portrait of becoming a father in middle age. Having experienced once unfathomable changes in what it means to be gay in American society, having lived through the AIDS crisis in New York and surviving the death of his

first great love, Brad wasn't longing for a conventional family life.

But in late middle age, he meets Paul Raushenbush, marries, and together they take the leap, soon having two boys through surrogacy. As with many new parents, the arrival of children spurs a reflection on his own upbringing as an only child in a comfortable town in Pennsylvania, and a mystery hidden in plain sight that only a DNA test can solve.

Pondering fundamental questions about the nature of family, while capturing the joys, humor, and hardship of raising kids, *Good Morning Moon* is an unforgettable addition to the literature of parenthood.

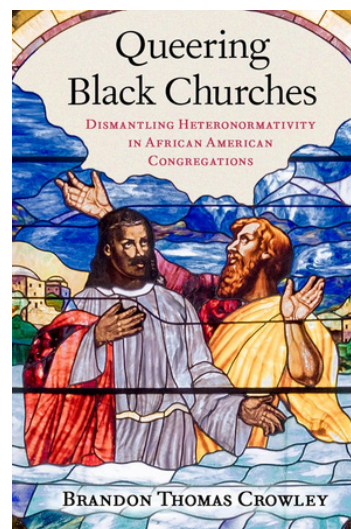
---

### Queering Black Churches

#### Dismantling Heteronormativity in African American Congregations

Written by Rev. Dr. Brandon Crowley

---



*Queering Black Churches* provides a systematic approach for dismantling heteronormativity within African American congregations. Using the lenses of practical theology, ecclesiology, Queer theology, and gender studies, Brandon

Thomas Crowley examines the heteronormative histories, theologies, morals, values, and structures of Black churches and how their longstanding assumptions can be challenged. Drawing on the experiences of several historically Black churches that became open and affirming (ONA), *Queering Black Churches* explores how historically Black churches have queered their congregations. Crowley examines the similarities and differences in their approaches and synthesizes them into a methodology called Black ecclesial Queering: a theoretical analysis and a practical method of queering that centers on the lived experiences of Black Queer folks seeking to subvert the puritanical ideologies of Black churches.

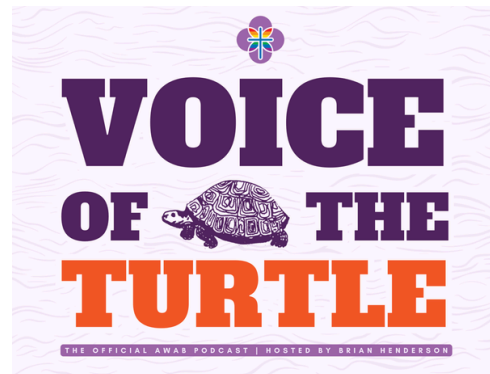
Crowley argues for a systematic approach to dismantling homophobia within African American congregations that moves beyond surface-level

allyship toward actual structural renovation. With its groundbreaking documentation of ONA congregations and its practical proposals for change, this book will be a valuable resource for students, scholars, and clergy alike.

---

## Full Season of AWAB's New Podcast Now Available

Season One of Voice of the Turtle, AWAB's podcast produced in partnership with Good Faith Media, has officially wrapped, and we invite readers to listen to the full eight-episode season. Hosted by AWAB Executive Director Brian Henderson, the series revisits the history, witness,

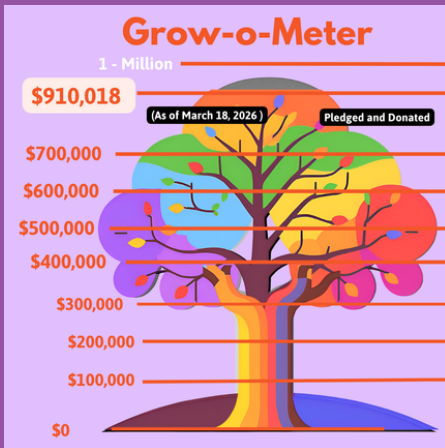


and ongoing work of welcoming and affirming Baptists through conversations with leaders who have helped shape this movement across generations.

The season began with Dr. C. Delane Tew reflecting on AWAB's roots in 1970s American Baptist life, followed by Rev. Dr. Rick Mixon revisiting the organizing conversations that helped spark a movement. Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders explored queer Baptist vocation and public witness, while Rev. Dr. Cliff Matthews, Jr. shared the story of becoming a proudly welcoming and affirming "whosoever church." Later episodes featured Rev. Paul Raushenbush on inclusive Baptist witness, Rev. Junia Joplin on LGBTQ+ ministry and justice in Canada, Dr. Susan Shaw on Christian nationalism and resistance, and Rev. Dr. Brandon Crowley on Black queer hermeneutics and preaching.

Across the season, listeners were invited into stories of courage, testimony, theology, and transformation. Some episodes looked back at the people and places that helped give rise to this movement, while others focused on the questions facing welcoming and affirming Baptists today. Together, the season offers a fuller picture of where AWAB has come from, what continues to shape our witness, and why these stories still matter in this moment. [Listen Now](#)

## We've Almost Made 1 Million!



Our 1-Million Dollar 'Here We Grow' Campaign is a significant step towards strengthening and empowering AWAB. Success allows us to build a robust and collaborative staff and an engaged board of directors, enabling us to provide high-quality LGBTQ+ resources to Baptists worldwide.

As of May 29, 2026, we have already received funds or pledges totaling **\$942,031!**



**Join today to keep awab here tomorrow!**

**For as low as \$10 a month**



**SCAN ME!**

You can help ensure AWAB is better able to make our welcoming and affirming vision a reality.

**Member Benefits Include:**

- Special Quarterly Communications
- Free or discounted access to all AWAB events
- Special recognition in our newsletter and website



WELCOME TO

**awab**

Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists



**We're Building a Church for Everyone!**

**By vote of the Board of Directors  
we welcome the following churches into our association:**



Greystone Baptist  
Church, Raleigh, NC



Myrtle Baptist Church,  
Newton, MA



New Covenant Baptist  
Church, Deland, FL

# awab Member Spotlight



## Check out what's been happening around the association



Executive Director Brian Henderson visited and spoke at First Baptist Church, Greenville, SC.

AWAB hosted a Flamy Grammy concert for a sold-out crowd the week of the ABHMS Space for Grace Concert in Cleveland, OH.



One of the sponsors helping AWAB host the Flamy Grant concert was the Open and Affirming Coalition (ONA) of the United Church of Christ. Here AWAB Executive Director Brian Henderson is with ONA Executive Director Rev. Derek Terry.

# awab Member Spotlight



## Check out what's been happening around the association

Congratulations to Rev. Jordan Conley (second from left), AWAB Board member, who was installed as the Senior Pastor of Celebration Community Church, Ft. Worth, TX. Jordan and AWAB pastor, Rev. Mary Alice Birdwhistell, are seen here with their spouses.



Congratulations to former AWAB Board Chair, Rev. Dr. Jill McCrory, who was installed as Senior Pastor of Kensington Baptist Church, Kensington, MD.

Congratulations to Rev. Kenna Curry who was ordained at Royal Lane Baptist Church, Dallas, TX.



# awab Member Spotlight



## Check out what's been happening around the association



Congratulations to AWAB Board member, Rev. Dr. Clifford Matthews Jr., who was named a finalist for the 2026 Thrive Gala & Awards with the Carolinas LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce.

AWAB Board Member, Dr. Laura Levens with Dr. Delane Tew, author of AWAB's history, *Finding a Home Among Baptists*, at the Baptist History and Heritage Society meeting which recently met in Atlanta, GA. Dr. Tew gave a presentation on her book.



AWAB Board members Aubin Petersen and Scott Green with AWAB friend Skye Perryman (center). Skye spoke at Another Story® in May, and she will be the keynote speaker for the AWAB/BNG/GFM breakfast at CBF's General Assembly meeting in June.



# awab Member Spotlight



## Check out what's been happening around the association



Several AWAB congregations were represented at the ABHMS Space for Grace Conference in Cleveland, OH.



The AWAB Board and Staff on retreat in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



Executive Director Brian Henderson preached at Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale, VA, to help the congregation begin their Pride month celebrations. While visiting he connected with long time friends and AWAB supporters Rev. Laura and Matthew Dalton.

**awab**  
**Member**  
**Spotlight**



## Check out what's been happening around the association



AWAB Executive Director Brian Henderson with Dr. Greg Garrett, professor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Greg preached at AWAB member congregation Wilshire Baptist Church in May, just weeks after helping lead the All Are Neighbors event at Baylor University. The gathering served as a counter-event to a Turning Point USA rally held on the university's campus that same day.



Congratulations to Rev. Doug Donley as he retires after a quarter of a century of ministry from AWAB member congregation, University Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN. Click [HERE](#) to read more about Doug's and the congregation's ministry together.

# Write for *The Welcoming Spirit*



AWAB is seeking a broader range of writers — people with diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences — who can speak to the many ways LGBTQ+ affirmation and Baptist faithfulness intersect in our communities. We are especially eager to welcome voices we have not heard enough from: writers of color, women and femme-identifying writers, trans and nonbinary writers, young adults, rural and small-church voices, and those whose stories broaden and enrich the movement we are building together.

Whether you have written for years or are hoping to contribute for the first time, your voice is welcome here.

To pitch an idea or express interest in writing for a future edition, please email: James Rice III, Communications Coordinator — [James@awab.org](mailto:James@awab.org).