

American Baptist Churches of IN & KY

TOGETHER

on God's Abundant
Journey

equipping leaders
empowering churches
expanding mission

THE BAPTIST OBSERVER MAGAZINE

HIGHLIGHTING THE MINISTRIES
OF AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN INDIANA & KENTUCKY

www.abc-indiana.org

BECKY SEPTOSKI & JEFF TRYON, EDITORS - VOL 21 NO. 1 - JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



**THE ABC-IN/KY STAFF SENDS YOU THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS
FOR A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR**



RESHAPING CHURCH: THRIVING CONGREGATIONS

Although we are living through a time of uncertainty and volatility, many churches and their leaders recognize an inherent call to transformation in turbulent times.

When Central Baptist Seminary (Shawnee KS) received a one million dollar Thriving Congregations grant from Lilly Endowment at the end of 2019, nothing could have prepared them for the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for congregations and their leaders.

Like a lot of other things in 2020, they had to put their ideas on hold. While they waited, they learned from faith leaders in the field who were innovating and adapting week-by-week in response to local restrictions and recommendations aimed at mitigating the spread of the virus. What emerged was the conviction that churches and pastors need both resources and support as they respond to increasing volatility in our world.

The "ReShaping Church" initiative encourages churches to discern the call to transformation inherent in disruptive seasons such as we have been experiencing. Although churches are facing

extraordinary challenges, there are also unprecedented transformation opportunities.

In 2021, twelve churches and their pastors will begin the ReShaping Church process together with a team from Central Seminary and Pinnacle Leadership Associates, and they will offer similar opportunities in 2022, 2023, and 2024, for sixteen congregations each year.

Program Director Rev. Dr. Angie Jackson expressed gratitude on behalf of Central. "We are exceedingly grateful to be one of only twenty-four organizations to participate in this invitational initiative," she said. "It is a significant opportunity for Central to partner with Pinnacle Leadership Associates, and we look forward to strengthening our service to the local church by not only providing resources but also journeying with congregations as they discern pathways to flourishing for themselves and their communities."

Region pastors and churches that have committed to be part of the initiative include Pastor Danny Russell of Culbertson Baptist and Pastor Nathan Brooks of Bloomfield FBC.

ReShaping Church is an intentional, guided process to support congregations and leaders who seek to make the most of this unique moment in time and transform a season of uncertainty and crisis into an opportunity for clarity, growth, transformation, and mission.

"What is God doing in these days? Who are we as a people of God? Where is God calling us to serve? How can we become all that God purposes us to be?" If your church is asking and seeking answers to questions like these, ReShaping Church is for you. When dramatic change affects churches, ministry practices change too quickly for a standardized approach to meet all needs. Instead, we need approaches that arise naturally from individual church bodies, allowing new ways of "being the church" to emerge.

Churches can be reinvigorated by this quickly changing ministry environment, reshaping themselves into greater expressions of the body of Christ. But, this kind of healthy transformation doesn't happen by accident. It requires an intentional, proactive process to

guide churches toward innovation and adaptation.

This is the purpose of the initiative, based on the new book *ReShape: Emerging Church Practice In A Volatile World*, by Mark Tidsworth from Pinnacle Leadership Press.

Enhancing congregational vitality is a grantmaking priority of the Lilly Endowment, rooted in the conviction that local congregations are the primary form of Christian community.

"This is an exciting and challenging time for many congregations. We understand that pastors and other congregational leaders are asking critical questions and seeking clarity about their values and mission," said Lilly Endowment Religion Vice President Chris Coble. "The Thriving Congregations Initiative aims to help congregations strengthen ministries and thrive so they can better help people encounter God, connect with each other and contribute to the flourishing of their communities and the world."

For more information about the Reshaping Church Initiative, contact:

Rev. Soozie Ford at sooziford@abc-indiana.org.



Rev. Soozie Whitten Ford
Executive Minister
sooziford@abc-indiana.org

Your Pastor Is a Gift

We are concluding a remarkable year of ministry for all the reasons of which we are well aware. If you're looking for a review and rehearsal of how difficult the year has been, you'll need to seek those words elsewhere. My preference is to draw attention to the positive, hopeful matters that have arisen in the midst of this strange (pandemic) season in which we find ourselves.

One of the most wonderful things I have witnessed in 2020 is the way our pastors have risen to the occasion by adjusting, pivoting, and adapting everything as they have led and served their congregations without any prior experience of ministering during a pandemic. "How would you lead our church during a pandemic" has not been on any search committee's list of interview questions since at least 1918, except possibly for the handful that actually were seeking to fill a pastoral vacancy after March of this year. The ways in which our pastors have demonstrated their creativity and resiliency has exceeded even my generally high expectations of their capabilities, and they are among God's good gifts to us.

Your pastor is a gift. As awkward and imperfect as your church's early attempts

at a virtual presence likely seemed, your pastor led the way within the first week or two. They were fortunate if they had a team of tech savvy folks and access to equipment, but many had nothing more than a willing person with a cell phone. Planning an online worship experience required different considerations to preparing for a typical Sunday service (i.e. How will we sing? Are there particular copyright considerations, or should we be worried about sharing prayer concerns while we are online?) but they adapted and made it happen. Oh, and remember, they did it all while completely reconfiguring the worship experiences and plans for Palm Sunday and Easter.

Your pastor is a gift. He or she is always attentive to the inner spiritual life, assisting anyone who is willing to cultivate a vibrant relationship with the Living God. In addition to taking the time and energy necessary to develop their own relationship, one of their deepest longings is to have someone like you join with them on that path. There's nothing about an ongoing living relationship with the Creator that happens in a flash. It takes discipline and commitment, and won't just happen because a podcast was helpful or a big-name speaker issued a challenge. It happens within the context of a dedicated community – ideally, a small covenantal group, who walk the road of life together and who are willing to authentically share with one another as they study scripture and pray. Your pastor can be a resource for you and others as you seek to grow and develop your inner spiritual life.

Your pastor is a gift. She or he spends untold hours studying for and preparing messages that, in addition

to plainly offering a word of gospel hope to those who need it most, are designed to teach and inspire you. Their preparation includes understanding the text and thoughtfully allowing it to speak to the current challenges of the day or the season. Hopefully they will achieve their goals of crafting a message that is thought-provoking, caring, pastoral, challenging and prophetic – all at the same time. With a bit (or a lot) of humor thrown in. All in the span of about 20 minutes, give or take, of course.

Your pastor is a gift. He or she has the ability to communicate vision and direction, effectively bringing the congregation together to respond to the needs of the wider community, even in the midst of a pandemic. How many community volunteer hours can be ultimately traced back to your pastor's challenge to: read to young children in the school system; be a caring presence in the hospital or a care facility; assist those who are under-resourced or who need help with day-to-day tasks; or any number of other worthy examples of Christ-like presence?

Your pastor is a gift. She or he is ready to be present when you experience the difficulties life hurls at you – in times of tragedy, illness, and death. They are trained to walk with you not just at the time of that event, but for months and years later, as you process all that has happened and adjust to the "new normal" of your life. And know this well – your pastor has struggled mightily in 2020, trying to find safe ways to provide that pastoral presence that they are called to be in the midst of COVID's realities and that you have come to expect. It has been downright gut wrenching for

most to provide pastoral care from an extreme distance.

Your pastor is a gift. This is nowhere near an exhaustive list of the humble ministry he or she offers. They are as much a prized resource and a valuable asset to the surrounding community as they are to your church. He or she is fortunate if they have cheerleaders who champion their efforts, looking beyond their very human frailties and finding ways to support and encourage them, both in public as well as in smaller, less obvious ways. But most don't have anyone.

During this season of Christmas as we focus on God's Greatest Gift to us, it would mean the world to me if you would do two things sometime during these next few weeks or early into 2021

First, be mindful of all the ways your pastor leads and serves, usually very quietly, behind the scenes, and without fanfare. Occasionally, let them know you notice, and are appreciative.

Secondly, take ten minutes and write a personal note to your pastor. It could be as simple as this: Pastor ____, you are a gift to me/my family because _____. And please don't wait until Pastor Appreciation Month next October.

Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year, as we continue Together on God's Abundant Journey,

Soozie Whitten Ford

*I WILL GIVE
you pastors
ACCORDING
TO MINE HEART,
which
SHALL FEED YOU
WITH
knowledge &
understanding.
JEREMIAH 3:15*

INTRODUCING OUR 2020-2024 REGION BOARD



Irina Sorrels, President
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Hayden BC



Jeff Caldwell, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Columbus FBC



Kristi Jones, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Memorial BC



Josiah Black, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2024
Church: Peru FBC



Kent Waggoner, Treasurer
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Seymour FBC



John Campbell, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Terre Haute FBC



Daisok Panmei, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Miami BC



Rhonda Compise
Serving: 2020 - 2024
Church: Underwood BC



Melanie Zeiner, Secretary
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Plainfield FBC



Tyrone Edwards
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Forest Hills BC



Rusty Strickler, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2022
Church: Warren FBC



Philip Elliott, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2024
Church: Tea Creek BC



Debbie Allen, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2024
Church: Osgood FBC



Karen Horsman, Member
Serving: 2020 - 2024
Church: Covenant

EMPOWERING CHURCHES

Matthew 25 Street Ministries' Alley Street Kitchen Finds New Home at Seymour FBC

When Matthew 25 Street Ministries' Alley Street Kitchen was seeking to find a new space, they were invited to set up at Seymour FBC where they have been in operation since August 2019.

"I consider it an honor and a privilege for us as First Baptist Church to partner with them as they seek to reach a portion of the population, we weren't doing a great job of reaching," said Rev. Dr. Jeremy S. Myers, senior pastor at Seymour FBC. "I feel there is a great deal of synergy in our missional focuses

and that we are able to create more meaningful impact and experiences together than we could apart."

With the onset of COVID, they decided to close the dining room and switch to curbside. "We have always provided transportation for those who couldn't get to the kitchen on their own and we began delivering meals," said Sara Bowling, manager of The Alley Street Kitchen. "Our number of meals went from about 50 to 250 a day five days a week." Once schools were in session this past fall, the number of meals

went down to approximately 175 per day, according to Bowling.

With the holidays around the corner and COVID cases on the rise in Jackson County, The Alley Street Kitchen is expecting to see another rise in numbers, after an already busy year.

"I think we have served about 30,000 meals this year," Bowling said in late November. "Without the love and support from Seymour FBC, we would have been forced to close the kitchen."

The Alley Street Kitchen is always accepting gifts of non-perishable food items at the Seymour FBC office during regular hours or in the FBC fellowship center during the kitchen's hours of 2 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. Monetary gifts are always accepted, Matthew 25 Street Ministries is a 501c3, and may be sent to P.O. Box 191 Seymour, IN 47274 or dropped off at the church office during regular hours.

If you would like more information about churches or events described in this issue, contact Becky Septoski at beckyseptoski@abc-indiana.org or (317) 635 3552 X222.

EXPANDING MISSION

COLUMBUS FBC HOSTS LOVE CHAPEL EVENT



Due to Coronavirus, Columbus FBC's ninth annual SEEDS OF LOVE RUN/WALK benefiting Love Chapel was very different in 2020. Instead of gathering at the church in a large group for the run/walk, folks were asked to do the route on their own day and time and report when completed.

Before the event date of September 19, 2020, folks distributed door hangers throughout the route and surrounding church area asking people to participate by bringing food to a designated drop

off spot located at the church. Several team volunteers, led by Rob and Deb Lilly, gathered at the church that morning to either take food or unload cars as they came through. A few people came to the church and actually walked the route on that day.

The event was a huge success. Thirty-five participants signed up, and 1,300 pounds of food were collected. \$17,604.71 in monetary gifts were given. The amount of monetary gifts received exceeded the total given last year by approximately \$5,000.00 dollars!

BADGER GROVE DEDICATES SHOEBOXES



For the second year in a row, Badger Grove Community BC packed "Operation Christmas Child" shoeboxes. The congregation collected items throughout the year, and held their packing party in early November (with masks and social distancing this year). The boxes were dedicated in

late November and sent to the pick-up center afterwards. There were 276 boxes, a big increase from last year's 154.

Thanks to all who collected items and/or helped to pack, including a local Girl Scout troop and a County Home Extension group. Everyone did a great job!

CLAYTON FBC SUPPORTS OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



Clayton FBC supported the "Operation Christmas Child" shoebox ministry through prayer and donations, enabling them to fill 60 boxes!

Thanks to Peggy Reitzel for coordinating this project, Janet Grubbs for the terrific display, and Rick Gorham for picking up the boxes. Praise God for this ministry!

Although Faye Elmore has not been able to attend worship services because of COVID, Clayton FBC recognized her for 104 years of life! Her birthday was November 17, 2020.

2021 OBSERVER ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

SPRING ISSUE (April, May, June) - Friday, March 12
SUMMER ISSUE (July, Aug., Sept.) - Friday, June 11
FALL ISSUE (Oct., Nov., Dec.) - Friday, September 10
WINTER ISSUE (Jan., Feb., Mar. 2022) - Fri., December 3

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EQUIPPING LEADERS

IN SUPPORT OF EXCELLENCE

Submitted by: Rev. Anthony Gualtieri

Sitting at my desk surrounded by stacks of bills, a student loan statement that rivaled the national debt, pending medical expenses and car repairs, I was crushed. My spirit deflated. I prayed for relief, but it never seemed to come. The game of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" was over and I lost. In all of my training and education, the one piece that was missing was what to do when you have nothing else you can do. I recall going home and telling my wife I was giving up. Years of debt and high interest rates had taken its toll on me physically, emotionally and spiritually. My ability to effectively shepherd my flock had been stripped away and I could not go on. I felt alone. There was absolutely no one I could turn to. I lived and served under the pretense that as a pastor, I had to have all of my ducks in a row. I could not allow the church to find out their pastor was buried in debt – regardless of how that debt was acquired; or so I thought.

When I first saw the information for the In Support Of Excellence program, I remember thinking to myself "well, that's great, but I am not about to air my dirty laundry to a bunch of strangers. Besides, I am sure it is just another program where you first need to have money in order to pay down debt." After some prayer and prodding (from my wife), I decided I would apply. I completed the application and I submitted my information. A few weeks later, I received a phone call from Jennifer Sanborn (director of ISOE). Within the first 15 minutes of our conversation, I felt as though an elephant had been lifted from my chest. The peace I felt was not anchored in anything that Jennifer said. There were no promises of debt relief or a magic formula. What I did experience however, was someone who treated me with love

and kindness. As I shared my story, Jennifer listened. Jennifer allowed me to speak candidly without judging and she prayed with me. In this moment, it was as if God was telling me everything was going to be alright.

Over the next 9 or 10 months, I learned I was not alone and it is okay to be vulnerable, because it is in these moments God works in us and through us. I learned God's economy (oikonomia) deals with the whole self, not just the bank account. It is His desire we release the burden of debt unto Him, so we can continue to minister to the Gospel of Jesus Christ both freely and boldly. I learned I do not have to be afraid or embarrassed, and I do not need to allow matters of financial difficulty to define me. I could either be a slave to money – or – become a master of my financial freedom by relying on the plans God has laid out through His oikonomia. Today, as I type this, I am a new creation in and through Christ Jesus. Through the In Support of Excellence program, I have been given a gift that cannot be valued by dollars and cents. I have received the fruits of David's prayer in Psalm 51, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Do not hesitate. If you can place yourself anywhere in my story, then I encourage you to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. You will be forever changed. *For further information and to learn more about In Support of Excellence: <https://abhms.org/ministries/developing-leaders/in-support-of-excellence/>; or to address your own (personal) financial debt: <https://abc-indiana.org/region-ministries/mef/>*

AMO FBC ORDAINS SHELLY ZOOK

On Sunday, October 4, 2020 Pastor Shelly Zook was ordained at Amo FBC in a beautiful service led by Rev. Soozie Whitten Ford, Executive Minister of ABC-IN/KY, Rev. Mark Thompson, Region Minister of ABC-IN/KY and Rev. Jeff Sexton, Pastor of Calvary BC, Kokomo.

Rev Zook's ordination was the result of a unanimous vote by the congregation of Amo FBC to honor her continued work for the Lord in over 20 years of service in ministry and continued education. Her ordination was a great celebration for the Church and community. The Spirit of God was evident and is still working beautifully in Amo! Amo FBC has a long history of raising up those called into ministry and it was a great day of fulfillment in the Church's work.



CAROLYN PORTER RECEIVES KENNETH C RHEA AWARD

Each year, Amo FBC recognizes a servant of the Lord in remembrance of WWII Veteran, Kenneth C. Rhea. Kenny was a member of Amo FBC who served God, family and country/community with great faithfulness and diligence

This year, the recipient of the award is Carolyn Porter. Carolyn has been a lifelong member of Amo FBC, carried into the church by her mother before her birth! Many of you will recognize Carolyn as an active ABW woman for many years. Carolyn has served on the ABW State Board, as church treasurer, on the missions committee, the board of Christian Education and serves God in many ways throughout her continued tenure with the church. We praise God for her servant's heart and her faithfulness unto the Lord!



ABCUSA UPDATE - 2021 BIENNIAL MISSION SUMMIT EVENT

The Executive Committee of the American Baptist Churches USA Board of General Ministries, has voted to hold a virtual Biennial Mission Summit in 2021 and to seek to hold an in-person Biennial Mission Summit in Puerto Rico in 2023

Go to the link below to read a letter from the Executive Committee
<https://www.abc-usa.org/2020/09/update-regarding-american-baptist-churches-2021-biennial-mission-summit-event/>

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CAMP
TIPPECANOE
100TH
ANNIVERSARY



**Mark your calendars now!!
May 15, 2021**

1:00 pm - 7:00 pm

**Come participate in a time of
celebration, reflection and praise.
There will be a special speaker and
activities on the lake.**

**The Adventures of Camp Tippy - By: Keagan Taylor
Seen From the Eyes of a Child**

My Memaw's (Rebecca Scott) house is special to me because it is fun and it holds special memories. In the morning at breakfast time, I always come in late, then we go play on the playground. Next, we go to chapel, listen to Bible stories and sing songs.

Lunch is next, and when we walk in, it smells like your favorite food multiplied by a hundred. It is that good! Then, we go rest in our cabins for a little bit. After rest time, we go swimming in the lake for 2 hours.

We eat dinner at 5:30, then we play on the playground until 7:30. Next, we have a campfire until 8:30 and during that time we play songs, dance and pray. After songs, we have free time, then it is time to go to bed. Now it is time for a new day.

My Memaw's home is special to me, because it is fun and sometimes we do really crazy things like, swimming, singing, dancing, playing and see Memaw. We always learn about Jesus.

