

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](http://www.abc-indiana.org)

WENDY SHULER, EDITOR - VOL. 25 NO. 2 - ANNUAL REVIEW 2025

### God at Work in Our Region in 2025



As we bring another year to a close, the Region Staff wanted to share with you some of the many ways we witnessed God at work throughout 2025. Over these past months, God has revealed Himself in countless places and moments—on the holy ground of Indian Creek Baptist Camp, in our Sunday worship services, during our RENEW workshops, and even as I admired the creative VBS decorations this summer. It has truly been an exciting year!

I want to thank each of you for your faithful support of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky. Through your generosity, our Region has flourished in ministry this year.

As we look back and give God glory, we also look forward with confidence, knowing we can trust Him in the year to come. We share these stories because we know many of you have experienced similar joys and challenges. The Region walks with you through *both*—celebrating what has been and anticipating what God will do next. We see your good works, and we give God praise.

May your Christmas season be filled with His Spirit, and may His peace rest upon you. Let us continue walking "TOGETHER on God's Abundant Journey."

Rev. Mark Thompson  
Executive Minister



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## Empowering Churches

### Regionwide Fellowship and Worship Events Bring Churches Together

If a person wanted to investigate church history, he or she could find evidence of more than two centuries of deep and dynamic relationships among the Baptist churches of IN & KY. Go ahead-- I challenge you to invest a few hours doing this! But, before you get wrapped up in that, I wanted to highlight that during this "off-year" of 2025, when we weren't holding a Region Biennial (which happens again in October 2026), we ushered in additional ways for the congregations of ABC-IN/KY to get to know one another better and to strengthen our longstanding relationship. Three events were offered which celebrated our strengths as interrelated congregations.

The first Regionwide Fellowship and Worship event was hosted by Alexandria FBC and the Harmony Assn. on May 4, 2025. The evening began with a pitch-in of excellent homemade dishes, then delectable desserts prepared by the host church. Pastor Michael Deutsch of Alexandria FBC welcomed all, and Mark Thompson, Region Executive Minister, shared ABC-IN/KY news. The Alexandria FBC Praise Team offered music. Bruce Cochran, Region Minister-North Central, led directed prayer. Pastor Jerry Ingalls of New Castle FBC challenged attendees with his sermon, "Refreshment through Soul Companionship."

On Sunday, September 28, 2025, Aurora FBC hosted the second Regionwide Fellowship and Worship event along with the Southeast churches. And, once again, when Baptists meet, Baptists eat! Aurora FBC and others attending provided delicious fare. Pastor Harris Long of Milan FBC opened evening worship with prayer. Steve Allen, Region Minister-Southeast; Bridget Back, Trustee of Southeastern Baptist Youth Camp in Greensburg; and Paul Scott, Former Director, who still assists at Indian Creek Baptist Camp in Bedford, each offered timely Region/Camp updates. Pastor Aaron Stainbrook of New Freedom BC led music. Pastor Bill Secrest of FBC Aurora challenged attendees to "Live a Worthy Life."

Saturday, November 1, 2025, brought over 100 folks to Indian Creek Baptist Camp for the third Regionwide Fellowship and Worship event. "Camp favorites" was the lunch menu theme. Former ICBC Worship Leader Steven Cobb prepared hearts with songs of hope. Kristi Jones, Region Minister-Southwest, and Jordan and Mindy Morris of ICBC welcomed and encouraged all to enjoy "one of the greatest spaces on the face of the Earth, Indian Creek Baptist Camp." The pastoring team of Seth and Lauren Alexander of Bicknell FBC brought words of grace and challenge for all to hear. Lauren pointed out that ministering to people with trauma is a huge part of our 21<sup>st</sup> century mission field, which still has me "thinking and reeling." – Steve Allen, Region Minister



#### Logansport Association Shares in Worship as Well

One of the most fun activities of the Logansport Assn. is when the churches get together to sing and worship.

We recently met at Denver BC, where Bryce Landon is Pastor. We first gathered around tables for an evening meal and then went to the sanctuary for a time of singing and music. The sanctuary was not only filled with people, but also with the Holy Spirit and His encouragement!



#### Biblical Lesson Personified by Young Girl

One Sunday morning in a church, the youth pastor was sharing the children's story. The children came up for the talk, and one little girl was visiting that morning. She sat alone, looking frightened and almost ready to cry. As I watched, another little girl showed amazing compassion. She got up, moved over to the frightened visitor and sat beside her until the story ended.

*2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3 And he (Jesus) said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2)*

*Photos at left from Regionwide Events: (Top) Pastors Jerry Ingalls, Steve Allen, and Aaron Stainbrook at Aurora FBC (Bottom) Worshipping God with music led by Steven Cobb at ICBC (Near left) Dinner at Alexandria FBC*



#### God's Harvest

Many of our churches in NW Indiana are blessed with older members. They have been serving their churches faithfully through both blessed times and times of difficulty. Recently, I attended an event at a church I have visited many times. As I left the event that day, I said to myself, "I missed the regular door greeter today. I wonder why he wasn't there." Soon after, I learned he had passed away.

The Psalmist wrote (Chapter 116:15), "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants."

I don't like losing friends and loved ones to the grave, but in God's eyes, this is a precious thing. At the end of the harvest season, the crops need to be brought in. God is also bringing in His spiritual harvest.

- Bottom three stories on this page written by Mark Spencer

## Equipping Leaders

### Engendering a Call to Ministry

Isaiah 55:11 promises that fruit is always born from honoring the Word. The ministry of Pastor Jeff Sexton is evidence of this promise. Jeff retired from pastoral ministry in 2022 after 18 years at Calvary Baptist (Kokomo, IN) and other places of service dating back to 1979. ABC-IN/KY continues to see the fruit of his ministry. Through the years, Jeff exercised a unique gift of engendering a call to ministry in both young and old by simply inviting people to consider into what service God was calling them. Subsequently, many responded, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

Our Region has been blessed by this gift in that several ABC-IN/KY churches are now being served by people whose call to ministry was either born or nurtured during Jeff's tenure-- namely, Shelley Zook (Amo FBC), Marty Pursel (Judson BC), Bev Bubner (Young America FBC), Jennifer Drapalik (Martinsville FBC) and Steve Archer (Calvary BC-Kokomo). Others impacted by Jeff's invitation to discern their call have served in IN/KY previously &/or serve elsewhere still, including the following: Matt Slaybach (Forest BC), Troy Hatfield (Denver BC and a non-ABC church in Grand Rapids, MI), Ken Spangler, who passed away in June (Young America FBC), Andy Bertapelle (Fairmount FBC), Tim Nehre (non-ABC Missionary to Kenya) and Kristi Engle (Global Consultant, International Ministries).

We commend Jeff and his wife, Margie, for their faithfulness and are thankful for how God continues to bear fruit from Jeff's ministry here in our Region.  
– Bruce Cochran, Region Minister



(Above): Jeff and Margie Sexton

(Below) Gen Z leads worship during Preaching Conference at GLCC



### Gen Z & Creativity in Preaching Conferences Offered at Green Lake

Until this summer, the only time I had been to Green Lake Conference Center in Wisconsin was Summer of 1990 for the World Mission Conference, sponsored by International Ministries. When I learned that Greg and Heather Henson of Kairos University and Green Lake's Quest youth experience were planning two weeks geared toward aiding pastors in their preaching, I knew I had to be there. Seriously, you cannot beat the price, food, fellowship, and growth and development you experience while at Green Lake! Pastors, I would suggest you register for upcoming Creativity in Preaching Conferences as soon as possible.

The first week (June 16-20, 2025), Aaron Stainbrook, Pastor of New Freedom BC and an M28 student (from the Madison Association), and I drove to Wisconsin with excitement knowing that God was going to allow us to stretch and grow. Kristi Jones, Region Minister-Southwest, and her young daughter Rylee, and Mark Thompson, Region Executive Minister, and his daughter Clara (who is Gen Z) were also there. Pastor Stainbrook is 21 years old. I am 60 years old. What was this going to look like? There were opportunities to meet with Quest staff and participants during the week. One of the staff was Kody Friend, who is from Westport, Indiana, and will return to Green Lake for permanent employment! Our time was spent "Exploring Gen Z and Preaching" through the teachings of Tonya Gericke and Greg and Heather Henson. If you haven't investigated what makes a person Gen Z (or Generation Alpha, Millennial, Gen X, Baby Boomer, etc.), it's time you do. Pastors, it is always a good idea to learn as much as you can about your preaching audience!

The second week (August 12-14, 2025), Pastor Harris Long of Milan FBC and I made the same trek north to Wisconsin. Pastor Long is a little older than Pastor Stainbrook (you will have to ask them their age differences), yet I really appreciated Harris's sense of adventure and willingness to expand his horizons! We joined 45 others, including Aaron Stainbrook and Mark Thompson, for a Creativity in Preaching Lab that second trip. There were participants there from all over the United States and several foreign countries who are also currently pursuing theological degrees through Kairos University. I was excited to establish a new friendship with Shant Kazanjian, who pastors a church for Syrian refugees and settlers in California as he works on his doctorate from Kairos University.

Mitch Marcello, founder and director of Imago Innovation, led us through experiments in creativity with our preaching. Get this--Mitch earned the Fredricka K. Reisman Award in Creativity and Innovation and has his M.S. in Creativity and Innovation, both from Drexel University, and he holds a B.A. in Fine Arts from Carnegie Mellon. Look him up on YouTube.

Pastors, watch for the opportunity to attend the 2026 Creativity in Preaching events at Green Lake. Churches, please encourage your pastor/s to attend because it's well worth their time away! – Steve Allen, Region Minister



## Equipping Leaders

### Pastors Complete Ordination



(Left, first photo) Nathan Parker being prayed over during his ordination celebration.



(Left, 2nd photo) Friends support Evan Guse during his installation and rejoice in the ABC recognition of his previous ordination.



(Above) Young leader discussions during Fusion 2024.

Ordinations are what I like to call “high and holy days” in a Pastor’s life. They are the recognition and affirmation of God’s call on an individual’s life. As a Region Minister, it’s a great joy for me to encourage pastors through the process and then celebrate with them at their ordination service. This year, Nathan Parker, Worship Pastor of Seymour FBC, and Brad Geary, Pastor of Oregon BC, have both been ordained by their churches. Evan Guse, Pastor of Columbus FBC, who was ordained through another denomination, had his ordination recognized by the American Baptist Churches USA. Each of these pastors now has full ordination credentials through ABC USA.

To meet their ordination requirements, the Pastors had to undergo an interview with the ABC-IN/KY Committee on Ordination, Recognition and Ministerial Standing (CORMS) two times throughout the process. They also participated in a candidate assessment, wrote a lengthy ordination paper, which included their position on several theological topics, completed the Healthy Boundaries and the American Baptist History and Polity courses, and performed several other tasks.

We rejoice and celebrate with each of these churches and pastors and look forward to seeing how God works in you and through you in the years ahead. – Kristi Jones, Region Minister

(Below) Pastors enjoy what has become a cherished annual event of relaxation and fellowship watching Indianapolis Indians baseball.



### God at Work through M28

The American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky are continuing to strengthen and support local church leaders and congregations through the **Certificate in Theology** program, **M28**. M28 is a 12-course certification in subject areas that range from Old and New Testament, to Leadership, Pastoral Care and Theology. Students are paired with an experienced mentor who encourages and evaluates their course work, which is all delivered through **Kairos University**, an accredited theological school with long Baptist roots.

In 2025, we saw an additional 11 students join M28, boosting our total ABC-IN/KY enrollment to 24 students. These students are local church pastors, staff members, and lay leaders striving to be better equipped for ministry in their local context.

Among the more popular M28 classes is one titled “Communicating the Gospel in Context.” This is a preaching or communication class that helps students examine their own preaching voice and story, while enhancing their ministry of proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

M28 is just one of the ways God is at work in our Region. Please keep our M28 students and mentors in your prayers as they continue the journey of development and growth.

For those interested, you may read more about the M28 program at [www.abc-indiana.org/m28/](http://www.abc-indiana.org/m28/). – Dan Cash, Dean of M28



Yes, another exciting opportunity for pastors and church leaders is returning to Northern Indiana in Spring 2026!

For more information about the 2026 Great Lakes Leadership Retreat, go to: [www.abc-mi.org/greatlakesleadershipretreat](http://www.abc-mi.org/greatlakesleadershipretreat).

**Deadline to register: April 6, 2026.**

If you would like more information about churches or events described in this issue, contact Wendy Shuler at [wendyshuler@abc-indiana.org](mailto:wendyshuler@abc-indiana.org) or (317) 635-3552 - press 3.

## Equipping Leaders

### Value in Togetherness as *The Family of Faith*

Have you ever attended a meeting where you were the only one from your ethnic background, not fluent in the language spoken during the meeting, least experienced in the profession of those attending, and with most there being older than you by about 30 to 50 years?

Welcome, Saw Uri Tana, Youth Pastor of the Burmese Christian Fellowship (Fort Wayne, IN), to the ABC North Pastors Gathering held monthly in Markle, IN!

Saw Uri was invited to the August lunch by Peter Janzen, Pastor of Fort Wayne FBC, only to find all were white pastors ranging from ages 40 to 80! Pastor Uri shared about his background and how he came to Fort Wayne to serve as Youth Pastor under Senior Pastor Saw Lincoln, his uncle. Uri shared with the other pastors at the lunch about a problem he was facing. He was to provide a 15-minute Bible lesson in English to the Burmese youth but was concerned he lacked the proficiency to speak English that long and might not be able to hold the students' attention.

At the end of their lunchtime together, the other pastors told Uri they were going to lay hands on him and pray for him in advance of ministering to the youth. Pastor Uri knelt right there in the restaurant, bowed his head and raised his hands, while all the other Pastors laid hands on him and prayed.

The results? Well, read here Uri's email he sent to the others, following his speaking event with the church youth:

Dear Pastors,

I just wanted to say THANK YOU! Yesterday's lunch meeting/prayer session was truly a turning point for me. When I shared my struggle with English, I didn't expect such an outpouring of love and support. Your collective prayers and laying on of hands was a powerful moment, and I'm convinced it was the Holy Spirit's anointing that broke the language barrier!

Last night's Bible study with the youth was a testament to God's faithfulness. I was prepared to speak for 15 minutes, but the Spirit gave me two hours of fluent English! And to my surprise, the kids understood every word!

I'm so grateful for each of you and the unity we share in Christ. Your prayers have made a tangible difference in my life, and I couldn't be more thankful.

Thank you again for your love, support, and prayers. I'm honored to serve alongside such an amazing team of pastors!

With deepest gratitude,

Tana Nawiya (Uri)

Uri is part of a "company of Pastors" becoming a closely-knit fellowship within our ABC-IN/KY Family of Faith. Burmese Christian Fellowship, the church he serves, celebrated 25 years of ministry among us on September 16, 2025!

(Below, at left) Pastors Saw Lincoln, Peter Janzen, Saw Uri, and Rusty Strickler at the event



North Pastors gather over lunch in Markle, IN: Alan Crull, Uri Tana, David Mix, Peter Janzen, Aaron Westfall, David Mitchell, Dan Summers, Lester Jefferies and Peter Fairchild

Photos and story provided by: Rusty Strickler  
Associate Region Minister

## Expanding Mission

### Coffee Creek Association Continues to Lead Disaster Relief

The Coffee Creek Association Disaster Relief Mission Team (CCADRMT) is committed to offering relief in places where natural disasters strike while also extending the love of God made real through kindness, goodness, and faithfulness-- and with God's Spirit. The Mission Team is committed to serving three locations each year.

From March 23-26, nineteen people from ABC-IN/KY congregations traveled to Winchester, IN, to assist folks with their recovery following the March 2024 tornado. An amazing statistic which reflects the diversity of the team reveals that they had people serving who were between the ages of 10 and 81.

Then on June 9-13, eleven people from ABC-IN/KY congregations traveled to Bakersville, NC (Mitchell County), to aid in Hurricane Helene recovery. Forty-eight percent of the trees in this mountainous area were broken in two or uprooted by hurricane winds! The CCADRMT cut and split a lot of firewood and cleared fallen brush for some very thankful North Carolinians. Coffee Creek AB Men left substantial donations with the Mitchell County Long-Term Resilience Group, with Bear Creek BC members who hosted the volunteers, and a heartwarming "Love Gift" to a wife and husband who were experiencing a long-term illness that had prevented them from clearing their land and homesite. The most amazing time occurred when these homeowners offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God on the team's behalf!

The third Mission Trip of 2025 was to Hazard, KY, from October 20-23. Hazard FBC hosted the team tasked with replacing insulation and drywall ruined by the supercell that passed through Hazard and Hayden, KY, on May 17.

Disaster Relief experiences are open to more than just Coffee Creek Association churches. In fact, they are open to all churches throughout ABC-IN/KY! Folks from Tell City FBC (Evansville Association), Terre Haute FBC and Sullivan FBC (Curry's Prairie Association), and Muncie FBC (Salamonie Association) have participated alongside the CCADRMT.

It is Coffee Creek Association's prayer that when disaster strikes, God will stir the hearts of additional churches and associations from across IN/KY to join them in responding with God's love and mercy. If you are interested, the **Region Office, 317.635.3552**, can help get you in touch with Patty Short, Disaster Relief Coordinator.

### Year-Round Student Gatherings & Youth Leader Meetings

ABC-IN/KY offers quarterly FUSE Student Gatherings for students in grades 6-12 in the North, Southeast and Southwest parts of our Region. In the beginning of 2025, we had nine of these gatherings on the calendar, and all but one happened (that one had to be canceled due to snow). In September alone, we had almost 100 students between three gatherings, with numerous youth leaders present and many churches represented as well! These events followed themes such as Star Wars night, a mystery party, "oldies" night, Mario Kart, and more. Not only were they a lot of fun, but they also included time to share a meal and hear a message by various leaders from around the Region. The results were students connecting with other students, youth leaders connecting with other youth leaders, youth groups joining forces for different events throughout the year, and above all, the name of Jesus continued to be proclaimed while students were encouraged to grow in their relationship with God. It's been wonderful to watch FUSE grow, and we look forward to our next FUSE Student Gatherings in April or May and September or October of 2026 in the North, Southeast and Southwest. Watch for dates to be released at the beginning of the year.

ABC-IN/KY also convenes Youth Leader Zoom Calls on the first Tuesday of the even-numbered months (February, April, August, October), but we pause during the summer (June). These calls are opportunities for Youth Leaders to connect and pray together, as well as to learn from one another. Courtney Kindler joined one of the calls this year and shared about the monthly large group nights at Olive Branch BC, where students from several area churches join them, and then they split into small groups the rest of the weeks in the month. In October, Jeff Weber shared about how important making connections with students has been in his approach to Youth Ministry at Bicknell FBC. These calls have been recorded, so if other Youth Leaders have an interest in previous topics covered, email Region Minister Kristi Jones at [kristijones@abc-indiana.org](mailto:kristijones@abc-indiana.org).

In early 2026, we have the Fusion Youth Conference on January 23-24 at Terre Haute FBC. Students in grades 6-12 are again welcome to this regionwide annual event. Music will be led by Logan and Katie Oakes. Speakers for the conference are John Campbell, Josh White, and Mikayla Myers. This will be full of fun, worship, and the word. Cost is \$50/student, and registration is now open at [www.abc-indiana.org/event/fusion-weekend](http://www.abc-indiana.org/event/fusion-weekend).

Youth Leaders are encouraged to attend with their students. However, if your church does not have a designated Youth Leader, contact Kristi Jones, for ideas about recruiting an adult chaperone or how your students may still be included in the weekend. Please join us in praying all year long for our students and youth leaders across the Region!

## Expanding Mission

### Thank You to Our Supporters

*We are grateful to these sister churches who have given to the Region Offering from January through October to support the Ministry of the Region. (Please note that fiscal months do not follow a regular calendar.)*

Alexandria First Baptist Church  
 Avoca Missionary Baptist Church  
 Bear Creek Baptist Church, Versailles  
 Bear Creek Baptist Church, Westport  
 Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, Fillmore  
 Calvary Baptist Church of Kokomo  
 Calvary Baptist Church of Noblesville  
 Clayton First Baptist Church  
 Commiskey Baptist Church  
 Crooked Creek Baptist Church  
 Dabney Baptist Church  
 Deer Creek Baptist Church  
 Federated Church of West Lafayette  
 First Baptist Church of Anderson  
 First Baptist Church of Austin  
 First Baptist Church of Bedford  
 First Baptist Church of Bicknell  
 First Baptist Church of Bluffton  
 First Baptist Church of Bunker Hill  
 First Baptist Church of Camden  
 First Baptist Church of Columbus  
 First Baptist Church of Decatur  
 First Baptist Church of Dillsboro  
 First Baptist Church of Evansville  
 First Baptist Church of Fort Wayne  
 First Baptist Church of Jeffersontown  
 First Baptist Church of Jeffersonville  
 First Baptist Church of Lafayette  
 First Baptist Church of Madison  
 First Baptist Church of Martinsville  
 First Baptist Church of Milan  
 First Baptist Church of Monticello  
 First Baptist Church of New Market  
 First Baptist Church of Peru  
 First Baptist Church of Petersburg  
 First Baptist Church of Plainfield  
 First Baptist Church of Rochester  
 First Baptist Church of Seymour  
 First Baptist Church of Terre Haute  
 First Baptist Church of Warren  
 First Marion Baptist Church  
 First Prairie Creek Baptist Church  
 Freedom Baptist Church, Crawfordsville

Greater Hope Christian Church  
 Greencastle First Baptist Church  
 Hayden Baptist Church  
 Hills Baptist Church  
 Hope First Baptist Church  
 Iglesia Bautista de Lake Station  
 Imani Baptist Temple  
 Judson Baptist Church, Kokomo  
 Kimberlin Creek Baptist Church  
 Lancaster Baptist Church  
 Lebanon Baptist Church, Linton  
 Lewis Creek Baptist Church  
 Little Union Baptist Church  
 Meadowbrook Baptist Church  
 Mill Creek Baptist Church, Mill Creek  
 Mill Creek Baptist Church, Salem  
 Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, Madison  
 Muncie First Baptist Church  
 New Hope Baptist Church of Clay City  
 New Liberty Baptist Church of East Enterprise  
 New Providence Baptist Church, Gary  
 Oak Grove Baptist Church  
 Oakdale Baptist Church  
 Patriot Baptist Church  
 Pleasant View Baptist Church  
 Poneto Baptist Church  
 Quincy Baptist Church  
 Riverside Avenue Baptist Church  
 Rock Creek Baptist Church  
 Sardinia Baptist Church  
 Tampico Baptist Church  
 Tanglewood Baptist Church  
 Tea Creek Baptist Church  
 Tell City First Baptist Church  
 Union Baptist Church, Vevay  
 Versailles Baptist Church  
 Vienna Baptist Church  
 Waldron Baptist Church  
 Washington First Baptist Church  
 Westport Baptist Church  
 Wirt Baptist Church  
 Zion Baptist Church  
 Zotung Christian Church



# Fusion

## YOUTH MINISTRY

### Weekend

To register, go to:  
[www.abc-indiana.org/event/fusion-weekend/](http://www.abc-indiana.org/event/fusion-weekend/)  
6-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Students  
\$50/student

January 23 at 7pm - January 24 at 3pm  
Location: Terre Haute First Baptist Church  
4701 E. Poplar St. Terre Haute, Indiana  
Theme: Growing as One



Ephesians 4:15-16  
Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

### Speakers:

John Campbell



Josh White



Mikayla Myers



### Worship Leaders:

Logan and Katie Oakes

