

Metro Chicago

eWind

*Suddenly there was...a strong wind blowing, and...
they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 2:2-3, TEV)*

A weekly electronic newsletter of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago
A patchwork of varied news and announcements
from our churches, communities, denomination and other organizations,
covering a wide variety of interests reflecting the diversity of our region

December 14, 2005

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
Isaiah 11:6 (NRSV)

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Upcoming Events

December 16—Hyde Park Union Church, 5600 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, presents 11th annual Jazz Christmas, 8 p.m. Tickets can be purchased for \$25 online at www.hpuc.org or through the church office. Call 773.363.6063 or visit the website for details.

December 17—ABCMC Family Cabinet Meeting, ABCMC office, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Suite 240; 9:30 a.m.

December 18—First Baptist Church of Chicago Christmas Cantata, 935 E. 50th Street, Chicago, 11 a.m. For more information, please contact the church at 773-536-3430.

December 18—Original Providence Baptist Church Christmas Concert, 515 N. Pine Avenue, Chicago. For more information, please contact the church at 773-378-5678.

December 22—Meeting of the Ghana task force, 11 a.m., McCormick Theological Seminary.

December 26-30—ABCMC office closed. Staff will monitor voice mail and email.

December 30, 31—Youth Encounter, First Baptist Church, 935 E. 50th Street, Chicago. Noon to 5 p.m. Thursday; 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday.

January 6—Registration deadline for online class “Connecting Faith and Health in the Congregation” (February 6-May 19) from North Park Theological Seminary. For information, phone 773-244-6201.

January 6—Registration deadline for online class “Experiences of the Body in Pastoral Ministry” (February 6-May 19) from North Park Theological Seminary. For information, phone 773-244-6201.

January 6-7—“Understanding the Bible,” Rickman Center, Jefferson City, MO. For more information, please phone 800-626-5924.

January 11—9 a.m. to 4 p.m., “What Religious Organizations Need to Know about the Law,” North Park University, 3225 West Foster Avenue, Chicago. For more information, go to http://www.northpark.edu/axelson/religiousorg_law.cfm.

January 18-25—Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Resources for the 2006 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are available electronically at the World Council of Churches web site, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/wop2006contents.html>.

January 22—6th Annual Ecumenical Prayer Service, sponsored by the Ecumenical Millennium Committee (of which ABCMC is a part), Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Luke, 1500 W. Belmont Avenue, Chicago; 4 p.m.

February 6-May 19—Online class “Connecting Faith and Health in the Congregation” from North Park Theological Seminary. For information, phone 773-244-6201. Register by January 6.

February 6-May 19—Online class “Experiences of the Body in Pastoral Ministry” from North Park Theological Seminary. For information, phone 773-244-6201. Register by January 6.

February 14-23—World Council of Churches 9th Assembly, "God, In Your Grace, Transform the World," Porto Alegre, Brazil. Visitors can register through the Mutirao Program. Information on the 9th Assembly is available at www.wcc-assembly.info.

March 21-24—SCUPE’s biennial congress on urban ministry, Chicago. For more information and registration, visit www.scupe.com/Programs/Congress/cngrs_homepage.htm.

April 17-20—Ministers Council's "Wait on the Lord" conference.

May 10-24—ABCMC Mission Partnership Trip to Ghana.

May 15—Deadline for submitting a proposal for a Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal grant.

July 27-29—Missional Church Conference.

Christmas Concerts and Cantatas

Hyde Park Union Church will present the 11th Annual JAZZ CHRISTMAS featuring the legendary Willie Pickens Trio on Friday, December 16, 2005 at 8 p.m. This year's concert will feature guest musical artists vocalist Maggie Brown and saxophonist Charles McPherson. The concert will be at the church, 5600 S. Woodlawn Ave., Chicago. Tickets can be purchased for \$25 online at www.hpuc.org or through the church office. Call 773.363.6063 or visit the website for details. All proceeds from the concert benefit Centers for New Horizons

The **First Baptist Church of Chicago** choir is presenting a cantata, "God's Love Gift", by Harold DeCou, Sunday, December 18, 2005, during the regular service time, 11 a.m. The church is at 935 E. 50th Street, Chicago. Everyone is welcome to come to this special service.

The **Original Providence Baptist Church** will present its Annual Christmas Concert, "**Christmas Joy**" on Sunday, December 18, 2005. Directed by the Minister of Music, Mr. Julius H. White, the concert will feature the Original Providence Mass choir, accompanied by an instrumental ensemble. The choir will sing songs of praise that celebrate the joys of the season. The holiday concert will feature Grammy nominated Special guest artist **Kim McFarland**. The concert will begin promptly at 3:42 p.m. with joyous pageantry. The community is invited to come and share this joyous occasion at Original Providence Baptist Church, 515 N. Pine Avenue in Chicago's Austin Community. For more information contact the church at 773-378-5678.

Respecting Religious Diversity During the Holiday Season

By J. Brent Walker, Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
December 9, 2005

Are "Christian haters" and "professional atheists" engaged in an all-out war on Christmas, as FOX News' anchor John Gibson claims? I don't think so—unless one is prepared to say that President Bush and the First Lady are leading the effort. This year's White House greeting card extends "best wishes for a holiday season of hope and happiness." No mention of "Merry Christmas" from the First Family.

About a dozen holy days are observed by various religious groups between Thanksgiving and New Year's. For decades we have been confronted by that "December dilemma" of how to acknowledge and celebrate winter religious holidays, usually in the context of the schools, in a way that is constitutional and culturally sensitive. People of good faith, including the Baptist Joint Committee, have worked long and hard to develop guidelines that comply with the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment's religion clauses, and respect the amazing religious diversity in this country.

There is widespread agreement that:

1. Holiday concerts in the public schools can and should include religious music along with the secular, as long as the sacred does not dominate.
2. Religious dramatic productions can be presented in the public schools as long as they do not involve worship and are part of an effort to use religious holidays as an occasion to teach about religion.
3. Free standing crèches, as thoroughly religious Christian symbols, should not be sponsored by government, but Christmas trees and menorahs are sufficiently secular to allow their display without a constitutional problem.

Having settled many of the legal issues, some are now bent on fighting battles in a culture war against an enemy that does not exist. Some on the religious and media right lament political correctness run amok by calling a Christmas tree a "holiday tree" and extending "seasons greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas." In fact, they have threatened lawsuits to rectify such indiscretions and, in the private sector, encouraged a boycott of merchants that fail to use the right words.

What irony and how sad—to be picking a fight over what to call a season that for many celebrates the coming of the Prince of Peace. We would all do well to take a deep breath and exercise some common sense as we think and talk about this season.

Christmas is Christmas and a tree is a tree. There's nothing wrong with calling it what it is: a Christmas tree. And it is perfectly appropriate to extend a specific holiday greeting such as my Jewish friends do when they wish me a "Merry Christmas," and I return a "Happy Hanukkah."

But often it's quite appropriate to wish another "happy holidays" or "season's greetings." It's just a matter of good manners and common courtesy. If I am talking to a person whose religious affiliation I do not know, I will employ the more general greeting. And the same goes for merchants who have advertised goods to Americans of many religious traditions who may or may not celebrate Christmas.

None of this disparages Christmas one iota or diminishes my enjoyment of it in the least.

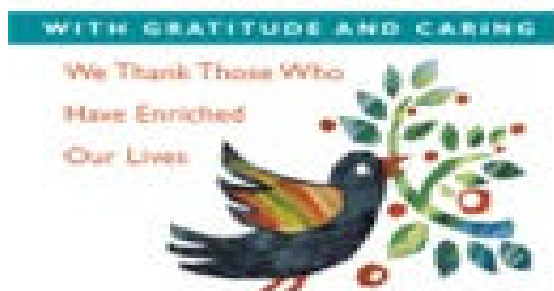
Then why are these culture warriors bound to start a brouhaha in the midst of the love, joy, peace and hope of Advent?

It's part of a concerted effort to affirm the mythical "Christian nation" status of the United States. (By the way, the Puritans and many other religious people well into the 19th century refused to celebrate Christmas because they thought it was unchristian and not supported by Scripture). So, in the words of the title of the Beatles song, "I, Me, Mine," it's all about ME and the brash assertion of MY supposed right to impose my religion on others. Moreover, and I hope it is not a too jaded thought, these bombastic diatribes about a war on Christmas attract publicity and make for good fund raising. (Truth be known, the Christmas spirit is threatened more by runaway commercialism—beginning just after Halloween!?!—than by any supposed cultural hostility to a holiday that more than 90 percent of our citizens celebrate.)

No, we do not need government promoting our religious holidays to the exclusion of others. Nor do we need a corps of purity police trying to dissuade our efforts to respect the religious diversity that is the hallmark of this country.

To all of our readers, then: Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a Joyous Kwanzaa, Martyrdom Day of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Bodhi Day, Maunajiyaras Day, Beginning of Masa'il, Nisf Sha'ban and Yalda Night, Yule and Shinto Winter Solstice, and Ramadan! Or, happy holidays!

Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering 2005



The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering (RMMO) is promoted and received in American Baptist congregations during November and December each year. Prayerfully decide how you can support the vital ministries supported by this offering. Please give when your congregation receives the offering. Since 1935, American Baptists have contributed to special offerings received in their churches for retired ABC ministers and missionaries, or their widowed spouses. The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering (RMMO) was established in 1977.

Through this annual offering, American Baptist congregations say **thank you** in a tangible way to the denomination's retired ministers and missionaries or their widowed spouses.

The offering provides them with:

- Emergency and other financial assistance, based on financial need.
- Thank You checks, based on 15 or more years of ABC service.

Receipts from the 2004 RMMO totaled \$1,764,749, a 1.1% increase over the 2003 receipts of \$1,744,801. Of this amount, \$774,564 was made available to meet immediate emergency and special financial needs. The balance of the receipts was distributed by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) on behalf of American Baptists in the form of Thank You checks: 3,252 checks were distributed in 2004, ranging from \$53.50 to \$428. The average check was \$304.49.

PSW Board Recommends Withdrawal from ABCUSA

On Wednesday, December 7, 2005, representatives from the General Executive Council (GEC) of the ABCUSA met with the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest (ABCPSW), concerning that region's contemplated withdrawal from the denomination. Representatives from the GEC were Desmond Hoffmeister, Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountain Region, and Al Fletcher, Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of Main. ABCPSW's Executive Committee included Brian Scrivens, Doug Copeland, Daniel Huerta, Jerri Hubbard and Dale Salico, Executive Minister of ABCPSW.

Desmond Hoffmeister reported, "We were received with grace, kindness and hospitality. The conversation was conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect, characterized by a spirit of openness and honesty. We listened, laughed, challenged, questioned, disagreed, dreamed, lamented and exchanged unscripted thoughts together in an atmosphere of fragile trust."

Desmond continued, "We communicated both the support of PSW's sympathizes, as well the anger of those who feel the pain, agony and frustration of broken relationships built over a century in pursuit of a shared vision for ministry. We heard their frustration of their perception of being misunderstood, disrespected and undermined."

"We challenged some of their assumptions, were surprised by some of their assertions, and they were surprised by some of the information that we shared. They were encouraged by the fact that we represented all the covenanting partners."

Both groups presented their perspective, and each group listened to the other with open hearts. Desmond stated, "At the end of the process we felt satisfied that we faithfully executed your mandate. We feel satisfied that we have done everything humanly possible to challenge and persuade PSW to reexamine their present course." Nonetheless, the meeting concluded with the sense that ABCPSW's Executive Committee would probably proceed with its recommendation for withdrawal.

On Friday, December 9, 2005, ABCUSA General Secretary Roy Medley received word of a decision made by the ABCPSW Board of Directors: "The American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest Board of Directors recommends that the Region withdraw from the Covenant of Relationships of the American Baptist Churches USA."

"Therefore, the Board of Directors calls for a Special Meeting of delegates from the churches."

(Specific date to be confirmed the week of December 12, 2005) The purpose of this meeting of delegates from the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest churches is for the Board to receive an expression of the will of the delegates to provide the Board with the guidance and input it needs to make a responsible and informed decision on withdrawing from the Covenant of Relationships of the American Baptist Churches USA.”

ABC Leaders Express Regret, Concern Over PSW Recommendation

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS)—American Baptist leaders have responded with profound regret and concern over the recommendation issued on Dec. 8 by the Board of Directors of the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest to withdraw that region from the denomination’s Covenant of Relationships. A regional meeting of its churches to advise the leadership is tentatively scheduled in May 2006. After that meeting, the Board will make its final decision. If approved, the recommended action would effectively remove the region from a formal relationship with the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

“American Baptists are deeply disappointed at the decision of the leadership of the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest to recommend a break-away from the denomination,” General Secretary Dr. A. Roy Medley said today.

The conflict American Baptists find themselves in is sometimes described as a liberal/conservative division over the issue of homosexuality. In reality, American Baptist statements on human sexuality and marriage have consistently been conservative, evangelical and traditional. We all hold biblical authority as primary for Christian discipleship and church life—but we have always respected dissent in interpretation.

When the proposal was first made to break Covenant, one of the region’s own Board members wrote, “I voted against withdrawing from the ABCUSA because I do not agree with the idea of requiring uniformity in the matter of interpretation of scripture, in this case, in the area of human sexuality. If there is one principle that drew me to become an American Baptist, it was the belief that each person can read the Bible and form his or her own conclusions without any imposition from others. As Baptists, we agree on a number of central Bible doctrines but still affirm the freedom of each individual to interpret scripture for himself or herself, under the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

Even though Baptist churches have been organized in America from the 1600s until the present, it wasn’t until 1907 that the Northern Baptist Convention, now American Baptist Churches in the USA, was formed. In structuring a national denomination, these Baptists were careful to safeguard the primacy of the local church so that the national body could not usurp the rights and privileges of the local congregation to exercise authority over them. These basic principles were derived from the Bible and represented early Baptist desire to properly reflect the New Testament teaching concerning the nature of the church. The principle of the primacy and autonomy of the local church is reflected in the name—the denomination is not the American Baptist Church—it is the American Baptist Churches.

“Because schism in the church is grievous to our Lord, we have done—and will continue to do—everything we can to maintain the unity of the Body of Christ, which is so clearly taught in scripture,” Medley emphasized.

In order to clearly understand the concerns of the Pacific Southwest, and in the hope of maintaining the desired unity of Christ’s Body, many national and regional officers and staff have

devoted extensive energy, time, resources and prayer in continuing dialogue with the region. In addition to previous visits by the President, the General Secretary, and the National Executive Council, Dr. Dale V. Salico, Executive Minister of the Pacific Southwest, has had multiple opportunities to speak to the concerns of the region, including meetings with the Regional Executive Ministers Council, the General Board Executive Committee, and the full General Board—the denomination’s governing body.

One result of these meetings was a decision by the General Executive Council to send a delegation to meet with the appropriate leadership groups of the region. Dr. Alfred Fletcher of the American Baptist Churches of Maine and Dr. Desmond Hoffmeister of the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains, were appointed and made themselves available for whatever meetings would be most helpful to the region leadership. They spent six hours of discussion with the five-member Executive Committee. There was a meeting of the full Board that followed, to which the two Executive Ministers were not invited.

Fletcher and Hoffmeister, in their meeting with the Executive Committee, expressed the deep care and concern of all mission partners in the denomination toward what, for over 100 years, has been one of the strongest regions in the denomination. They reported: “We made a pastoral and passionate appeal on behalf of the GEC for PSW to remain at the ABCUSA table. We challenged some of their assumptions, were surprised by some of their assertions, and they were surprised by some of the information that we shared. They were encouraged by the fact that we represented all the covenanting partners. Notwithstanding the positive tone of the meeting, we left feeling that it will take a monumental effort to reverse the advanced and propelling momentum of their intended process.”

If the region withdraws, it will assume control of the disbursement of mission money historically given by the churches in support of American Baptist missions. In 2004, that amount was over \$2.9 million. At the same time, as the region is distancing itself from the denomination and expressing the intent to formally break covenant, the Pacific Southwest is negotiating ways to continue doing ministry with American Baptists—specifically the pension/benefit and mission boards of the denomination.

In the final analysis, each of the 300 churches in the Pacific Southwest will make its own decision regarding its continuing relationship with ABCUSA. Each church—in the Baptist way of decision making—will have the opportunity to choose for itself.

“Regardless of the region’s decision, there will be a continuing American Baptist presence in southern California,” Medley said. “Every effort will be made to enable and support churches wishing to remain in covenant with us.”

In addition, Medley stated, “The Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society, one of the most racially and ethnically diverse evangelical mission organizations in the nation, is a cooperating American Baptist region, and has given us assurances through its Executive Minister, Dr. Samuel Chetti, that it will stay at the table.”

In reflecting upon his visit to southern California, Fletcher said, “Hope keeps bringing us back.”

Medley added, “And in that hope we press on.”

Children’s Ministries

Do you have special interest and experience related to children's ministries? Perhaps you would like to provide an article for *The Pebble*, the children's ministry newsletter of National Ministries. Themes for upcoming issues are "Children and Divorce," "Children and Poverty" and "Discipline."

You may write an article, or you may host an interview with Wendy Morris, editor of *The Pebble*, and leave the writing to her. Theme-related poetry is also welcome. You can see the current issue by going to www.nationalministries.org, and clicking on children and youth. The deadline for "Children and Divorce" will be February 15.

If you would like to contribute to these issues of *The Pebble*, please contact Wendy at wem@ameritech.net.

Christmas Office Schedule

The ABCMC office will be closed Monday-Friday, December 26-30. The staff will monitor email and voicemail. There will be no *eWind* on December 28. The ABCUSA Mission Center will be closed on the same day.

Missionary Kids

Growing up as the child of missionaries ministering abroad brings challenges. We have reason to praise God and be very proud of some of our missionary kids (MKs).

One of our MKs, **Marcie Chapman** (daughter of Glen & Rita Chapman in Democratic Republic of the Congo), will graduate on December 18 from the University of California at Davis with a BS in International Agriculture Development with an emphasis on crop production and a minor in French. She will stay in Davis for the next quarter to study for her GRE and then return to the DR Congo for a few months to visit with family and friends. She would appreciate your prayers for her future plans.

Ann and Bruce Borquist, ABC Missionaries in Brazil, write concerning their MKs:

If you were a teenager, what would it be like to leave your friends, your dog, and your favorite pizza parlor to move to another country where all your classes are taught in another language, you wear a school uniform, and there's no such thing as a Philly cheese steak sandwich? Or imagine that you're in college and decide to study at a university in a foreign country. Our son, **Asa** (13), and daughter, **Elena** (20) have done just this. They are "MKs" – missionary kids, or "KMs" as Asa likes to point out – kid missionaries. Both of them have been building bridges of love and understanding in unique ways with our Brazilian sisters and brothers.

Last week, Asa represented his class at a special convocation at a large Christian school about 5 km from our apartment. The students have been working on a project all year called *Vivendo as Diferenças – Living [with] Differences*. They learned about people with physical disabilities, street people, children with cancer, elderly people discarded by their families, and so forth. More important, they put into practice Jesus' command to love and care for people of all kinds regardless of their physical, racial, economic, or religious status. Asa is a living example of the lesson, since he is the only American in his class of 37. His professor de geografia (Geography teacher) was very proud of how well Asa spoke in front of about 250 classmates and teachers – in Portuguese, no less!

Elena, like Asa, is the only American and one of the few Christians in her art and language classes at the university. Less than 5 months after her arrival, she is already an active member of the worship team and young adult ministry at Igreja Batista Reviver (The Renewed/Revived Baptist Church). She has begun teaching English classes at the church and is donating the

proceeds to mission. This summer (December and January), she hopes to reach out with Jesus' love to street youth in our area.

Lilly Endowment National Clergy Renewal Program

Lilly Endowment Inc. has announced that its popular National Clergy Renewal Program will continue for a seventh year. The Indianapolis-based Endowment offers grants of up to \$45,000 to congregations across the country to allow their pastors to spend some time away from the daily demands of parish ministry. "Pastors and congregations both benefit from this period of renewal," said Craig Dykstra, Endowment senior vice president for religion. "The pastors are given a rare opportunity to dig deep into what 'makes their hearts sing.' The renewal and refreshment of a pastor's heart is key to the spiritual vitality of a congregation's life. That is why we suggest that, before they move too quickly to figure out the details of their renewal proposal, pastors reflect carefully about what kinds of experiences will touch them most deeply."

Most pastors who receive the grant end up spending three to four months away from their churches. Their experiences both open their minds to new possibilities and connect them more deeply with what really matters to them. They travel the world, study things they really care about, and reconnect with family and friends from years past.

"As they explore the roots of their religious traditions, write poetry, practice contemplative prayer, and spend weeks or months in significantly different cultural contexts," Dykstra said, "they come to see their ministries with fresh eyes. At the same time, the congregations often come to see their pastors and themselves in a new way as well. The planning process itself gives them a better understanding of what their pastors do, and their appreciation for them grows. Sometimes congregations decide to undertake a spiritual journey of their own alongside the pastor; they may read some of the same books the pastor is reading or form discussion groups around the sabbatical theme. Comments from former recipients prove to us that both pastors and congregations find the whole experience empowering and exciting."

As many as 120 congregations will be selected for the 2006 program. They will join the more than 600 that have received grants since 2000. While each grant proposal may request up to \$45,000, up to \$15,000 of that may be used for congregational activities during the pastor's absence.

The brochure/application is available on the Endowment's Web site, www.lillyendowment.org. Interested persons may call 317/916-7350, e-mail clergyrenewal@yahoo.com or write Lilly Endowment, 2801 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind. 46208.

Completing the application requires a joint effort of the pastor and congregation; applicants are encouraged not to put off applying until the last minute. "The process takes some time," cautions Dykstra. "It involves intentional and purposeful discussion between the congregation and the pastor. It is not just a form that can be filled out overnight. We have found, however, that - even among congregations that did not receive grants - the application process itself helped them focus on issues such as effective leadership, the future directions of the congregation, and the like."

Also on the Endowment's Web site are two documents that applicants may find helpful: "What Makes a High-Quality Proposal?" and "Grace Notes." Both the brochure and the Web site also suggest possible reading materials for interested persons. To be eligible, ministers must have earned at least a master of divinity degree. The program is open to all Christian congregations in 49 states and the District of Columbia. The deadline for proposals is May 15, 2006.

Clergy Spiritual Growth

Check out the Ministers Council web site, and learn about the upcoming "Wait on the Lord" event, to take place in April 2006 in Orlando, Florida. For information, go to <http://www.ministerscouncil.com/WaitontheLordInformation.aspx>. For registration, see <http://www.ministerscouncil.com/Wait%20on%20the%20Lord/WOTLRegistrationInfo.aspx>

Prayer Requests

Missionaries Ann and Bill Clemmer ask that we pray for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On Sunday, Dec. 18th the referendum vote on the Constitution is scheduled. It is the forerunner of the presidential elections set for April of 2006. 20 million voters in 40,000 polling stations across Congo will decide whether or not to accept the new constitution. It will be the first election since independence in 1960. Much is riding on the process...even more so on the Presidential elections in the spring.

Please pray for Ellen Brown, Special Assignment Missionary, who will be leaving International Ministries at the end of this year.

Please pray for all our Missionary Kids.

Please hold in prayer those who are alone, or separated from loved ones, in this season of celebration.

Please remember in prayer persons who are suffering with illnesses at this time of year. Please pray also for their caregivers and loved ones.

Please remember with prayers of thanksgiving those who have retired from ministries in our denomination.

The Metro Chicago *eWind* is an electronic communication intended for the people of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. The events publicized herein do not necessary express the opinions of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. We welcome your news, prayer requests and comments. Please email your communications to abcmchi@aol.com. We will email the newsletter each Wednesday. If you spot a typographical error in *eWind*, please let us know at the ABCMC office, 773-695-9791 or abcmchi@aol.com.