

Metro Chicago

eWind

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

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

September 23, 2009

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.
Joel 2:28

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ABCMC NEWS

Vital Ministries: Leverage Points of Lay and Clergy Leadership

Who among us doesn't want our churches to become even more vibrant, vital, healthy? The question always is, "How?"

ABCMC is sponsoring a seminar on Saturday, October 3 to help lay and clergy leaders in congregations gain answers to that "How" question.

Dr. Jeff Woods, Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries, ABCUSA, an expert in this field, will lead us. We asked Dr. Woods to give us a glimpse of what will happen in the morning and afternoon sessions. Please take a careful look at what he has provided us below.

During the first session, participants will have an opportunity to explore findings related to church health and church growth. With so much written about church growth and church health, it can be difficult to sort out the hunches from reality in order to know what works and does not work in promoting church health and congregational renewal. In this workshop, Dr. Woods draws from his involvement on the "Pulpit and Pew" project as well as numerous research papers presented at the Religious Research Association over the last few decades in order to respond to questions such as:

- What are the marks of a healthy church?
- What is the number one concern of congregations?
- Where are the gaps in community ministry?
- Who is healthier—larger or smaller congregations?
- How does location influence a congregation's ability to grow?
- What type of member is more likely to invite their neighbor to church?
- Who is actually reaching the unchurched?

The second session will further explore the strategies from the first session in a “coaching style” workshop. Five “leverage points” of church vitality will be explored with lots of opportunity for group learning and interaction with the instructor. Participants will take away from this workshop the development of specific skills as well as products resulting from the application of those skills, including:

- Tools for discovering how to make worship more uplifting
- A framework for defining local identity, mission, and vision
- Pathways to creating ownership of a vision
- A procedure for following up with guests
- The wisdom of knowing how to use consensus and synergy in the congregation
- Ideas for engaging members in the most important aspects of God's call.

The seminar will take place at North Shore Baptist Church, 5244 N. Lakewood Avenue, Chicago from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Members of congregations should register for the seminar by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, September 30. Please complete the registration form that is attached with this issue of *eWind* and email it to office@abcmc.org or fax to 773-804-1656 or mail to American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, 7035 W. Grand Avenue, Suite 102, Chicago, IL 60707. OR you may register at ABCMC's web site, http://www.abcmc.org/documents/Registration_Form_Congregational_Vitalization.pdf Registration is due by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, September 30.

Thinking Theologically

Don't miss the new issue of “Thinking Theologically for the Common Good” at the end of this issue of *eWind*. It is ABCMC's Executive Minister Larry Greenfield's latest biweekly column from *The Common Good Network*. This timely article is “Race, Grace, and Vulnerability.”

World Mission Offering

It's time for ABC's annual World Mission Offering. Based on Philippians 2:5-7, the theme for this year's offering is “Surprised by Walking in Different Shoes.”

Church members at the Mansion of Light Baptist Church in Costa Rica faced their deep fear of the drug-using young adults in their community by welcoming these forgotten people into their church for a home-cooked meal. International Ministries missionary Mylinda Baits, who serves this church, hosted a 2009 American Baptist Women's Ministries tour where members of the outcast group surprisingly shared their gifts of break dancing with the delighted women. Having feet fitted with a Gospel of peace, everyone is learning about the love of Jesus, and each other, walking and dancing in different shoes.

The offering helps to pay for American Baptist missions of many kinds throughout the world. It helps us to share God's Good News with people in places where most of us will never go in person. But we can be there in our hearts through our gifts to the World Mission Offering.

Every ABC church has received a tool kit about the offering. Please make use of these resources and share from your heart.

NEWS FROM ABCMC CONGREGATIONS

Festival of the Arts – Body, Mind, and Spirit

*This article is from **The Spire**, the newsletter of the Lake Street Church of Evanston.*

Lake Street Church's newly formed Arts Council is holding the first ever Festival of Arts at Lake Street Church on Saturday, September 26, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday, September 27, Noon to 3 p.m. You may join LSC visual and performing artists as they share their talents. Established, emerging, and inspired LSC artists will offer their creative gifts as a celebration of community. You may want to purchase art or simply appreciate the beauty of it. Following the Sunday worship service, teachers from the LSC-sponsored Yoga Tree will give a Yoga asana demonstration in MacLeish Hall including an explanation of Yoga philosophy.

Tae Kwon Do for Seniors



**Tae Kwon Do for Seniors (50 years of age & above)
Morgan Park Baptist Church, 11024 S. Bell Avenue, Chicago, 773-445-9443
Gymnasium, Tuesday mornings, from 9:00 until 10:15 am
First Session: Tuesday, September 29
Class size is limited: Minimum of 10 & Maximum of 24**

The instructor will be Rev. Dr. Thomas Aldworth, pastor of Morgan Park Baptist Church. Dr. Aldworth is a certified third-degree black belt (WTF & USTU) and has taught Tae Kwon Do for almost 20 years. He was a Louisiana State Champion in sparring.

There will be no fee for those attending the previous Sunday service at Morgan Park Baptist Church, otherwise the fee is \$15 per class. There will be a one-time fee for uniform & pads. The first class on September 29 is free and open to everyone.

Jazz Vespers at Woodside Church

All are invited to participate in Jazz Vespers, held the third Friday of every month—September through June—beginning at 6:00 p.m. This monthly event is designed to be spiritually uplifting with some of the area's best jazz musicians adding their musical interpretation to a selection of readings—classic to contemporary—creating a unique experience.

Jazz Vespers is presented in a coffee house setting at Woodside Church, located at 1509 East Court Street in Flint, right next to Mott Community College. A light dinner and refreshments will be served.

Mark Your Calendars for the Entire Season

In addition to the event on September 18, please mark your calendars for all of the Jazz Vespers services: Oct. 16, Nov. 20, Dec. 18, Jan. 15, Feb. 19, Mar. 19, Apr. 16, May 21 and Jun. 18.

Reservations are requested, to help Woodside prepare the supper; please call the church at 810-767-4911. Visit www.woodsidechurch.net for more information—which will be updated regularly.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Sermon Contest

This announcement is from the FaithTrust Institute, www.faithtrust.org, which is holding its fourth national sermon contest.

What are you preaching to your faith community?

The FaithTrust Institute wants your sermons addressing child abuse, rape, and domestic violence.

Please email your sermons as a Microsoft Word attachment and as a video or audio file to training@faithtrustinstitute.org. Include your name, faith tradition, and contact information (phone number and mailing address).

Sermons will be judged on the following criteria:

- Clarity and accuracy of information about the issues
- Well-grounded presentation of theological context
- Use of sacred texts from your faith tradition
- Creativity in presenting the nuances of victimization and our faith traditions

The video or audio version of the top three sermons will be published on FaithTrust Institute's website in February 2010. **Deadline for Submission: November 30, 2009**

Walter Wink to Give Public Lecture at Chicago Theological Seminary



On Thursday, September 24, at 7 p.m., Chicago Theological Seminary, 5757 S. University Avenue, Chicago, will host Walter Wink, a noted author, theologian and Bible scholar for a lecture and book signing with the theme “Non Violence for the Violent.” Wink will address the question, “Is there a way between absolute pacifism and just war theory, a position committed to non-violence that is able to address the thorny issues of armed aggression, terrorism and civil strife responsibly?” In this presentation we will attempt to find a nonviolent path for people who are opposed to war and the mindless addiction to violence in our society, yet who are unsure of their capacity to respond with love in every situation.

Tickets will be sold at the door only. The cost will be \$20 for adults and \$10 for students. Space is limited, and tickets will be available on a first come first served basis.

Some of the books the speaker has written will be available for purchase and signing. These three books are *Engaging the Powers*, *Jesus and Nonviolence* and *Powers that Be*. Don't miss this opportunity to hear an outstanding speaker who is a gifted interpreter of scripture.

Religion and Violence

2009 McCormick Days will take place at McCormick Theological Seminary, 5460 S. University Avenue, Chicago, on the grounds of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. The dates are October 29-30. McCormick Days are not only a reunion for Alumni, but also an excellent opportunity for continuing education for all of us. Featuring excellent speakers such as Rita Nakashima Brock, Thomas Mockaitis and Daniel Little, the conference will explore contemporary impact of Christianity on world-wide violence—as well as the impact of world-violence on contemporary Christianity. To register online with a credit card, and for more information, please go to www.mccormick.edu/mcdays.

Summer Collegium

This announcement is from Virginia Theological Seminary.

Applications are now available for the Summer Collegium, a project in support of small congregations at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. Clergy (and their spouses or partners) from 25 small churches of all Christian denominations are invited to spend nine days at Virginia Seminary for encouragement, education, rest and renewal. **All expenses, including travel, books, meals, lodging, child care at home and pulpit supply, are paid by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.**

The theme of the Summer Collegium this year is Leadership in the Small Congregation. Our keynote speaker will be Alice Mann, a prolific writer on congregational ministry, and John Bell from the Iona Community in Scotland will join our worship team for the conference.

The dates for the Summer Collegium are June 23 - July 1, 2010. Application forms are on our website, www.vts.edu/education/collegium, or will be sent in the mail by emailing SummerCollegium@vts.edu or by calling 703-461-1760. Applications must be postmarked by December 15, 2009, to be considered.

ABCUSA NEWS

Other articles from the American Baptist News Service are available at <http://www.abc-usa.org/Resources/AmericanBaptistNewsService/tabid/79/Default.aspx>

Chief Minister Reddy Dies in Helicopter Crash



VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 9/17/09)—A champion of the Baptist and broader Christian community in the Indian province of Andhra, Chief Minister Dr. Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy died in a tragic helicopter crash on Sept 2nd, 2009. Baptist leaders across India and the United States have expressed their condolences for the sudden loss.

American Baptist International Ministries (IM) area director for East Asia and India, Rev. Ben Chan, met with Reddy a few years ago to discuss church issues in Andhra Pradesh. Chan remembered him as a committed Christian, along with his family who attended the Baptist Church Hyderabad which has a long relationship with IM.

"Please continue to pray for our mission involvement in South India," Chan said, "where we sponsor new church construction, theological education, leadership development and community transformation."

Reddy, his secretary, security chief and two pilots took off in bad weather. The wreckage of their helicopter was found a day later on a nearby hillside; all aboard were killed.

The office of chief minister is a political position, appointed by the province governor, and handles the day to day running of the province. Reddy was the first chief minister in Andhra Pradesh history to serve the full five years of his governor's term.

"Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy was a fine statesman, a strong humanitarian and a true and compassionate supporter of Christians," said David Sagar, general secretary of The Federation of South Asian Christians in America, and the senior pastor of Antioch Telugu Baptist Church (an ABCMC church). "Our prayers and deep condolences go out to his family and the rest of the bereaved."

Joan Friesen Named Executive Minister for ABC Greater Indianapolis



VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 9/21/09)— Rev. Joan Friesen has been elected to serve as the next executive minister for ABC Greater Indianapolis (ABCGI).

"Rev. Joan Friesen brings a variety of skills and experiences well suited for ministry with the American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis," said Dr. Wayne M. Paulsen, interim executive minister of ABCGI.

"I am delighted that she has accepted this call and I believe that she will provide the

needed leadership to help the Region move ahead with both promise and possibility," Paulsen said.

Friesen comes to this position after serving since November 2007 as director of church relations at Redwood Glen (a San Francisco Bay Area Christian Camp and Conference Center).

Prior to that, she served as minister of mission support in the American Baptist Churches of the Northwest and as a consultant to the America for Christ Offering Committee of the Board of National Ministries. Friesen is a graduate of Linfield College in McMinnville OR and American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA.

"Rev. Friesen will be a wonderful match for the current needs of the region and is perfectly equipped to lead the congregations and leaders to new heights of ministry in the Greater Indianapolis area," said C. Jeff Woods, associate general secretary for regional ministries.

"I am both honored and excited to see what God will do in us and through us in the Greater Indianapolis Region," Friesen said. "I've already been able to experience first-hand several churches that are taking seriously the call to be Christ's hands and feet in their communities."

BJC, 57 Groups Ask Attorney General to Withdraw Memo That Damages Religious Liberty

This article is from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

WASHINGTON — The Baptist Joint Committee and 57 other religious, education and civil liberties groups have [sent a letter](#) to Attorney General Eric Holder requesting that he withdraw a 2007 memo that damages religious liberty.

The memo, from June 29, 2007, "threatens core civil rights and religious freedom protections" because it interprets the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA) to allow discrimination on the basis of religion for [positions funded with federal money](#).

The groups, including some that are members of the BJC-led Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, claim that “the guidance in the [memo] is not justified under applicable legal standards and threatens to tilt policy toward an unwarranted end that would damage civil rights and religious liberty.”

RFRA was signed into law by President Bill Clinton to restore robust protection for free exercise rights after the U.S. Supreme Court sharply curtailed them in a 1990 case, *Employment Div. v. Smith*.

“Having helped to spearhead the RFRA effort, I know of no one in 1993 who thought the new law would ever be applied this way,” said J. Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

The BJC maintains that using taxpayer funds to discriminate on the basis of religion is a direct violation of the separation of church and state. This was a concern of many church-state watchers after former Pres. George W. Bush announced his faith-based plan in 2001. The Obama administration has said the religious hiring issue will be dealt with by the attorney general and the White House Counsel on a case-by-case basis.

Organizations signing the letter include: National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA; The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO; Anti-Defamation League; NAACP; The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries and the United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society.

Walker to Appear In CBS Documentary

This article is from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.



J. Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, will appear on the half-hour CBS documentary, “Religion, Politics & Advocacy,” airing Sunday in most areas on local CBS affiliates nationwide.

“Religion, Politics & Advocacy” focuses on how religious advocates spend their days – “who they are, who they represent and how they lobby Congress on behalf of those who may not have a voice.”

It also explores how religious groups balance their roles in advocacy as well as in shaping legislation, how one religious coalition’s grassroots efforts paid off when their proposal was signed into law, and how “citizen advocates” work to have their message heard by Washington lawmakers.

The documentary compiles interviews with other Washington religious advocates including: Sister Simone Campbell, advocate for the Catholic Social Justice Lobby Network; Dr. Sayid Syeed, a founder of the Islamic Society of North America; Andrew Genszler, Director of the Washington office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Rabbi

David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform.

[Check local listings](#) to find out when the special will air in your area.

Choctaw Nation Donates \$10K for Bacone Road Improvement*



**Pictured from Left to Right
Eugene Blankenship, Joy Culbreath,
Rev. Dr. Robert J. Duncan Jr.**

Muskogee, OK-In recent years, numerous potholes have popped up and started dotting the Bacone College roads and parking lots. In an attempt to rectify this issue, the historic school is focusing on raising funds for these road improvements. With a proud and long standing relationship, the Choctaw Nation has made a generous lead-donation of \$10,000 toward this effort. Bacone President, Rev. Dr. Robert J. Duncan Jr. stated, "We are very appreciative and grateful to the Choctaw Nation. They see that we are focused on our mission of educating American Indians and saw that we have a need and were very willing to help us fund this project."

Bacone College is playing an active role in "A More Beautiful Muskogee" to increase tourism and economic development. Bacone is in the process of completing improvements to its campus to serve the students and the people of Muskogee. "We are doing our best to promote Bacone and Muskogee to prospective and current students to either remain or move to Muskogee to earn a quality, college education", said Rev. Dr. Leroy Thompson, Special Assistant to the President for Admissions.

2009 Black Church Conference

"Power Connection: A Call to Greater Works" will be the theme of this year's American Baptist Black Church Conference. The conference will take place at the Holiday Inn Chicago Matteson, 500 Holiday Plaza Drive, Chicago November 3-7. The Third Baptist Church of Chicago will be the host church, and ABCMC along with the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, will be the host regions.

A pre-conference event will be a Ministers Summit November 2-3. The Ministers Summit is designed to provide dialogue, networking and resource sharing for those ministering in the African-American Community.

Speakers for the Black Church Conference will include ABCMC's own Brenda Little, Alan Ragland, Marshall Hatch, Carol Jamieson Brown, Alice Greene and Francine Stark. ABCMC's own John Sundquist and Rick Barlow will represent the American Baptist Foundation to talk about estate planning.

The conference will end with a Super Saturday Extravaganza including a Hip Hop Intergenerational Summit. This will be a great event, and a good investment of a pastor's time.

For registration and more information, please visit www.ABCPowerConnection.org.

MINISTERS COUNCIL NEWS

Uh-oh. Did I Pay My Dues?

ABCMC Ministers Council treasurer Sara Day is receiving dues for 2009 membership through September 30. That's this coming Wednesday. Dues received after that date will be for 2010.

If you have not yet paid your 2009 Ministers Council dues, please send your check to
Rev. Dr. Sara E. Day
The Ministers & Missionaries Benefit Board
2205 S. Wolf Rd. #281
Hillside, IL 60162

If you have any questions, please phone Sara at 800.531.1940.

Together in the Lord Conference

Come to Orlando January 4-7, 2010 for the *Ministry Renewal Conference!* The conference will be held at the Wyndham Resort and Conference Center, 8001 International Drive, Orlando, FL 32819. It will be presented by American Baptist Churches, USA.

For registration and conference schedule visit this link -
<http://www.ministerscouncil.org/TogetherintheLord/TITLinfopage.aspx>

HEALTH CARE NEWS

Health Care Justice Walk, Run, Roll

We are all invited to participate in or sponsor participants in the October 3 Health Care Justice Walk, Run, Roll. This event is part of the AIDS Foundation Walk. This fun-filled event will be held in Grant Park. You can sign up at <http://afc.aidschicago.org/netcommunity/cbhc>.

Health Care Sabbath

The Illinois Campaign for Better Health Care invites all ABCMC congregations to participate in this year's Health Care Sabbath on October 18. We can join congregations across the state in focusing on justice and health care disparity during the Health Care Sabbath. Resources for the event are available for free download from <http://www.cbhconline.org/issues/hcjc/sabbath.html>

PEACE NEWS

Fellowship of Reconciliation

This Invitation is from the Chicago Area Chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

You are invited to join with us on Monday, October 5, 7-9 p.m., for the Chicago Metro Area Chapter monthly meeting of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Our monthly meetings are always on the first Monday of each month; if the first Monday falls on a holiday, the meeting will then be on the next day (Tuesday). The web site is www.myspace.com/FORchicago.

In October we will feature special guest Joshua Noehrenberg, a GI resister. 27 year-old Joshua brings us his story of GI resistance and success. Joshua, a native of DuPage County, joined the military for a combination of patriotism and necessity right after high school. Joshua hopes that his story will have an important role in ending the USA's illegal occupations.

The meeting will be at the First United Church of Oak Park, 848 Lake Street, Oak Park. The church is at the corner of Lake and Kenilworth. Come to the back entrance and follow the signs. We will be meeting in the Commons area.

Directions to the church: Take the Eisenhower Expressway to Harlem Avenue, go north to Lake, turn right, and continue to Kenilworth. Turn left on Kenilworth and enter through the parking lot. Or take the Green Line to Oak Park Avenue, walk north to Lake, and go west to Kenilworth.

The organization is on Facebook. Go to www.facebook.com/group.php, then search for Fellowship of Reconciliation Chicago Chapter.

Drugs and Death at Bagram

The film *Drugs and Death at Bagram* tells the story of a young American military man in Afghanistan. On July 12, 2004 Army Specialist John Torres was found dead in a latrine at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. He had a single gunshot wound in his head. His death was ruled a suicide, but members of his unit and family believed he was murdered. Initial information received by the family led them to believe that U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan may have killed John for talking openly about heroin use among his fellow soldiers. Shortly before his death he had called his father, Juan Torres, from Afghanistan, and he was overwhelmed with fear. He was distraught because of rampant drug abuse, drug dealing and trafficking inside the army base. Since the day in 2004 when the young man was found dead, his father has been fighting to uncover the truth. This documentary film presents part of the discovery.

We are invited to attend a showing of the film hosted by the Northwest Suburban Peace and Education Project (www.nwsbpep.org). It will be shown on **Friday, December 18 at 7 p.m. at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, 500 N. Dunton Avenue, Arlington Heights**. A discussion will follow the viewing of the film (<http://drugsanddeathatbagram.com/index.html>).

John Torres was right to be concerned about the substance abuse he witnessed all around him, even though military officials deny that it is taking place. Soldiers who come home addicted are reluctant to talk about it, even after they have been discharged from their military duties. The effects of using opiates while at war are lasting effects for individuals and their loved ones, and ultimately for American society. For more information about use of heroin by U.S. military personnel serving (or formerly having served) in Afghanistan, you may wish to read some online articles such as http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/08/07/afghan_heroin/

John did not use opiates, however. His death was, in all likelihood, related to another matter that the military does not want us to know about. The film will be an eye-opener.

Northwest Suburban Meeting

The Northwest Suburban Peace and Education project will hold its monthly meeting on Tuesday, October 13 at 7 p.m. at the South Church, 501 S. Emerson Street, Mount Prospect. All who are interested in helping young people consider careers in peacemaking and social improvement are welcome. For more information, please see the group's web site, www.nwsbpep.org.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Please pray for world peace.

Please pray and take action for real reform of the health care system in the United States.

Please pray for Denard Newell, the new pastor at Logan Street Baptist Church in Batavia. Please also hold in prayer the church's new Executive Administrative Assistang, Kirstin Nolberto.

Please lift up in prayer the Christians of southern India dealing with the loss of Chief Minister Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy. Please pray also for ABC's missions in India.

Please remember in prayer ABC missionaries Chuck and Ramona Shawver. They serve in the field of leadership training in partnership with the Baptist Seminary of Mexico and the Council of Indigenous Evangelical Churches of Mexico (CICEM). They have recently moved and established their home and base of operations in Mexico City. Anybody who has ever moved knows they need our prayers. Please pray also for the seminarians and others with whom they are ministering.

Please pray for ABC missionary Kim Brown in Thailand. Please lift up in prayer one of her ministries in Thailand, the House of Blessing, which is a preschool program that targets needy children from ethnic minority groups who might otherwise not attend school. Now in its 8th year, the program has some impressive statistics, including the fact that 88% of the children who have graduated from the daycare program are now enrolled in Thai schools. Please pray for all the young ones to whom Kim and her colleagues are extending the love of Jesus.

CALENDAR

NOW—Please take action—phone calls, emails, letters to the editor—for health care reform.

September 24—CTS Advent Lectionary Workshop, Covenant United Church of Christ, 1130 E. 154th Street, South Holland, IL, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Advance registration \$40 until September 10; \$45 thereafter.

September 24—Lecture and book signing by Walter Wink, Grand Taylor Chapel, Chicago Theological Seminary, 5757 S. University Avenue, Chicago, 7 p.m.

October 3—ABCMC gathering with Jeff Woods on vitalizing congregational ministries, North Shore Baptist Church, 5244 N. Lakewood Avenue, Chicago, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m..

October 4—ABCMC Sunday with Larry Greenfield preaching, Woodside Church, 1409 E. Court Street, Flint, Michigan.

October 4—Lynne Kelley preaching at Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, 11 a.m.

October 7—Student Life Luncheon featuring Hadeer Abo El Nagah and Deborah Kohler, Prael College Center (PCC) at Mott Community College located at 1401 East Court St., Flint, Michigan, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

October 11—Hadeer Abo El Nagah preaches at Woodside Church, 1409 E. Court Street, Flint, Michigan.

October 11—ABCMC Sunday with Larry Greenfield preaching, Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, 11 a.m.

October 18—Health Care Sabbath.

October 18—ABCMC Sunday with Larry Greenfield preaching, Montrose Baptist Church, 4411 N. Melvina, Chicago.

November 3-7—2009 Black Church Conference, Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center, 500 Holiday Plaza Drive, Matteson, Illinois.

November 8-9—Hidden Treasures: Spiritual Wisdom Through the Voices of Women in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Catholic Theological Union, 5416 S. Cornell, Chicago. For more information and registration, please call the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union, 773-371-5432, or visit www.ctu.edu

November 14—ABCMC Annual Meeting

December 12—ABCMC's 3rd annual Advent and Christmas Music Festival, Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, 3 p.m.

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 necessarily express the opinions of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. We email the newsletter each Wednesday. We welcome your news, prayer requests and comments. Please email your communications to the editor, Lynne Kelley, at lynne@abcmc.org. If you spot a typographical error or other mistake in *eWind*, please let us know at the ABCMC office, 773-804-1655. The ABCMC office is at 7035 W. Grand Avenue, Suite 102, Chicago, Illinois 60707



Reflections

Vol VIII no. 19, September 18, 2009

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT THE COMMON GOOD

*Reflections on theology, scripture, and public life
from the Rev. Larry Greenfield.*

"Race, Grace, and Vulnerability"

I was ashamed of myself and envious of my daughter. That was more than thirty-some years ago. But it's still the case.

My younger daughter, Jessica, was watching a TV program in the family room of our third floor apartment. At one point she yelled, "Daddy, Daddy, come here, Mrs. Brown is on the show."

I got up from my desk in the other room and joined Jessica as she excitedly pointed to the screen saying, "See, Daddy, it's Mrs. Brown, it's Mrs. Brown!"

I looked carefully at the female characters on the TV, some white and some black, while rummaging my brain for all the possible Mrs. Browns whom the Greenfields knew — and drew a blank.

"I'm sorry, honey, but I don't see who you are referring to," I told Jessica.

She showed her irritation, as she said, "Right there, Daddy, right there!"

I looked carefully again and realized she was pointing to an African American woman on the screen. I brain-rummaged again: among our African American acquaintances, were there any Mrs. Browns and did they look anything like the one Jessica was pointing to?

I came up blank again, and Jessica could tell.

She moved even closer to the screen and put her finger on the woman she knew looked just like Mrs. Brown. "There, Daddy, there!"

Only then did I look carefully at the woman's facial features and began to realize — yes, Jessica was right — she looked a great deal like the Mrs. Brown we knew very well: the white wife of a friend I taught with.

The eyes, the nose, the mouth, the frame, the posture, all strikingly similar.

That's when I started being really ashamed of myself and envious of my daughter.

Growing up, even at her very young age, in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic neighborhood, going to nursery school and church and the playground with children from very different family and cultural backgrounds, allowed Jessica to see the physical similarities between our white friend and the black actress without the lens of race.

And obviously, I couldn't. Not given how I was raised as a child. Not with the racial stereotypes of my family, and my neighborhood, and my church, and my culture.

I realized right then, just as I have realized repeatedly since, that I had been given a racial lens — not so much for vision but for valuation — at a crucial stage of my childhood development that caused me to distort reality.

And I began to realize then, that with the distorted lens that had been inserted into my consciousness and unconsciousness, I would always have to be intentional about compensating for my weakness, for my prejudice, for my racism. I needed, as it were, a corrective lens to re-form, re-shape, re-envision my consciousness and maybe even my unconsciousness.

It will be a challenge and a task until the day I die.

My prayer has been that my lens of racial distortion will not be visited upon the generations of my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I'm pretty confident that this has also been the prayer of many others in my own generation.

So it was natural, I suppose, that so many of us thought that with the election of a mixed-race president, our nation, our society, our culture had realized a major step, with God's grace, in making good on our prayer.

But it appears that such an assessment came far too soon. Already we are experiencing a slightly veiled, if not, in a few instances, a blatantly explicit, redistribution of racially distorted lenses.

We see it in attacks on the president himself — questioning his birthplace, his religious and civic faith, his political motives, integrity, and honesty — and in ad hominem attacks on many of his proposals. And beyond the president we can now recognize those lenses have been used all along in our criminal justice system, in our public educational system, in our social welfare system, and in our economic system, but now with renewed energy in resistance to the promise of reform in these realms.

The lenses are still operational, maybe with renewed strength.

Understand, I'm not in any way suggesting that this racism accounts for all of the opposition against the president and against the reform proposals coming from his administration and elsewhere. There are surely other sociological and cultural dynamics operating and there surely are principled reasons for challenging major changes in public policy. But to fail to see the racial lenses operating requires either

an admitted blindness or a deliberate decision to close one's eyes to what is happening on the matter of race.

Wherever and whenever it is operating, I am again ashamed of my nation and envious of those countries and cultures that have found their way beyond the racial divide.

Somehow we've got to learn to do it right. Somehow we've got to find those corrective lenses that will allow us to overcome the racist distortion of reality.

Maybe, for Christians at least, a clue comes from scripture, in that story from the synoptic Gospels about parents and grandparents bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing.

We typically read this text (Mark 10: 13-16; Matthew 19: 13-15, Luke 18: 15-17) as Jesus being nice to the children, patting them on their heads, blessing them in a gentle and loving way. That's probably only a tenth or a twentieth true, and maybe outright wrong.

More likely the parents and grandparents are bringing their kids to Jesus not for a pat on the head but rather out of a concern that something terrible is going to happen to the kids and they want Jesus — who they recognized as having special powers — to do something that will protect them against this tragic likelihood. They were coming because some evil reality or evil disease would capture their kids and either take away their life (kill them) or handicap them for the rest of their life. So they were coming to Jesus — to draw on an image that has current relevance — for a vaccination against this evil that could infect their children and grandchildren.

In the story, Jesus provides the kids the vaccination.

But neither the kids nor their parents and grandparents are at the center of this drama. That central role is assigned to and played out by the disciples — who are anything but children.

And they must have had some idea of why the parents and grandparents were coming to Jesus. Yet, with their own distorted lens, the disciples are the ones who see the children as disqualified for treatment by Jesus. These vulnerable kids didn't count or qualify for Jesus' attention and the administration of Jesus' gracious ministry of protection against evil. That grace, for the disciples, was reserved for others, not kids.

But, as we know from the story, Jesus doesn't rebuke the children and their parents and grandparents; instead he rebukes the disciples.

The story doesn't end, however, with this rebuke to the disciples. Jesus, in addition to vaccinating the children, ministers to the disciples. It's not a vaccination but, in their case, a new set of corrective lenses to see and understand reality. It is a set of lenses that applies to living, that is, in God's reality: the kingdom or the realm of God.

What these corrective lenses allow the disciples of Jesus to see is that, not just these vulnerable kids are in need of God's grace (protection against evil and empowerment for a flourishing life) but that everyone — even, and maybe especially, the disciples of Jesus — must become vulnerable (like the kids) if they are to be able to receive God's grace and live fully in God's realm.

With those corrective lenses, the disciples of Jesus (or anyone, for that matter) can

be vulnerable and open to God's love, vulnerable and open to receiving love from others, and, most amazing of all, vulnerable and open to loving God with a full heart, soul, mind, and strength and sharing that love with others.

Today we need to continue to bring our vulnerable children to Jesus so that, with the blessing of God's love and grace, they will be protected against the evils of our society, including a resurgent racism that can kill our children and handicap them for life.

But not just the kids. It is also the disciples, and anyone else that has already been infected by racism in our nation, who need to come for those corrective lenses that will allow us vulnerably to enter the gracious realm of God, along with the kids.

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