

News & Notes

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SUMMER 2020

“In summer, the song sings itself.”

— William Carlos Williams

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— Norma Jean-Jacques, Editor

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Spotlight on Rev. Joan Friesen

Executive Minister, ABC Greater Indianapolis



Alvin Toffler once said, “Change is not merely necessary to life; it is life.”¹ Adapting to change is also necessary in life in order to survive and thrive. Leading adaptation has been central to Rev. Joan Friesen’s service to the church.

After a stint in a corporate job she grew to dislike, Rev. Friesen said yes to God’s call to ministry and attended American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA. She notes, “Unfortunately, my seminary education in the 80s prepared me well for the church of the 50s. The church is so radically different and will continue to change. The days of ‘If the church doors are open, they will come’ are long gone.”

Despite the shifting church landscape, during her 11-year tenure as the current Executive Minister of ABC Greater Indianapolis (ABCGI), Rev. Friesen’s region has grown from 31 churches to 40. Currently, ABCGI is starting two new congregations and working with two other churches exploring membership within the region.

Living Christian Values Through Inclusion

Embracing the region’s diversity has facilitated its transition to the changing face of membership and its expansion. She remarks, “I like to say the world has come to

Indianapolis.” Rev. Friesen serves on ABC’s Burma Refugee Commission, an advocacy group for ethnic minority immigrants from Burma, who have settled in Indianapolis in large numbers and are counted among the member churches.



“I hope retirees will help us discern new ways of impacting our communities as we strive to truly be Christ’s hands and feet and serve God’s people. The Lord is mighty in all of this change and is taking us to new and exciting places. I believe the future is bright for God’s church. The church simply isn’t going to look the same as it did in the past.”

– Rev. Joan Friesen



When Rev. Friesen and her husband moved to Indianapolis from California, there were no Spanish-speaking churches in their region. Five years after Rev. Jaime Flores joined ABCGI as the Latino Ministries Strategist, the region includes five Spanish-speaking congregations. Rev. Friesen explains, “Having someone who can communicate with Latino congregants’ in their first language has been critical.”

Furthermore, four years ago, Rev. Friesen asked Ms. Shirley Alexander, one of ABCGI’s Board members, to serve as the region’s Multicultural Ministries Strategist. In this role, Ms. Alexander co-led a tele-meeting on racism with Rev. Friesen this past June in response to America’s renewed consciousness of racial inequality that has occurred since the death of Mr. George Floyd and the ensuing protests.

Rev. Friesen declares, “The conference call provided practical advice to pastors and congregants on how our churches can assist our community in taking action on racial justice. Our community is one that has had its own issues with policing. We know we have a long way to go in collaborating strategically with our congregations to be part of this change in views on racial inequality.”

Diversity, inclusion and encouraging innovation are areas where Rev. Friesen feels retired clergy can play an important role in their congregations. She adds, “I hope retirees will help us discern new ways of impacting our communities as we strive to truly be Christ’s hands and feet and serve God’s people. The Lord is mighty in all of this change and is taking us to new and exciting places. I believe the future is bright for God’s church. The church simply isn’t going to look the same as it did in the past.”

A Crisis Brings Unexpected Change

While some shifts have been gradual, perhaps the most sudden change facing ABCGI has been carrying on the region’s efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Because of building closures caused by coronavirus lockdowns, the region started online communities and reached out to pastors via phone. Rev. Friesen explains, “Our pastors felt overwhelmed by what was happening and how to respond. We provided ideas about how to navigate through the pandemic. We assist our congregations in being strategic and cautious, so they don’t have to close their doors again after they open.”

The next step was being aware of what church activities are possible in lockdown. For example, the ABCGI annual gathering moved from May to August and took place online.

Finally, ABCGI encouraged its congregations to apply for Lilly Endowment Inc. technical assistance grants of \$5,000 each, which were accessible to ABCGI churches because Lilly Endowment’s headquarters is in Indianapolis. All ABCGI congregations that applied were awarded grants.

New Opportunities Pop Up in Surprising Places

ABCGI is prepared to help its congregations adjust when the world reaches its “new normal.” The region will encourage the continued use of technology even after the pandemic subsides.

“Many churches have told me people have worshiped with them from outside their congregations, including from abroad. The international interest is allowing us to have a global influence right from Indianapolis,” Rev. Friesen states. For those who don’t live in the area, the availability of digital worship is an incentive to keep participating in a church’s services after it reopens.

Rev. Friesen concludes, “Every congregation in our region has said more people are connecting since they’ve gone online, including former members or those who weren’t going to church at all, but were churchgoers as children. We are encouraging congregations to take advantage of this renewed and expanded interest and let new or returning service attendees know how to participate in online giving.”

Rev. Friesen adds, though she doesn’t think some of the challenges facing the church will be resolved during her tenure as executive minister, Rev. Friesen hopes she is strengthening her region for future transitions.

¹*Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler, 1970.

Anniversaries



You don't hear about diamond wedding anniversaries every day, but MMBB family members, **Reverend Roscoe Robison and his wife Nina Robison**, cele-

brated 75 years of marriage in November 2019.

The couple met at Ottawa University in Ottawa, KS, and they married in their early twenties after graduation. They have two children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

During World War II, Rev. Robison served his country in the Navy. Afterward, he was called as pastor at several churches, including Calvary Baptist Church in Providence, RI, Central Square Baptist Church in Portland, MA, and First Baptist Church of Medford, MA. From 1974 to 1989, he was Executive Minister of the American Baptist Church of Boston.

Rev. Robison notes that he's had a beautiful life, ministry and marriage. He adds that he and Mrs. Robison have a great time together and share many memories with each other.

Reverend John Kearns and his wife Marion Kearns celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in October 2019. They were married at



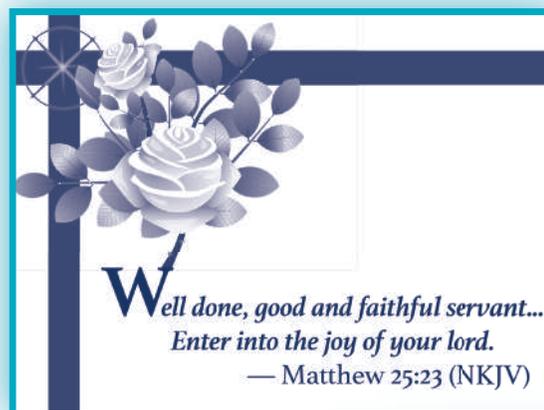
Calvary Baptist Church in Providence, RI, by Rev. Roscoe Robison, who was pastor there at the time (see the anniversary listing above).

They have three children, Amy, Meredith and Matthew, and nine grandchildren. Rev. Kearns primarily served congregations in the American Baptist Churches (ABC) of Rhode Island region from 1965 to 2003. During that time, he was also an ABCUSA National Ministries Endorsed Military Chaplain with the U.S.-Air-Force

Auxiliary-Civil Air Patrol for 40 years. In 2003, he retired from pastoral ministry and spent several years as a pulpit supply minister. Mrs. Kearns is a retired corporate executive secretary, and later served as a church secretary.

The couple make their home in Charlestown, RI, and enjoy their winter months in Palm Harbor, FL, near their daughter, Meredith, and her family.

In Memoriam



Reverend Ronald Arthur Gunton, 86, of Fort Smith, AR, went to his eternal home on Tuesday, April 28, 2020. He was born in Toronto, Canada, on May 8, 1933, and was the son of the late Dr. Claude Gunton and Blanche (Noble) Gunton.



On September 1, 1957, he married Verna Gunton in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada. They were married for 47 years. He remarried and is survived by his wife of 15 years, Barbara Gunton of Fort Smith, AR.

In 1961, Rev. Gunton was ordained at Kenmore Baptist Church, Kenmore, Ontario. He served churches in rural parishes in Ontario before immigrating with his wife and young family to New York State in 1963. Afterward, he pastored Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in the Oswego United Parish and in Hammondsport and Avoca, NY.

In 1970, he joined the Chaplain Service at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Bath, NY. Chaplain Gunton's pastoral duties included supporting, caring and comforting patients, family members and employees. He served at Fort Lyon, CO Veterans Affairs Medical Center as Chief Chaplain and retired after 26 years.

In retirement, he continued ministering through volunteer and personal outreach. Chaplain Gunton led a life of great service to the Lord, his family, the strangers among us, and the neediest of God's children.

Rev. Gunton is survived by his wife, Barbara, one son, one stepson, seven daughters, 14 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.



Reverend Dr. David E. Horton of Phoenix, AZ, passed into the arms of his Savior on April 7, 2020, at the age of 88. Born December 10, 1931, in Fort Wayne, IN, to Thomas and Bernice Horton, he served God and others faithfully throughout his life.

Rev. Horton grew up in Fort Wayne, graduating from Northside High School in 1949 and Fort Wayne Business College two years later. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1952 to 1956, including as a navigator with the Military Air Transport Service in Japan, and traveled throughout Asia. In 1957, he married Doris Tindall of Trenton, NJ. Their daughter Bethany was born in 1964 and their son Mark was born the following year. After attending Eastern Baptist College and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in suburban Philadelphia, he was ordained as an American Baptist minister. Later he received a doctorate in ministry from McCormick Seminary in Chicago. After retirement, Rev. Horton and his wife lived in Fort Wayne and Green Valley, AZ, until Doris Horton's death in 2008. In 2009, Rev. Horton married Mary Frances Ward and lived in Green Valley until moving to Phoenix in 2013.

Rev. Horton made a lasting, positive impact across the country and the world through his ministry. He served churches and communities in Cardiff, NJ; Saginaw, Grass Lake, and Jackson, MI; Pueblo, CO; Fort Wayne, IN; and Green Valley and Phoenix, AZ. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Pueblo from 1979 to 1990.

Internationally, Rev. Horton traveled on mission trips to build healthcare facilities in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Myanmar. Parishioners and friends remember him as warm, kind, caring, dedicated and energetic. He became involved with the Amish and the Burmese immigrant communities in Indiana and was instrumental in the "Friends of Burma" organization. In addition, he was a member of the Valley Presbyterian Church of Green Valley and the Valley Presbyterian Church of Scottsdale, AZ.

Rev. Horton was predeceased by his parents, his sister Carolyn and his first wife, Doris. He is survived by his wife, Mary Frances of Phoenix; his daughter Bethany Klingensmith of Colorado Springs; and his son Mark Horton of Bethesda, MD; as well as his grandchildren Thomas, Peter and Anna Horton; his sister Shirley of Fort Wayne, IN; his brother Steve of Naples, FL; his nieces Linda, Lisa and Laurie; and his nephew Matthew.

Reverend Dr. Langston Clinton Bannister went to his eternal rest on Friday, November 22, 2019. Rev. Bannister was born on December 8, 1933, in Wake Forest, VA, to Frank Bannister, Sr. and Revella Harrison Bannister.



Rev. Bannister began his lifelong education in a one-room schoolhouse. He pursued intellectual excellence throughout his life, completing an undergraduate degree program at Tuskegee University. After serving his country in the U.S. Air Force, he obtained a Master's degree from San Francisco State University and a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Massachusetts. Rev. Bannister served as a professor at the University of Toledo (UT) in Ohio for 30 years and was instrumental in expanding the Education Sociology Department. During that time, Rev. Bannister spent a year with his family on sabbatical in Oslo, Norway, working in an International Management Program for Educational Change. He also conducted workshops in Indonesia. While at UT, he served as Senior Pastor of Third Baptist Church for 18 years.

In retirement, Rev. Bannister completed a three-year Spiritual Formation program, which enhanced his work as a mentor, lecturer and community leader. He was

passionate about helping others and was observant of who needed assistance. He shared his gifts generously, welcoming many young people into his sphere to help them reach their goals and use their talents.

Rev. Bannister was preceded in death by his parents, his brother, Frank and sister, Dorothy Bannister Brown. He is survived by his devoted and loving wife of 59 years, Elizabeth; daughters, Angela Bannister, Carla (Nate) Bond and Michelle (Sean) Williams; son, Alan (Patekka) Bannister; grandchildren, Kai and Nate Bond, Sean Williams, Jr., Ian, Seth and Cranston Bannister.

Lift Your Spirits with Self Care



Navigating life during the coronavirus pandemic can be daunting for anyone. Still, it may be even more frightening for people who have been told they are especially vulnerable, such as older adults and people with certain underlying health conditions. In addition to fear, you may be feeling anxious or isolated because of lockdowns in your area.

Keep in mind that your mental well-being is just as important as your physical health during these uncertain times. According to an article in *Simple Psychology* magazine, stress may suppress the immune system by lowering the number of white blood cells that fight disease. This makes an individual more susceptible to illness, including infections and viruses.¹

Here are 10 tips for keeping a positive attitude and reducing stress during the pandemic.

1. **Stay connected to family and friends.** Make regular phone calls to friends and loved ones. If you're comfortable with technology, try online video calling on your smartphone, tablet or computer using apps such as Facetime, Zoom or Skype.
2. **Log on or dial in to worship.** Just because you can't physically be in church doesn't mean you can't enjoy service. Most churches are providing teleservices or online worship.
3. **Meditate and pray daily.** Meditation releases endorphins, hormones that trigger a positive feeling in the body similar to that of morphine.²
4. **Develop a routine for yourself.** Structuring your day may help increase a sense of purpose and control.
5. **Consider getting a pet.** A furry friend may reduce feelings of isolation.
6. **Keep a gratitude journal.** List one to three things that you appreciate about your life every day. Focusing on what you are thankful for can keep you from dwelling on what you don't have.
7. **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity contributes to physical health and by releasing endorphins, may relieve stress.
8. **Take up a hobby.** Reconnect with your hobbies or develop new ones.
9. **Don't forget that the pandemic will not last forever.** This too shall pass.
10. **Take advantage of the extra time you may have at home to organize and refresh.** Working on a project that you can control can lessen feelings of helplessness.

Remember that you are not alone. If you find that you feel continually overwhelmed, depressed or feel constant anxiety, contact your health professional or pastor.

¹"Stress, Illness and the Immune System," by Saul McLeod, *Simple Psychology*, 2010.

²Good Therapy.org; and Harte, J. L., Eifert, G. H., and Smith, R. (1995, June). "The effects of running and meditation on beta-endorphin, corticotropin-releasing hormone and cortisol in plasma, and on mood." *Biological Psychology*, 40, (3), 251-265. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/030105119505118T>.