

Notes & News, Thoughts & Views



For ABCOPAD Churches from Rev. Mark Mahserjian-Smith
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Rev. Kelly Legg
Regional Pastor

My mom said, 'It is better to give than to receive.' Probably your mom said that too and we've both said it to others. Right? Ordinarily I agree with Mom and her proverb. After all, I enjoy few activities more than selecting the perfect gift for someone I love and then watching their face when I surprise them with it. Under normal circumstances I think giving a gift to someone else is vastly better than receiving one myself.

But Christmas is different. When it comes to Christmas, I am 100% positive that Mom's proverb ought to be chucked out the window. When we're talking Christmas, it is way better to receive than to give! Wouldn't you agree? Perhaps I should explain, before you decide I'm reverting to childhood.

This Christmas you and I will give wonderful gifts to all the people in our lives: You will hand-select a sparkling piece of jewelry for your wife, wait in long lines for just the right electronic gadget for your husband, and wrap gift cards for your rather difficult-to-buy-for-child in brightly colored bags and bows. And you will be truly blessed to see all of the folks you love enjoy the gifts you give to them. But Christmas is not about giving.

Christmas is about receiving. Christmas is not about giving the number one item on everyone's wish list; it's about receiving the One who is the good news of great joy meant for all people. Christmas is not about giving the latest and greatest fad; it is about receiving the eternal, unchanging Savior who has been born to you. Christmas is not about giving brightly colored packages under Christmas trees; it's about receiving the Son of God wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger (Luke 2:10-12).

At Christmas we are invited by our Father God to receive His own Son as our Savior. When we receive our Savior, we receive the Child born 2000 years ago: The One whose perfect wisdom enables Him to rule and reign in the lives of those who receive Him perfectly. The One whose strength and might equipped Him to defeat sin, death, and the evil one so that we who receive Him might know eternal life. The One who promises to love and protect those who are His. The One who alone is capable of bringing peace into our very spirits. For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders, and He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)!

More than that, Scripture promises that 'to all who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God' (John 1:12).

It is better to receive Jesus than to give even the most amazing gift. For to receive Jesus is to receive Emmanuel, God with us, to receive the One who left heaven to prove how much He loves you, to receive the Son given to us, to receive the forgiveness that makes us children of our Father. Receiving Him – this is what Christmas is about.

Love ya,
Pastor Kelly





Rev. Rob Rice
Regional Pastor

When it comes to Christmas presents, many years ago, my wife Jen and I vowed that we would do our best to keep things somewhat even between our four kids. If you're a parent you can probably understand our reasoning. It's no fun to have a Christmas morning where someone appears to have gotten more than the others. Years ago, we switched to a "three-present" approach, using the rationale that Jesus received three gifts from the wise men. Some years there have been variations in our plans, but generally, we try to work things out so nobody is forgotten or left out. Jen has usually handled the small stocking stuffers for years, and we've worked together to purchase the larger, under-the-tree gifts.

If you know me, you know I am not a last-minute person. I want to get things done so they arrive on time and we don't have to stress. This year, I may have driven myself (and Jen) a little crazy trying to wrap up loose ends well in advance. At one point, I said to Jen, "I just want to have this done and over with."

I'll admit, I tend to be like that with most things. While some people are procrastinators, I'm the opposite, maybe a kind of "precrastinator" who likes to get things done significantly earlier than they need to be. When I'm not done with things ahead of time, I don't like it, and sometimes, will even start to get anxious about things not being done in plenty of time.



Dr. Felicia Brock
Pittsburgh

Our Work Matters

Believe it or not, we have reached the end of another year. It is now that we often spend time reviewing the year and all our ministry opportunities, activities, and perhaps even failures. Be encouraged today to keep working; because our work matters.

1 Corinthians 15:58 reads, "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." ABCOPAD leaders, take a moment and thank God for the successes.

Pray for guidance for the failures. And rely upon Him to identify missed opportunities. Because as this scripture teaches, we are

In the midst of working to complete my Christmas shopping, an article came through as part of a pastor's newsletter I received. It was written by a fellow pastor, and the title of it hit me right between the eyes, "What Christmas Says to the Impatient Pastor." In the article, Pastor Jeff Peabody talks about the fact that he, too, struggles when things are in process and not done. He likes closure. However, in the article, he shares that Christmas and the incarnation isn't so much about closure as it is a reminder that God works in His time, not ours.

"Reflecting on the birth of Christ, here's what I realized: Jesus becoming a baby automatically put God's seal of approval on a slow process."

Peabody goes on to talk about how Jesus could have come to earth as a man ready to go to the cross, but He came as a baby, instead. It took time for Jesus to develop, to grow in wisdom and stature, and that was God's plan. While we may be discouraged when things are slow, we must remember that God is still at work, and His time is different from ours.

I don't know if you get impatient sometimes, or if there are moments this Advent when you will find that your life is in the midst of a process that you wish was finished, but I encourage you to hold onto the promise that God is working, and that slowness doesn't equal failure, it's just the way that God might be working!

to be steadfast—stable, staunch, constant and strong. We are to be immovable—solid, fixed, firm without shaking or trembling. And we are to always be excelling—never ending, superior, producing quality in ministry, and achieving our God-given goals.

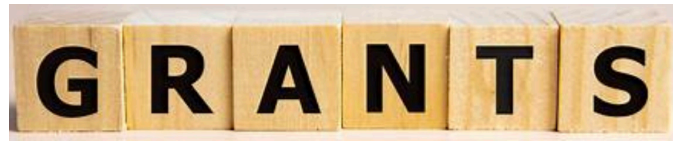
As the body of Christ, we are in this together. No matter which part of the State we call home; we are in this together! No matter how big or small our congregations; we are in this together! No matter how old or young; we are in this together!

And ABCOPAD is here for us all. Never forget that. So please, don't be discouraged. Instead, let's look to 2025. A new year that will be filled with new opportunities. Get that 2025 calendar out and start planning. And contact your area's GPS to see how ABCOPAD may assist in your ministry planning.

Please, never forget, our work matters; and we are in this together.



Ms. Caryl J. Casey
Treasurer
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30 Years of Grants — ABCOPAD

- The first grants were disbursed in 1995 from the Release God’s Power Fund, which was a capital funds campaign donated by supporting churches in PA & DE
- Principal was used from the Release God’s Power Fund (for that first cycle) – in order to raise interest and awareness of the grant process and grants were disbursed once a year
- Funds from the sale of the Laurel Highlands Camp were used to create the Ministries of Christian Discipleship Fund and later the Legacy Fund was added from church closing funds
- In the 30 years of grant disbursements, \$2,018,946. has been paid out, all from earnings other than the first year.
- 128 churches have received grants, along with numerous associations, the American Baptist Women’s Ministries of PA & DE, the American Baptist Men of PA & DE, the ABCOPAD Ministers Council, Camp Judson, Camp Carmel, Laurel Highlands B.C., Camp Ichthus, North Country Camping Ministries and Camp Swatara; numerous ABCOPAD task forces, committees and staff for specific targeted ministry
- \$65,900 Student Ministries
- \$163,500 Christian Centers and Refugees Aid and Assistance
- \$106,140 Training events, Clergy Retreats, Staff Training and Support of Pastors
- \$48,190 Association support and revitalization
- 40,675 Biennial Leadership Conference for speakers, materials and scholarships
- \$324,127 Technology, video conferencing, broadcasting and online services
- \$55,550 Mission trips and Scholarships
- 17,500 Loss of income grants for pastors during Covid
- \$8,500 Women in Ministry support, events and continuing education

Some of the requirements for receiving a grant include support of the Partners in Ministry offering and submission of the Church’s annual report.

Highlights include:

- \$226,180 For Camps or Camping Ministry
- \$69,620 For ABW Ministries, AB Men of PAD and the ABCOPAD Ministers Council
- \$63,000 For the Church Leadership Institutes (CLI) and Academy of Christian Training & Service (ACTS).

Last month, we included a note regarding new overtime rules that would have affected full-time church employees, other than pastors. We recently received the following notice from our legal counsel:

Overtime Overruled: Texas Judge Strikes Down DOL’s New Rule

On November 15, 2024, a federal judge in Texas effectively blocked a Department of Labor (DOL) rule that would have made about 4 million more salaried workers eligible for overtime pay.

The first phase of this rule went into effect on July 1, 2024 and raised the salary threshold for overtime eligibility from \$35,568 to \$43,888. The next increase, which would have gone into effect in less than two months, on January 1, 2025, would have raised it to \$58,656.

This decision vacates the entire rule, including the increases that already took effect in July. Meaning, the prior salary threshold of \$35,568, established in 2019, will be reinstated.



**Rev. Tim Schwartz
Northeast**

A few years ago when I was living in Texas, I read a book about the hurricane that hit Galveston, TX in 1900. The storm hit the island of Galveston, which was not prepared for the storm. The wake of the storm left more than 6,000 people dead in the city. It was a devastating storm. The city responded by raising the town above sea level – building planks and boardwalks and then using sand and dirt to fill in underneath them. They also built a huge concrete seawall along the coast to try and keep the waves and ocean back during significant storms. That plan worked for more than 100 years.

In one of the last chapters of the book, the author wrote about a woman named Gloria. She lived through a recent hurricane in Galveston (Hurricane Ike, 2008), but her house had been flooded. The book described how Gloria and her family were still living in a trailer on their front lawn more than a year after the storm. The book also describes how Gloria had walked through a long season of depression after the storm. She and her family had lost everything, and unfortunately their recovery and insurance money was not able to stretch far enough to get back into their house. Gloria didn't know what to do and couldn't wrap her mind around the huge task ahead of her.

Unfortunately, the book I read only told half of Gloria's story. Some time after she had spoken with the author, she started to encounter work teams from ABCOAPD and other places

that helped her family rebuild their house. A disaster recovery organization in Galveston connected her to resources that helped her replace furniture and appliances. The recovery organization sent volunteers to hang drywall and trim, lay down flooring and paint the house. Within just a few months, Gloria's depression lifted and her family celebrated moving back into their home. Gloria felt the freedom of the destruction of the natural disaster lifted from her shoulders. In a short time, she started attending a neighborhood church.

As I sit here writing these thoughts for News and Notes, I am also working on pulling a recovery mission trip to North Carolina to help after the devastating floods from Hurricane Helene. We are going from December 16-20. I am hoping that we will have experiences in being sent by God to partner in his work of recovery after natural disasters. We are hoping to be instruments of hope and peace for God to people who have been struggling since the flooding months ago. We want to remind people that God still cares for them, and that he sent a group of people from Pennsylvania to tell them that he cares. We pray that God will use us and our willing hands to remind a few people in North Carolina that God is not far away, even amid times of loss and devastation.

I hope that you and your congregation will consider partnering with God on a work trip of recovery and restoration sometime in 2025. We do not live too far from the flooding in North Carolina or other areas. ABCOPAD is happy to help you pull details together to be the loving hands of God in communities that are needing hope and love after these devastating floods.



While studying some advent things I had these 'silly' thoughts...but not really silly. I have just completed a Mary/Martha study and my mind wondered (yes, it does...) to the Mary of the Christmas stories and *if* she had had a sister like Martha at her side, who acted like the Bethany sister Martha....some things might look like this:



Mary was expecting a child.

Martha was expecting every day on her December calendar to have at least one activity scheduled.



Mary was on a journey with her family.

Martha packed 13 camels with supplies and couldn't take all she had planned on taking.



Mary carried the weight of a King.

Martha carried the weight of running her kingdom.



Mary moved from point A to point B to be counted among the family.

Martha counted on herself to complete tasks A-Z for her family.



Mary said, 'I am the Lord's maidservant, may Your word to me be fulfilled.'

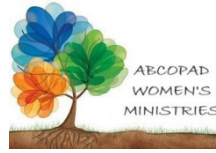
Martha said, 'I'll take your word and raise you 18 to-do lists plus plans B, C, and D just in case your plan A fails'

These seem silly until we pause and realize that our Martha version takes over during the holidays and our Mary version becomes too small to recognize. Can you relate?



Here is a Christmas blessing to pray over yourself and others:

May this Christmas bring happiness into our homes, peace into our lives and Jesus into our hearts. Help us remember this season is about the birth of Your Son and His love for us. We ask for You to humble our hearts, and bless us this Christmas. Amen.

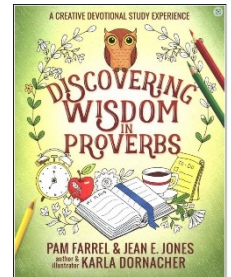


It has been a wonderful year serving the ladies across Pennsylvania and Delaware! From online study opportunities to retreat weekend to area one day events, God has blessed and challenged us all. Making connections is so important in our life and health; physically, emotionally and spiritually. Your leadership team continues to look to the future with vision, prayerfully seeking God's will for our lives and the life of our Region. Here are some coming events opportunities to connect with Sisters in Christ!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THESE COMING EVENTS!

JANUARY – MARCH 2025

Beginning Monday, January 13, 2025, Jodie Vasbinder will be leading an **online-study group** using another one of the creative devotional study guides by authors Pam Farrell, Jean E. Jones and Karla Dornacher. These workbooks have a **10-week** reading plan with tons of optional activities.



Online, in a **PRIVATE Facebook group**, we will be sharing insights with each other. Below is a link where you can purchase the study book. If you wish to join the private Facebook group, **'PROVERBS STUDY'**, simply email Jodie at jesusavespt@gmail.com, or request joining from the ABWM of PA DE Facebook page or messenger.

Discovering Wisdom in Proverbs: A Creative Devotional Study Experience: Jean E. Jones, Pam Farrel, Karla Dornacher: 9780736981477 - Christianbook.com

I am looking forward to growing 'wiser' with Sisters!

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025

ONE DAY LADIES EVENT SE – LANSDALE, PA

SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2025

ONE DAY LADIES EVENT NE/CENTRAL – MILTON, PA

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025

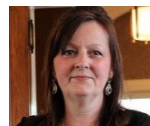
ONE DAY LADIES EVENT SW – JEFFERSON, PA

Friday/Sunday AUGUST 15-17, 2025

THRIVE RETREAT – CAMP HEBRON, HALIFAX, PA

Full details coming soon!

*Jodie Vasbinder, Spiritual Enrichment
Coordinator/Director*



News From our Associations (www.abcopad.org)

Beaver

FBC, Sharon recently welcomed their new pastor, Rev. Harley Williams. Pastor Harley began his ministry at Sharon this past July. Actually, Pastor Harley is a bi-vocational minister serving two congregations.

Keep Rev. Jim Inghram (**FBC, Beaver Falls**) in your prayers. Pastor Jim was recently released from the hospital after a significant motorcycle accident that required 3 different surgeries for recovery. Fortunately, Pastor Jim is now able to recover at home, surrounded by his family to care for him.

Central Union

Pastor Randall Harris has served for the past year as the Transitional Pastor for **Siloam Baptist Church of Norristown**, a church that is growing, thriving and making a huge difference in their community! They feed and clothe the needy every Friday, have a strong, innovative youth ministry under Rev Nicole Skinner, and gather for inspiring worship and preaching every week. Pastor Randy was named as the recipient of this year's ABCOPAD "Excellence in Ministry" Award, but unfortunately his mother's health crisis prevented him from attending. This past Sunday, ABCOPAD Vice President Lori Jennings presented him with the award. Congratulations Pastor Randy and Siloam Baptist Church!

The **Central Union Association Fall Meeting** convened with record breaking attendance (well over 60 people present representing 15 churches!) Under the theme "Community Outreach: Stepping Outside the Church Doors" several new leaders were put in position for the association, an updated financial report was presented, and several significant ministry reports were delivered. The gathering also included four outstanding breakout discussions:

- Creating a Culture of Outreach (presented by GraceCrossing Community Church in Phoenixville).
- Your Ministry Box (presented by FBC Norristown)
- Follow-up on Affordable Housing by Royersford Baptist Church.
- Three in One Witnessing Plan by retired CUA Pastor Tony Tilford.

It was a wonderful experience together!

Centre

It was a glorious day of celebration as the congregation gathered for the installation & permanent certification service for Pastor Apryl Crownover-Glunt, the newly called pastor of **Mill Creek Baptist Church!** It was a joy celebrating with Pastor Apryl, her family, and the church family as we prayed with gratefulness for the work of the LORD in the life of His servant & His church.

FBC, Three Springs recently called Pastor Rex Shope. Pastor Rex is now serving both FBC Three Springs and FBC Saltillo, where he has been preaching for over 5 years. Pastor Rex received training through ABCOPAD's Recognized Pulpit Speaker course. It was such a joy seeing Pastor Rex use his gift of preaching to minister at both these ABCOPAD Churches.

Delaware



It is with a mixture of fond memories and a tear (or two) that we announce the passing of **Bud Russell's** illustrious career as the ABCOPAD Web Coordinator RMA. Bud's career was born in 2016 when he first logged in with his brand-new username and password. (According to Snopes.com, he was hired for only 3 months during Mark Mahserjian-Smith's sabbatical leave.) His days were quickly filled with HTML, CSS, and coffee spills. He bravely battled spam filters, wrestled with broken links, and tirelessly updated the homepage and Facebook posts with the latest news from across ABCODAP (OK... He hails from the First State!). His passion for pixel-perfect design was matched only by his ability to break the internet (literally) on multiple occasions. In lieu of flowers, please send Wi-Fi boosters and ergonomic keyboards to Bud, as he transitions to a life of leisure, where he can finally read those "Top 10 Websites You Won't Believe Exist" articles he's bookmarked for years. It's true. Surrounded by pop-ups and browser tabs, Bud will log out for the last time on December 31.

French Creek

FBC, Linesville (French Creek Association), hosted a community Thanksgiving dinner.

The ABW Thrive event was recently hosted at **FBC, Franklin**. Over 40 women came for fellowship, worship, encouraging teaching, and they brought with them a huge pile of toiletries for the Emmaus Haven homeless shelter (Oil City) which our church supports.

Laurel

Let's Keep the Fire Burning Advent Fellowship Dinner

Laurel Association Clergy
Thursday, December 19, 6 p.m.

El Paso Mexican Grill
204 Resort Plaza Dr; Blairsville, PA 15717

Must RSVP by December 16.
fbrock@abcopad.com / 724-351-0205

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Association Ordination Council called for Heidi Clark, December 30, 2024, 6 p.m. Online/In Person at the North Hills Community Baptist Church
7801 Thompson Run Rd; Pittsburgh, 15237
Contact 412-687-3940 / pghbaptist@aol.com to register or for the link to participate online.

	2024	2023
United Mission Basics	\$16,902.00	\$28,346.00
Love Gift	\$318.00	\$893.00
Partners in Ministry	\$39,716.00	\$25,461.00
Over & Above	\$1,117.00	\$0.00
Annual Offerings		
AFC	\$574.00	\$181.00
WMO	\$19,256.00	\$25,347.00
RMMO	\$62,441.00	\$674.00
OGHS	\$16,555.00	\$5,951.00

The cumulative comparison figures

United Mission Basics is behind thru Oct. 2024 by (\$11,444.)

The decrease in United Missions (includes UMB and Love Gift) amounts to (\$23631.) less in actual dollars, that ABCOPAD received thru Oct.

Partners in Ministry is ahead by \$3,636. thru Oct. This increase includes \$30,000. from the sale of property & 2 gift annuities @ \$5,000.

Over & Above is the ABCOPAD Womens Ministry offering.

ABCOPAD Womens Ministry supports ABCOPAD monthly

AFC is behind by (\$12,828.) thru Oct. This decrease amounts to (\$3,763.) less in actual dollars, that ABCOPAD received thru Oct.

In actual dollars, from UM, AFC and PIM, ABCOPAD has received (\$23,757.) less thru Oct.



January, 2025 Deadline:

Items to be included in the Jan. issue of Notes & News need to arrive by 5 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 9.

Please send all material to Denise Veselicky via one of the following:

Mail: ABCOPAD • 159 N. Bellefield Ave. • Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2609 • **Email:** dveselicky@abcopad.com

Phone: 888-687-0883 • **Fax:** 412-687-3941

Thank you! Donna L. Schneff, designer • deeschneff@gmail.com

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Pennsylvania and Delaware**

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GATHERED to SCATTER

Everyday Churches Unleashing Hope Among Everyday People

Sandusky, OH

April 25-26, 2025



Learn how congregations are reimagining and reorganizing to bring hope into the cafés, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods and common places we spend our days.

ABCOPAD will purchase the tickets and cover the cost of the hotel (2 per room) for ABCOPAD pastors. Carpooling is encouraged as transportation is not covered.

If you are interested in attending, visit www.abcopad.org to register.

