

Recap of the 2016 Ministers Conference

The 2016 Ministers Conference was held from August 22-25, 2016 at the National 4H Conference Center in Chevy Chase, MD and it was a glorious event. Sponsored by the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries, the American Baptist Foundation, the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, MMBB, and the Ministers Council, 90 attendees engaged in a time of respite and renewal, devotion and development.

The conference kicked off with worship on Monday evening. Our guest preacher was Rev. Dr. Wallace C. Smith, Senior Pastor of the historic Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. He reminded us of what happens "When the Power Goes Out," a sermon motivated from Acts 9:36-43. Dr. Smith noted many examples of power outages in the church where we have strayed away from God's word. But when we are willing to go where God wants us to go, the lights come back on. The high time in the Spirit that Dr. Smith inspired was only enhanced by the Shiloh Baptist Church choir who favored us with several selections.

For our conference plenary program, we were blessed by Rev. Dr. Jennifer Davidson, Associate Professor of Worship & Theology and Director of Chapel at American Baptist Seminary of the West. She led us through the process of establishing a Rule of Life, a gracious way of achieving holistic wellness and balance. With a mantra of "In all things... grace," and leveraging the work of Debra K. Farrington, Dr. Davidson walked us through the eight elements of a personal rule of life: God is the foundation, with facets of prayer, work, study, spiritual companionship, care of your body, reaching out, and hospitality. Using this as a basis for our rule of life, Dr. Davidson provided us with the most generative ways of looking at our lives to determine how we were engaging the eight elements. Her expansive way of sharing created space for participants to reflect and consider practices that would be life giving. In addition, she provided us with numerous resources including her presentation, reference books, and online resources to help us continue refining our rule of life far after the sessions were complete. It was such a rich time.

To set the stage for our plenary sessions, Rev. Brad Berglund led us in worship. Well known for leading Taize-style worship, pilgrimages and retreats, Brad opened us each morning and made us alive to the power of the Holy Spirit. Through song, scripture, meditation and reflection, we were able to sense the rhythms of the spirit as a means of starting each day. We were also favored by the gifted Paul White, who served as our musician and musical director. An accomplished artist, Paul was well versed in sensing the move of the spirit and providing just the right song that would help to fan the flame. The spirit of worship was so amazing that several asked whether the services were taped and available for sale. Worship leaders Rev. Dr. Liliana DaValle, Rev. Jabulani McCalister, Rev. Dr. Shane Kinnison, and Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson enlivened our worship. And Dr. Jeremy Fackenthal provided audio and visual enhancements that further enriched our gatherings.

Our conference also featured powerful workshops. Rev. Dr. Perry Hopper, MMBB, and Rev. Jamaal Nelson, ABHMS, presented on Economic Challenges Facing Clergy. Given the expertise of the presenters, the sessions covered far more than the Lilly funded initiative awarded to both MMBB and ABHMS. According to Dr. Hopper, discussion extended to a wide range of concerns faced by those serving in congregations and other specialized ministries. The spirited discussion demonstrated that workshop attendees were appreciative in receiving the information.

Rev. Doug Harris and Rev. Holly Bean presented a session on clergy networking. In their session, participants gathered to reaffirm the power of coming together as colleagues to network and lend support. When we take the time for networking, we increase our awareness of the resources that are available to us through others. It was exciting to see the exchange of contact information after each session, providing the impetus to remain in contact and engage clergy colleagues for support and friendship.

Rev. Dr. Shane Kinnison and Rev. Randy Pearson led the session "Coaching for Life and Leadership." Both certified life coaches, Dr. Kinnison and Rev. Pearson helped participants understand the need for coaching and how coaching provides a powerful means to help people who might feel momentarily "stuck" in some aspect of their life. Specifically, the presenters demonstrated that coaching can help people realize hopes and dreams, gain new focus, clarify goals, and overcome hurdles.

We also offered specialized activities for participants. Rev. Brad Berglund introduced participants to the ancient practice of walking the Labyrinth. Revs. Renee Colson Hudson and Judy Fackenthal were

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available for spiritual direction, helping others to see the power of spiritual friendships. Rev. Perkin Simpson shared strategies for helping churches tap into different avenues for financial resourcing. And workshop presenters made themselves available for one-on-one conversations.

One of the features of the conference was the intentional time for Sabbath. Rather than fill each moment with programming, Tuesday afternoon was dedicated to spaciousness. Attendees had time to enjoy the Washington, DC area, take a nap, or simply spend time talking to colleagues. Several pastors shared that their decision to attend the conference was based on the fact that there was space in the schedule for restoration.

Wednesday evening worship was a treat in that our guest preacher was Rev. Edgar Palacios, Associate Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Attendees were among the first to learn that Rev. Palacios had been appointed by his native El Salvador to be the Ambassador to Canada. In his sermon motivated from Romans 1:8-15, Rev. Palacios reminded us that we are Ministers of Reconciliation and that we have a responsibility to serve even as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Teresa Blessing and Dr. Cheryl Branham, from Calvary Baptist Church, graced our worship with song as did our music director, Paul White.

Our time together concluded with communion which was led by ABCUSA President, Rev. Judy Fackenthal. She reminded of us "the messiness of the communion table," where we are encouraged to bring the messiness of ourselves to that table. We were truly re-membered as we served one another at the Lord's Table.

The 2016 Ministers Conference was a wonderful time of fellowship, worship, and learning. It was also a wonderful example of the power that results when members of the ABCUSA family collaborate together. Thank you to the members of the planning team: Judy Fackenthal and Don Ng, Board of General Ministries; Perkin Simpson, American Baptist Foundation; Laura Miraz, American Baptist Home Mission Societies; Perry Hopper, MMBB; Doug Harris and Holly Bean, Ministers Council; and Patricia Hernandez, American Baptist Women in Ministry. Special thanks are extended to Rev. Dr. Robert Cochran of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention for providing scholarships to DCBC Ministers so that they could attend the conference. We hope that more of you will take advantage of this tremendous gathering when we convene in 2018 for the next Ministers Conference.