

## AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

### Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another

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*Women in Ministry Conference Hosted by New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit.*

For two days beginning on August 19th, Detroit's New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church, whose Senior Pastor is The Rev. Dr. Wilma Johnson, was host to "Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another." The conference for women in ministry, sponsored by American Baptist Home Mission Societies, drew participants from across the country. The following reports from the Rev. Chris Smith testify to the encouragement, fellowship, respite and support the experience provided. Chris interviewed conference attendee Minister Carol Shannon for her blog: <http://shepastor.blogspot.com>. Excerpts from that interview follow Chris' reflections.



*Pastor Chris Smith  
Senior Pastor,  
Covenant Baptist Church,  
Wickliffe, Ohio  
Producer/Editor,  
Shepastor Blog*

For approximately one year, I have been privileged to work with a wonderful team of clergywomen to develop, plan and carry out the female clergy conference, *Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another* (August 19-20, 2010). Rev. Yvonne Carter, Managing Director, Event Development ABHMS, Rev. Dr. Wilma Johnson, Senior Pastor of New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church (and Host Pastor for the conference) and Rev. Marilyn Turner, Associate Executive Director, Center for Missional Life and Leadership ABHMS prayed, strategized, "conference called" and surrendered our work to God and He gets the glory!

Clergywomen from across the country came to Detroit, Michigan to attend the conference. What a glorious, victorious, powerful time we had in the LORD! The conference was held on the campus of the New Prospect Baptist Church where the Rev. Dr. Wilma R. Johnson joyfully serves as Senior Pastor. What an amazing ministry they have! Each day a warm, welcoming and accommodating team of volunteers met us and assisted us in anyway needed.

The women worshipped together, prayed together, cried together, praised together and shared testimonies together regarding our ministry experiences and life journeys. Excellent, anointed, Holy Ghost filled women served as worship leaders, panelists, preachers and workshop facilitators. Together we grappled with issues among and between women—what helps and hinders our relationships and how we can push past the hurts of yesterday in order to embrace the blessings ahead.

Through powerful sermons and workshops, we were challenged to admit that we are not "Superwomen," but called to take hold of that "one thing" (as Jesus told Martha) – to rest and be in relationship with Jesus Christ. Something was available for everyone! Workshops were designed to further equip, enhance, encourage and instruct senior pastors as well as ministers serving in a variety of capacities, including associate/assistant ministers, pastoral counselors and chaplains. For greater details about the conference as well as thoughts shared by different conference participants, visit [http://www.nationalministries.org/front\\_center\\_wim\\_conf\\_2010.cfm](http://www.nationalministries.org/front_center_wim_conf_2010.cfm), <http://www.ministerscouncil.com/WIM%20Resources/documents/2010ShadesofGraceGroups.pdf>, as well as the "Shepastor Blog" at <http://shepastor.blogspot.com>. You will be blessed!

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## The Superwoman Takes a Seat

*“You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand.” Galatians 6:2*

*August 19, 2010, New Prospect Missionary Baptist Church, Detroit, MI*

*By Rev. Marie Onwubuariri*

Preparing for tonight has been a welcome challenge as I find myself in a time in my life—in my ministerial vocation—in which I am in transition. Less than 3 months ago I completed my first pastorate, a five-year relationship with the MacArthur Community Baptist Church in San Pablo, California. During this time the question, “God, am I really called to pastor this church?” would surface at least every year since, well, since my first year. But it was just this past December when a discernment process led not to the answer I was used to receiving – that God was not done with me yet at MacArthur, but rather to the decisive realization that now, at this time, God did have different plans for me and the church. Our gathering today and in the next 24 hours or so is focused on the mutual support that women in ministry can offer to one another. I start out tonight by going back to that process in December because it was exactly that – the mutual support of fellow women in ministry – that was the voice of God for me when I so desperately needed to hear it.

This group of women I am referring to are all part of a Together-in-Ministry group called, “Emerging Asian-American Women in Professional Ministry (EAAWPM),” admittedly not the catchiest acronym. The six of us began meeting regularly in 2004-2005, all recent seminary grads, for the purpose of journeying together, with mutual support and accountability, as we clarified our call to ministry, particularly as young Asian-American women. This past December we held an overnight retreat, with a focus on discernment. How many of you are familiar with a little book called, *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer? When I was in seminary I did not know how God was calling me to serve, and this little book was a required reading in one of my classes. By the title you can imagine how impactful it was to me. During my time of pastoral transition, I began thinking of it again. The majority of our TIM group being graduates of ABSW and were familiar with the book, so we agreed to use a



Rev. Marie Onwubuariri

*“You are the closest thing to a superwoman that I have ever known  
.... BUT YOU ARE NOT ONE.”*

*Those five words went straight to my gut, at first, as a blow to my ego, but then, it settled as a relief to my soul.  
God had spoken.*

spiritual practice called “Clearness Committee” that was introduced to us through this little gem of a book. We allotted time for each of one of us to be the focus of a clearness committee. When it was my turn to be in the hot seat, the question I brought was, “Is it time for me to move from the pastorate at MacArthur, and if so, when?” The questions asked of me were very helpful in bringing out what was I thinking and feeling; they helped me see perspectives I had not yet considered, but it was during the open period, the feedback time, when one of my sisters, who knows me so very well because she is attentive to me and a lot like me, said something like, “You are the closest thing to a superwoman that I have ever known (which made me laugh because we have often joked about both of our high standards of ourselves), but then she said, with true Christian support and accountability and a touch of Asian American gentleness...BUT YOU ARE NOT ONE.”

Those five words went straight to my gut, at first, as a blow to my ego, but then, it settled as a relief to my soul. God had spoken.

Please pray with me as we meditate on God’s word tonight through this sharing entitled, “The Superwoman Takes a Seat.”

## The Superwoman Takes a Seat (cont.)

Read Luke 10:38-42

<sup>38</sup>Now as they [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup>She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup>there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." NRSV

What a familiar text, especially for us women, huh? You know, with all the AB Women's Ministries Sundays, and Women in Ministry Sundays, all the Mother's Day events and conferences, retreats and series on discipleship or spiritual gifts I've had on my past planning calendars, I have never preached, done a bible study, or even led a devotion primarily based on this text. You know why? Because even though my name is Marie, which is a form of Mary, I am (who?) Martha.

I am culturally wired to be a Martha. I was raised to be a Martha. To this day I believe that to have Martha qualities is good and, dare I say, "righteous." There, I said it. Yet more often than not, when people talk about this text, the lesson is, "don't be like Martha; be like Mary." So, frankly, I never liked this text. Is that blasphemous for me to say I don't like a part of scripture? Let me say it like this: I always had a hard time buying into the prevailing interpretations of this text, particularly about the depiction of Martha's motivation and ultimate choice, because as I said, I was raised to believe that it is not only expected, but the right thing to do to serve others, especially guests in your own home. However, I get that Martha's comment of irritation was uncalled for. After all, we are to serve with joy in our hearts, not out of mere servility, but still I resonate with her. I, too, get irritated when I feel like I'm the only one doing the work while everyone else is getting something that I'm missing.

Think about it. How do we know that deep down Martha didn't want to be out there with Jesus? She was a woman of faith; we know that she believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Who's to say that she wasn't struggling between her desire to be seated at Jesus' feet and living up to the expectations upon her as

*I was raised to believe that it is not only expected, but the right thing to do to serve others, especially guests in your own home.*

## LIVING HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER LIVES?

By Rev. Margaret J. Marcuson

How can we live healthier, happier lives as clergy leaders? Ministry is a stressful line of work, as even the *New York Times* noted this summer. The constant pressure can conspire to keep us from taking care of ourselves, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Working hard is not a bad thing at all. Ministry is hard work. But if it's compulsive, then it's a spiritual problem.

My own experience and that of the many clergy with whom I coach and consult suggest most clergy are overfunctioners—we take too much responsibility for others and for the life of the church. Ask clear questions such as: whose responsibility is this? When do I need to let go? This helps create time and energy for the rest of life.

The Spiritual and Personal Wholeness Committee of the national Ministers Council is committed to engaging the question of clergy health, along with The ABC General Executive Committee, (GEC), executive leaders from the national, regional and affiliated organizations of ABC-USA. We are strategizing to develop a number of new Together in Ministry groups focused on wellness.

We will never find greater health and wellness if we only think we "should" do it. More and more I'm working on receiving God's acceptance, just as I am. From that place of love I am able to make



Margaret J. Marcuson

## The Superwoman Takes a Seat (cont.)

*What if she did just that—forgot about dinner for a minute and sat at his feet with Mary? I think this story still would have been in the gospel writings, only Jesus would have been rebuking the disciples for putting Martha down for not serving him and them.*

hostess to serve the Messiah and the others with him. What if she did just that—forgot about dinner for a minute and sat at his feet with Mary? I think this story still would have been in the gospel writings, only Jesus would have been rebuking the disciples for putting Martha down for not serving him and them. Isn't that life? You feel like you just can't win, no matter what choice you make. So maybe Martha, in her good intentions, did not do what she really wanted, but what she thought had to be done. And in her humanness, she was feeling a little burnt out about it. What if she simply was having an internal struggle stemming from her cultural baggage: the women serve in the background—the men get the spiritual front seats. And here is my “younger” sister breaking the rules! I don't know—Martha sought out Jesus during the illness of her brother, Lazarus; she ran to him when he arrived; she proclaimed a clear faith in Jesus and his power; I just don't buy that there was nothing in her that wanted to be right there soaking in Jesus' presence. I get her. I get Martha. Do you get her?

Sisters, how many of you would have gone to seminary years earlier if wasn't for spouses, children, parents, and ministries that successfully vied for your attention – not that you're bitter about it, but you get that that's life—with all its joys and challenges. How many look to your male counterparts and notice the favor they get even though you know you are just as able, if not more, and twice as hard-working. How many times in

ministry have you said, “If I want it done right, I've got it do it myself!” How many of you pastors wish you could spend 20 hours a week deep in the Word rather than 20 hours a week fixing the problems you wish others would tend to. How many hours of rest do you give up just to wake up early or stay up late to have quiet time with God, when everyone that needs you is asleep? Or wish you could read more, pray more, be fed by the Word more, but the expectations that others put on us and those we put on ourselves, win out over our deepest spiritual desires?

Don't you get Martha? I get her. In colloquial terms, I've been getting her, but since my spiritual sister spoke those five words to me back in last December—“but you are not one” (a superwoman) – I've been on an intense journey of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-challenge. Times of transition can do that for a person. And on this journey I've learned to understand something more from this story that I've struggled with for years. Jesus, with understanding, accountability, and gentleness, in essence said the same five words to Martha—“but you are not one.” “Martha, I know you are expected to serve me, and all of us here, I know you have good intentions, I know you serve with love, and I know your meal will be slammin', but let your spiritual desire win out on this one. You are not a superwoman, and I will not be here much longer with you. You need me. Come, take a seat, be with me, and let me give you something that can never be taken away from you.”

### LIVING HEALTHIER... (CONT.)

incremental changes. I'm starting to think of the voices of judgment and self-criticism as demonic. Can we take care of ourselves without making “self-care” yet another weapon to use to beat ourselves up with? Change comes slowly! What would a grace-filled approach to self-care and fitness look like?

Are you in a Together in Ministry group? If not, consider beginning a group that includes a component of wellness. If you are, ask your group if they would like to hold each other accountable for some kind of health and wellness activities. Small steps are the best, in my experience—a five minute walk, one minute of prayer. Over time, real change can happen.

*Rev. Margaret J. Marcuson works with churches who want to create a ministry that lasts and clergy who want to have more impact on the people they serve best. She is the author of Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry (Seabury, 2009) and the Ministers Council Vice President for Spiritual and Personal Wholeness. Her free mini-course, “Five Ways to Avoid Burnout in Ministry” is available at [www.margaretmarcuson.com](http://www.margaretmarcuson.com).*

## The Superwoman Takes a Seat (cont.)

*Sometimes we'll go  
everywhere and to  
everyone else seeking  
the care we need,  
before we go to Christ.  
... We don't need to be  
like anyone else to  
have more of those  
times of filling and  
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You see, in this story I do not see so much Jesus asking Martha to simply be more like Mary but rather Jesus giving Martha permission to be more of her spiritual self and to let that win out over her prevailing cultural self, to win out over those things that were worrying and distracting her. We all have cultural dimensions to us, whether they stem from ethnicity or nationality, our generational affinity, regional or family upbringing, whatever influences have formed us. Sometimes these things about us can display the infinite creativity and beauty of God, and sometimes they can be barriers to developing our fullness of spiritual identity. My cultural understanding of hosting can display, at times, Christ's radical call for hospitality, but it can also undercut Christ's radical call for relationship building. I know. I went all out with hosting my daughter's 2nd birthday party in my house—decorations, food options, activities, favors—not all out in terms of over spending, 'cause I can save a buck, but every detail of everything intentionally related to our party theme, and I was busy in the kitchen, and everything was a hit. But, you know, I probably couldn't tell you all of who was at the party nor had more than a five-minute devoted conversation with at least half of them. Overdone hospitality (i.e. superwoman syndrome). I was worried and distracted. I should have taken a seat and enjoyed my company.

Whatever our cultural dimensions are, we have got to remember that being a spiritual person is just as much part of us as believers. We've got to know what our nature is, to be self-aware of what we can easily get trapped into, what can easily be our escape, or default, and learn to recognize whether these things are nurturing our relationship with Christ or distracting us from it.

And you know what – not only do we need the Holy Spirit to point things out to us, on occasion, we need each other for mutual support and accountability. This means, as women, we need to be self-aware of any tendencies that are within us—things like cattiness, jealousy, unhealthy competitiveness or comparisons, gossiping, resentment, perfectionism, superwoman-ness or whatever else, particularly when we apply it to each other. In other words, let's not be like Martha – trying to get Mary in trouble, and in a way, let's not be like Mary either, “getting hers” without noticeable regard to Martha's struggles. Instead, let us try to

figure out ways in which we can both challenge and give permission to each other to be the self that often gets neglected, thus preventing us from developing a fuller relationship with Christ. Some of us who suffer from superwoman syndrome may need to be reminded to take a seat, to rest, to be still and be filled. Others of us may need some encouragement to stand up from their seated position and to serve as God has prepared and called them to—to push past any fear or doubt. And then, at some point, our needs may change. Whatever way in which we need to be cared for, we, as sisters, can and must do that for one another. In verse 40, when Martha addressed Jesus, she said a phrase that we all may be able to resonate with... “Do you not care [that my sister has left me to do all the work]?” “Do you not care?” Doesn't that speak to one of our deepest needs?

We need to remember that as much as we minister, as much as we give, we need to be cared for. We seek that care in different ways: affirmation from those whom we serve, attention from our spouse or families, recognition from the wider society. Being cared for is part and parcel of not only our cultural being but our spiritual being as well. Martha was not corrected for this deep desire, only that she allowed herself to be worried and distracted by many things and didn't seek first Jesus who was in her midst. Sometimes we'll go everywhere and to everyone else seeking the care we need, before we go to Christ. But try to remember a time when you were most intimate with Christ. Has anyone or anything been able to take that away from you? We don't need to be like anyone else to have more of those times of filling and overwhelming care, but sometimes we will need one another for support and accountability, prodding us back towards true relationship with Christ.

Sisters, in our time together, let your hair down, wear your dangling earrings if you want to, kick off your heels and let your toes breathe (even if they're not pedicured), hit the snooze button in the morning, and exhale. If you need direction and a boost of energy, I pray you receive it. Overworked superwomen, please take a seat and receive your fill. There is no human-made mold we need to conform to, only the one that was created uniquely for you by God. If we can help one another discover and reflect those images of God with less worry and distractions, the closer we come to true sisterhood-in-Christ.

## The Superwoman Takes a Seat (cont.)

I want to leave with another five words. In the NKJV version, Jesus' response in verse 42 reads: "but one thing is needed."

BUT: a word of conjunction that speaks of another possible way; ONE THING: a phrase that challenges us to focus in, to let go of multi-tasking and focus in; IS: a word of active truth in the present tense; NEEDED: a word denoting a requirement, something that is essential, and important.

Whatever struggle or need or emptiness you bring to our gathering, consider that there may be another way to pursue that one thing that is essential, now and always, that one thing that will sustain us in ministry and in life, in our transitions and in our maturity: a deeper and stronger relationship with the one who calls and equips us. Let us lift and serve one another in ways to find those alternatives that don't deny our gifts but rather allows us to be more fully who we are meant to be as the image of God. There is room for all of us in the presence of Christ.

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### UPDATE FROM THE ABWIM OFFICE

As the final months of 2010 unfold, a new time for American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) is about to begin. During the previous 10 months, the Steering Committee has gathered information and re-envisioned how ABWIM work can be most effective at the national level. In January, the Steering Committee gathered representatives of various ABC entities in a Roundtable meeting to hear their thoughts on current realities of ABC women in ministry. With the learning from that event, more information was gathered in the months that followed through meetings with women in ministry groups around the country and in conversation with executive ministers and other denominational leaders. The ABC database, ABCIS, was also consulted for current data on American Baptist women in ministry. During the General Board meeting November 18-21, the Steering Committee's new model for the ABWIM office will be presented. Watch for details in the press releases from the General Board meeting. Reports from the meeting will also be posted on [www.abwim.org](http://www.abwim.org).

During this transitional year, ABWIM has also strengthened denominational partnerships and networks and redesigned ABWIM's communications. As we move into a new time for ABWIM, it is very clear that voices from all across the ABC are needed to build support for the gifts of women clergy. And we need financial resources to make sure those voices are heard. Will you contribute to this renewal of ABWIM work?

Since the 1990's, funding for ABWIM has been generated from an endowment the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) established. Even without the financial markets' volatility in recent years, prudent management of ABWIM's resources leads us to develop revenue sources to reduce our dependency on investment returns. You can help us by contributing to ABWIM's annual appeal, Phoebe's Purse. To send your gift for this important work, write a check payable to ABCUSA, with ABWIM posted in the memo section, and mail it to ABWIM, ABCUSA, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482. Your contribution is tax deductible.

We are deeply grateful for all the ways that women in ministry and their friends speak up to strengthen the witness of the ABCUSA.

Yours in faith, Rev. Holly V. Bean, Ms. Joyce Lake



Rev. Holly V. Bean



Ms. Joyce Lake

## Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another (cont.)

*Minister Carol Shannon  
Associate Minister of  
Second Baptist Church of Media  
Media, Pennsylvania*

Minister Shannon just completed a three-year term as the National Coordinator of Church and Community Ministries with American Baptist Women's Ministries. Minister Shannon also triumphs over an eye disease called, Keratoconus, which is the progressive thinning of the cornea. Minister Shannon's visual impairment has not stopped her from answering and pursuing her call to ministry. God so ordained that Minister Shannon received a cornea transplant approximately seven months before her initial sermon. Below are excerpts of the interview with her.

**Rev. Smith:** It was my honor and privilege to meet you at "Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another." What drew you to the conference?

**Min. Shannon:** I was searching for some answers. There was a press in my spirit that I had to be there. I didn't know what, but I knew that there would be an answer in regards to the situation I'm in. I travel a lot with the Women's Ministries and with my own ministry. There are times when we don't want to be on the program but to be ministered to.

**Rev. Smith:** What did you find most helpful about the conference?

**Min. Shannon:** Our time of sharing – the classes were good, but sharing with other clergywomen who are serving in other areas – not just the pulpit—was very inspirational and helpful. It is important to remember that all areas of ministry – not just the pulpit—are needed. Also, the openness in sharing. Sometimes we think that we have this "hold" or "guard" on our ministry and we won't share, but sharing is so important because it may help someone walk into their place of purpose.

**Rev. Smith:** Was there anything that you would add or change about the conference?

**Min. Shannon:** The one thing that I would add is to make sure that we don't forget lay ministers or licensed clergy not yet ordained. Licensed preachers need to see themselves in leadership roles or serving on the program. That is important so it doesn't look like you need to be an ordained minister or pastor in order to do ministry.

**Rev. Smith:** How did you experience the call to ministry?

**Min. Shannon:** In light of the fact that I had this visual impairment, I was reading the word on my computer and God gave me Isaiah 61. It kept pressing on my spirit. As I struggled to read the words, just staring at the computer screen, I began to question the Lord... 'I can't see, how am I going to preach and read your word if I can't see.' And the Lord gave me 1 Peter 4:11 which talks about God dealing with the abilities that He has given us. Like Mary, I just pondered it in my heart. Afterwards, I asked the Lord to confirm what I thought I heard Him saying. He did just that. When I would hear sermons, or scriptures, or when my pastor was preaching (at the time he was preaching on wrestling with God) I kept hearing Isaiah 61 or another scripture related to preaching the Gospel. I told no one, not even my husband. For a while, it kind of stopped there.

**Rev. Smith:** How would you describe your journey into the ministry?

**Min. Shannon:** Challenging. I was a trailblazer. I didn't have anyone to walk the path before me. I was the first female licensed at my church. It was new for everyone—myself, the congregation, the pastor. Like a mother for the first time, there weren't any manuals to follow. I was challenged by my own prejudices—what do I do with me? How do I handle me? I came from the school of thought that women could not be preachers. The Lord was calling me into a new arena. I'm a shy person. He was calling me to be out front. In my family, I was the first female to answer the call. I come from a family of preachers. One family member said, 'You'll become a preacher over my dead body!' I told them to be careful because God may serve them just that! Over all they supported my calling, but they questioned, what to do with me.

**Rev. Smith:** What role models impacted your perception of ministry (male and female)?

**Min. Shannon:** A lady in the congregation gave me the book, *Those Preachin' Women* by Dr. Ella Mitchell. She said the Lord pressed upon her spirit to give me a bunch of books. Another book was *Daughters of Thunder*. She also gave me Christian Ed books. My cousin who is a preacher began to take me to hear female preachers and introduced and encouraged me to talk to them. My uncle also

*Rev. Chris Smith  
interviews Minister  
Carol Shannon  
about her journey to  
and experience at  
the pulpit*



Minister Carol Shannon  
Associate Minister of Second  
Baptist Church of Media  
Media, Pennsylvania

## Women Together Lifting and Serving One Another (cont.)

encouraged me to go out and hear 'educated' preachers so that I would not develop bad habits as a female minister. He said, "You will not be silly in ministry!"

**Rev. Smith:** How did you become who you are (multifaceted question I know!)?

**Min. Shannon:** I think my over all life experiences. I believe the last 5 years of my eye disease really helped shape who I am in terms of knowing God is with me. I truly live the scripture, 'we walk by faith and not by sight.' I was living the impossible if you will - Going to school on public transportation, not being able to see the steps I walked down, taking night classes with night blindness, I was living the impossible. Things didn't make sense, but I was making it and God was with me. Not only did I go to school, I was on the Dean's list! I think that the women he allowed me to meet during the time of my mobility training at the Blind Center and then that type of training itself helped to mold me. The training 'messes with your ego' because you are still sighted to some degree, but still having to use a cane. It humbles you. He gave me Proverbs 16:18, 'Pride goes before a fall.' Dealing with the challenges that I had to become licensed to even be recognized was a challenge in and of itself. These have shaped and molded who I am.

**Rev. Smith:** What challenges have you faced in your role as a clergywoman?

**Min. Shannon:** Not being allowed on some pulpits, or being asked to preach from the floor, only being recognized as a preacher on Women's Sunday or something that pertains to women. Any other time I'm just "sister so and so." Not being taught pulpit etiquette, but required to know it, although the men were taught. The men were corrected, but I was left to fend for myself.

**Rev. Smith:** What suggestions do you have to help create greater opportunities for female clergy?

**Min. Shannon:** Clergywomen should do 2 things - be willing to share their story - be transparent whether it is a struggle or not. If God has allowed you to move along in ministry, don't forget to reach back and help open the door for someone else. In my struggle, I found it helpful when I moved out of my niche and went and looked at other cultures and denominations. I looked at other women who did not necessarily agree with me, but had similar circumstances or experiences. Our likenesses helped to support and nurture me to move to the next place. Others who are not female clergy can help by opening the doors that they are in a position to open. More importantly they can help by joining us in prayer that hearts are changed towards women in ministry.

*"...I explained to people that I was one of God's surprises but it would not change the otherwise normal pattern."*



Susan E. Gillies

### ABC OF NEBRASKA'S EXECUTIVE MINISTER SUSAN GILLIES RETIRES

*Susan E. Gillies is retiring from the position of Executive Minister of the ABC of Nebraska at the end of the year. Prior to her 10 years in this ministry, Gillies served with the Home Mission Societies in Valley Forge for 13 years, first as Director of Ministry of the Laity in the Workplace and then as Deputy Executive Director. She is a commissioned home missionary of ABC. A native of Nebraska, she has lived in both Dakotas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas and Pennsylvania. She taught in higher education and worked in public radio. She has a B.A. from the Univ. of Sioux Falls, and a M.A. from the Univ. of Memphis. Susan writes:*

Living as a lay person in a clergy profession for the last 23 years has been an amazing life experience. I will be the first lay woman to retire as a Region Executive in the American Baptist Churches. [Rev. Millie Myron began her service in Metro Chicago as a lay woman but was ordained before she retired.] I have always had a healthy respect for the fact that I served in roles usually held by clergy. In Nebraska, I explained to people that I was one of God's surprises but it would not change the otherwise normal pattern. I am an advocate for women in ministry and for the care and encouragement of all our clergy. Thank you to all of you who serve so well. My life has been blessed by the unique and gifted ministry of so many women in the ABC. I will be forever grateful.

## Blessings in an Urban Church

By Rev. Dr. Judy Gay

The Fremont area of Seattle, WA, is a quirky place. This urban neighborhood is home to the Troll, Lenin's statue, and a rocket ship. It has bars on every corner and rumors of naked bike riders abound. I drove through Fremont for a total of eleven years as I pursued my Masters and my Doctorate from Seattle Pacific and my Masters of Divinity from Fuller Northwest. And still Fremont remained foreign territory to me. The one comforting piece was the prominent sign that I could see regardless of which way I approached the neighborhood. That sign proudly announced the presence of a church, Fremont Baptist Church, in the midst of all the quirks.

So imagine my surprise when I was contacted by Fremont Baptist about an opening for an interim pastor. Fremont! I remember wondering about God's sense of humor. Why would someone who had remained firmly apart from that area of the city consider working there? But God's wisdom is so much greater than mine. Eventually the congregation of Fremont called me to be their pastor in January of 2005.

So how has ministry in Fremont shaped me? I have ministered to the people of this congregation. I have laughed and cried and worshiped with them. I have prayed and studied with them and together we have worked to meet the needs of this urban neighborhood.

But more than that, I have been blessed to minister to some from the greater Fremont community. I recall the blessing of walking with Brian, a young homeless man, who eventually died from complications of Lou Gehrig's disease. Brian needed support to maneuver through the medical and welfare systems and to reconnect with his estranged family. He needed someone to listen and care. And he needed to give back. I remember buying him a sandwich at a deli and then being instructed to roll down my window and to give half of the sandwich to a homeless man standing

on the corner. Brian who had nothing taught me a lesson in sharing. I remember the joy-filled birthday party/memorial service that the church held for Brian—celebrating his life in a way that he had never experienced before. And I remember the tears of his father and sister as they saw Brian through the eyes of others.

I have also ministered to some who have chosen to remain anonymous. One Sunday those in worship brought their gifts forward to the communion table. One homeless gentleman came with the others and laid his American flag on the table as an offering. He had used this flag as his belt, his coat, and his blanket. Images of the widow's mite being brought forward as an offering flooded through me, spilling over as tears ran down my face.

I have learned to appreciate the people of Fremont—especially a group of people that I refer to as our 'hidden congregation.' Some of these people attend 12-step programs here, some operate shops in the neighborhood, and some just know of the church. These people support the church—financially and with their prayers. And while we know the identity of some, others have chosen to remain anonymous. Some in this group would claim Fremont Baptist Church as their church even though they may never have set foot in the sanctuary. It's a curious place—this Fremont.

I remain excited to be pastor of Fremont Baptist Church and pray regularly that God will continue to help us discern how to be church in this place at this time. Why Fremont? Why me? God continues to open my eyes to possibilities and the blessings of being in this quirky place.

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Rev. Dr. Judy Gay

## American Baptist Personnel Services

PARTNERS IN YOUR MINISTRY, PARTNERS IN YOUR FUTURE

The American Baptist Personnel Services (ABPS) is a computer-based data-storage-and-retrieval system which produces personnel Profiles. The mission of ABPS is to provide these Profiles of women and men, professionally qualified, who seek new places to serve to local congregations and denominational entities. ABPS also provides resources which enable a local congregation to discover its mission and leadership needs. Personnel Profiles provide useful information which is shared openly and without bias, standing fully in the spirit of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) Ministry Purpose to develop Christ-Centered Leadership. ABPS is committed to ABHMS values of integrity, stewardship, diversity, collaboration and teamwork.

ABPS works in partnership with ABC/USA region staffs who assist local church search committees by using the ABPS resource titled *Calling an American Baptist Minister* to understand better their congregation, its mission and leadership needs. With this information a search of the ABPS data base is completed to retrieve Profiles of persons with the skills and experiences identified by the church. *All ministerial leaders in the American Baptist Churches, USA are encouraged to enroll in the Profile system and to keep their Profile updated so that their gifts for ministry are afforded a broad and timely consideration.*

American Baptist Home Mission Societies seeks to provide the denomination with those among American Baptists who are skilled in a variety of ministry gifts. The ABPS Profile system can be searched for those who are educated and experienced in a broad diversity of ministries. Any affiliated American Baptist organization may contact the ABPS office for such searches. ([nationalministries.org/abps](http://nationalministries.org/abps))

### Why Enroll?

1. You are an American Baptist leader in ministry and the Profile identifies you with the denomination and its process for appropriately sharing relevant information about its leadership.
2. It is the only place within the denomination where your gifts, skills and experience in ministry are recorded and available to others across the ABC.
3. Your gifts, skills and experiences are available to region and national groups seeking leadership for committees, task forces, workshops retreats, etc.
4. It opens doors for women and racial/ethnic ministerial leaders especially for specialized searches on the national and regional level.
5. It opens doors for all persons nationwide who are not widely known across the country.
6. You may want to or need to move to a different place of ministry sooner than you think and the Profile is the primary means of introducing you to search committees within the ABC.

We encourage you to call ABPS with any questions regarding the placement process and your personal, missional journey.

*Rev. Dwight Lundgren*

*Manager ABPS*

*1-800-ABC-3USA ext 2414*

*ABPS Resources are available online at:*

*[nationalministries.org/abps](http://nationalministries.org/abps)*

*It opens doors for women and racial/ethnic ministerial leaders especially for specialized searches on the national and regional level.*



Rev. Dwight Lundgren

## Rev. Millie Myren Honored with The Ralph Garfield Schell Award

*The Ralph Garfield Schell Award was presented to Millie Myren at the closing banquet of the Ministers Council Senate 2010. Rev. Carol Jamison Brown, President of Metro Chicago Ministers Council nominated Millie with these words. "The Metro Chicago Region of the Ministers Council strongly recommends Millie for the Garfield Schell Prize for the many qualities and accomplishments she embodies: as a talented woman who attained leadership roles on the basis of demonstrated ability, theological/theoretical and ministerial/practical wisdom, and unwavering support for clergy and lay leaders in congregations, in related ministries and organizations, and in denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith work. She is, in our judgment, herself a prize, and one highly deserving of the Garfield Schell Prize."*



Rev. Millie Myren with her husband, Art

in 1934 and later became the pastor of my present church, the Morgan Park Baptist Church on the south side of Chicago. There he and my father, the Minister of Music, worked together over the years. Dr. Schell baptized me and in 1957, despite illness, was present at our wedding to pronounce Art and me husband and wife. Our whole family knew his family and some of his grandchildren.

Besides his role as pastor he was instrumental in much of the planning to host the World Council of Churches meeting in 1954 in Chicago. I cannot put together all the facts of his extensive dossier, but do remember him as a loving pastor, dear friend and a man beloved by my family. He knew the whole New Testament by heart.

This summer, 2010, during our three month stay on the Green Lake Conference/American Baptist Assembly Grounds, I ran into a friend who was attending the Senate meetings. Having been retired and away from their meetings for 10 years, I asked if they still gave the Ralph Garfield Schell award to which the answer was "yes." I related to my friend my knowledge and love of Dr. Schell. She suggested I speak to Jeff Savage the national president of the Ministers Council. I followed her suggestion and related to him the whole story. The next morning after worship I was asked if Art and I would be their guests at the Tuesday banquet and share my story about Dr. Schell. I readily agreed because I thought it was important for folks to know about him and besides, who turns down an excellent free banquet meal.

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Read Millie's words about what this means to her.

### Coincidence or Providence?

Rev. Millie Myren

It seems to me that when something wonderful and unexpected happens, people often ponder the events leading up to it, and consider whether it was all coincidence or whether God in God's providence has something if not everything to do with it. These were my thoughts this summer when I had a mountain top experience that I will remember the rest of my life.

When I served as the Executive Minister for the ABC of Metro Chicago, one of my assignments was to be the liaison to the Ministers Council Senate which meets every August at Green Lake Wisconsin. The gathering brings together representatives of Ministers Councils across the country. At the banquet which closed their meetings, the recipient of the Ralph Garfield Schell Presidential Award for Excellence in Ministry was announced. I asked if anyone knew who R. G. Schell was, other than being the founder of the Ministers' Council in the 1930's. When the answer was "no," I told them the story of how he was my grandparents' pastor at the Second Baptist Church in Chicago as well as being their dear friend. Dr. Schell married my parents, Mark and Janet Hallett



Jeff Savage, national president of the Ministers Council, with Rev. Myren

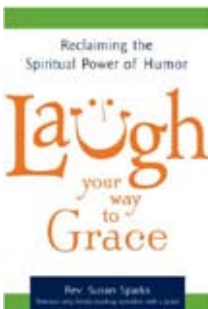
## Coincidence or Providence? (cont.)

After the banquet dinner I shared my story and as I was returning to my seat was asked if I would like to present the award. I felt honored to do so and returned to the lectern. President Savage suggested I open the certificate and read the name. There in beautiful calligraphy was my name! I could do nothing but put my head down in my hands as my elbows steadied me at the lectern. I was shocked, amazed and totally “got.” That

moment brought together a significant part of my early spiritual growth, the memories of Dr. Schell and our family, and my years in ministry. It was truly a synergistic moment. How had all that happen to have happened?? Was it all coincidence or God’s providence? I truly believe it was the latter and know that God indeed works in mysterious ways.

## Update – Two new books by American Baptist Women Clergy

Two new books have been published by American Baptist Women in ministers. Dr. Alice Greene, Minister of the Irving Park Baptist Church in Chicago and the immediate past president of Ministers Council, is the author of *Angels All Around*. Rev. Susan Sparks, Pastor of Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York, has written *Laugh Your Way to Grace*.



### Dr. Alice Greene

Alice writes: “*Angels All Around* is a novel about two angels who are sent to earth as humans with a special plan to accomplish and the difficulties they face. The story provides a thoughtful and fun way of exploring the relationship between heavenly and earthly life. It opens readers to the possibility that we are all angels, born from above with gifts that are intended to be used in this world to serve God—but the problem is that we just forget that when we are born! You can get it online now at [iuniverse.com](http://iuniverse.com) or [barnsandnoble.com](http://barnsandnoble.com). I hope the readers will enjoy it and respond on the blogsite: [angelsallaroundblogsite.blogspot.com](http://angelsallaroundblogsite.blogspot.com).”



### Rev. Susan Sparks

“Laughter is the GPS system for the soul,” explains Rev. Sparks. “Humor offers a revolutionary, yet simple, spiritual paradigm: If you can laugh at yourself, you can forgive yourself. And if you can forgive yourself, you can forgive others. Laughter heals. It grounds us in a place of hope. Perhaps most important, laughter fosters intimacy and honesty in our relationships with each other and with God.” For more information please visit her website at [www.susansparks.com](http://www.susansparks.com).

## Events

Baptist Peace Fellowship of North American (BPFNA)

Transform Yourself  
Travel with BPFNA to Mexico

January 15-23, 2011

We invite you to join the BPFNA for a transformative trip to Mexico. Our planned itinerary includes three days in Mexico City and five in San Cristóbal de las Casas, a city in the central highlands of the Mexican state of Chiapas. Our visits will be centered around two seminaries—the Seminario Bautista of Mexico in Mexico City and the Mayan Intercultural Seminary at Chiapas in San Cristóbal. You will be responsible to book your own round trip ticket to Mexico City. For more information, visit [www.bpfna.org](http://www.bpfna.org).

Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America Annual Conference  
Eastern Mennonite University—  
Harrisonburg, VA

July 4-9, 2011

Come and experience workshops on a wide variety of topics, participatory worship, challenging speakers, moving music, chances to tell your own peace-making stories, nurturing programs for children and youth, studies on the Bible's call to justice, and a supportive and fun-loving group of people with whom to share it all. For more information, visit [www.bpfna.org](http://www.bpfna.org).

ABWIM at the 2011 Biennial  
¡Vengan a Puerto Rico!

Planning to go to Puerto Rico in June of 2011? We hope to see you there. We are planning a celebratory Women in Ministry Breakfast for Friday morning, **June 24, 2011**. Don't miss it!

ABWIM will also join with Ministers Council, Area Ministers and Mission Resource Development to sponsor a pre-Biennial event entitled *The New Normal* on **Thursday, June 23** and **Friday, June 24**. It promises to be enlightening and stimulating; watch for more information.

For more information on the 2011 Biennial, visit the ABC website at [www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org).

## AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA



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The ABCUSA Office of Women in Ministry seeks to educate, advocate, support and celebrate, on behalf of the women serving in American Baptist professional church leadership.

2010 is a transitional year for the Office of Women in Ministry. A Steering Committee, chaired by Rev. Mary Hulst, with Rev. Holly Bean, Rev. Alice Greene and Rev. Lauren Ng, is engaged in a reassessment of the national staffing needed to effectively address the issues ABC professional women in ministry face. Watch for an announcement of the new staffing pattern—sustainable within the endowment resources available—to be presented to the ABC General Board in November 2010 for implementation in 2011.