

Women's Word

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

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CHERISHING A LEADERSHIP LEGACY

The year **2020** will mark the **40th anniversary of the Women in Ministry Project**, which was birthed out of the 1980 Women in Ministry conference at Green Lake Conference Center (GLCC) and which eventually became American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM). To celebrate this remarkable anniversary and the courageous, cutting-edge commitment of American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) to women in leadership, while also recognizing the challenges that still exist, a denomination-wide event is being planned for **June 16-19, 2020**.



Rev. Dr. Patricia Hernandez

We have much to celebrate in ABCUSA's legacy of women leaders, such as (to name just a few):

Dr. Lulu Fleming - first African American woman to be commissioned for missionary service in 1866

May Jones and Edith Hill - two of the first women to be ordained (1882, 1894)

Helen Barrett Montgomery - in 1921 was the very first woman to be President of the Northern Baptist Convention, or for that matter of any Protestant denomination

Mayvis Shao-Ling Lee - first American Baptist seminary trained Asian Pacific woman to be ordained

Ruth Maldonado - first woman to serve in an executive position with ABC of Puerto Rico

We did not get here alone.

American Baptist Women's Ministries first called on the denomination to study the role of women in professional church leadership

The **Ministers Council** commissioned the **Study of Women In Ministry (SWIM, 1979)**

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) established the program **Feminism and the Church today**

American Baptist International Ministries (IM) has commissioned many women to the mission field

The **Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB)** sponsored the first national conference bringing women in ministry together (1980)

The former **ABCUSA General Board** (now Board of General Ministries) authorized a Task Force on Women

Clearly, we did not get here alone!

From the pioneering women of long ago to the trailblazing leaders of today, the movement of women into ministry has involved the whole family of faith. Thus, we invite the full family of faith to come together in June 2020 to celebrate **"Ministering Women."**

Rev. Soozi Whitten Ford and Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles are co-chairing the planning team, which includes representatives from across ABCUSA. Also on the Leadership Team are Rev. Gina Jacobs-Strain and myself as together we — and our respective organizations (AB Women's Ministries and ABWIM) — partner in this innovative initiative. The theme that has emerged is **"Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready."** **Mark your calendar for June 16 - 19, 2020!**

Celebrating Ministering Women - We are **celebrating** women leaders, past and present, their myriad journeys into ministry and their many ways of ministering. We are also celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the birth of the Women in Ministry Project.

Radical - ABCUSA has carried out a **radical** witness and **radical** witness is still needed.

Redeemed - When all God's gifts in all God's people are fully accessed, embraced and utilized, churches flourish and our world is transformed. We are all **redeemed!**

Ready - We are **READY!** Are you?

All are Welcome: Women and men, young and old, lay and professional, ordained and non-ordained, people of every color, culture, and context... **All are Welcome! That means YOU! Join us!**

Your partner in ministry,

Pat

Rev. Dr. Patricia Hernandez, Associate General Secretary, American Baptist Women in Ministry, www.abwim.org

GOD IS CHOOSING YOU! COME!

By Rev. Gina Jacobs-Strain, Executive Director, American Baptist Women's Ministries, www.abwomensministries.org



I was recently asked, "What advice would you give to a teenager who is sensing a call to ministry?" I shared this response, "Someone is waiting to hear words of hope from you. Someone needs to be inspired by you. Someone needs to hear God's affirming voice and witness God's love through you. God sees you and is choosing YOU."

As I think about the 2020 Celebrating Ministering Women Conference, I hope anyone sensing a call to serve God will come. I especially hope women will come so that we may have honest and genuine dialogue and engage in theological reflection.

We intend to foster a safe space where women can be transparent and feel affirmed in discerning their calls. I hope the Conference will be an opportunity for us to intentionally journey together, building a sisterhood united because of our love for Christ. Most churches are comprised of 60 percent women. (Women do at least 80 percent of congregational work.) Women make up 50 percent of seminary enrollees. And 46 percent of the U.S. workforce consists of women. The 2020 Conference will welcome all women whether from pew to pulpit to board room to participate in the event's fellowship and learning. The program we are planning is designed to encourage each of us to be Kingdom builders and to live our faith fully in the varied places where God is calling us to serve. It will be a chance to embrace and celebrate all the gifts that God has placed within our denomination and beyond. This Conference will truly be an opportunity to network, to mentor and be mentored, and to collaborate to build stronger churches and communities.

Lastly, I am trusting God that the 2020 Conference will be intergenerational. Today's teens are leaders who have so much to teach us. Millennials will increasingly comprise the majority of the workforce. It is essential that the Conference attracts new voices and new leaders so that our denomination can continue to listen and respond with relevant ministries and programming.

This 2020 Conference has great possibilities! So if you are reading this article, plan to attend. If you are sensing a call, come and be part of a transformative experience. Join us at the "Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready." conference in 2020! YOU are RADICAL and uniquely created in God's image, REDEEMED by God and READY to take the next steps with God. Allow us to be part of your journey.



REDISCOVERING A 'SHERO' OF THE FAITH



By Rev. Atula Jamir, Ph.D., Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Lowell, Mass.



Stumbling upon a treasure chest is far more likely to be imagined than to take place in reality.

But, I happened upon a treasure recently. When the American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) Advisory Team was collecting the names of the American Baptist "sheroes" past and present, Rev. Soozie Ford suggested Joanna P. Moore (1832-1916). I had never heard of Joanna P. Moore. So I did a little research. She was the first white woman missionary appointed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

Joanna served primarily black communities of the South. She also assisted in forming women's societies. She was a teacher to freed slaves throughout her life. In addition, she opened boarding schools for young boys and girls as well as homes for older folks, and also found time to publish a magazine called *Hope*.

Three things stood out in the research I did on Joanna. First, I admire her dedication to the service she was called to. In her autobiography *In Christ's Stead*, Joanna wrote that she set aside her prospect of getting married and having biological children because of the many children she discovered who needed her love and care. Second, I was impressed by the remarkable manner and nature of her letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, the renowned African American civil rights activist, sociologist and author. The letter revealed her to be a truly unique woman, advising a towering figure like Du Bois with love, humility, respect, and high intellect. It seems to me she wrote such a letter to Du Bois due to the affinity they had in respect to women's rights, as Du Bois was a strong supporter.

Third, the letter pad of the Women's Baptist Home Mission Society on which she wrote her letter is outstanding. I am moved by their object: "Woman's work for women and children among the Americans, Indians, Afro-Americans, Euro-Americans, Jews, Chinese, Mexicans, and exceptional populations in North America."

In discovering Joanna's history and contributions I found a treasure that you don't just hear about and forget, but which touches you to the core, makes you excited, causes you to reflect and think deeper about your ministry, and makes you restless. ABWIM has given me a new zeal to explore past and present women in American Baptist history – what they did, how they lived, and what they have to say to us today. I am looking forward to the 2020 "Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready." event, where I believe together we will uncover the value and contributions of more new faces.



JOANNA P. MOORE (1832 ~ 1916)

COMING THIS FAR BY FAITH: ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY



By Rev. Betty Wright-Riggins, Co-Convener American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) Advisory Team



I didn't come to ministry always knowing it would be my true path. I, like many others, have had other calls to serve with passion and commitment. As a speech pathologist, principal, state consultant and college adjunct, I found each role rendered amazing opportunities to serve. Yet, a stirring within was constant. It was something I could not identify.

What I knew for sure was that something deeper was calling my name.

I followed the threads of the stirring, which later became nudges and pin lights that opened my eyes to see glimmers of what was to come. My journey was a marinating process laced with confusion and complications. I realized I needed a guide who could clarify, direct and love me through.

When it was clear that my first tangible step was seminary, I sought out a mentor. My secular career had taught me that to succeed one needed a mentor; someone you admire, who is wise and understands what is needed to maneuver the journey.

What that initial sage taught me was that every wise and admired person I might encounter may be the God-directed mentor for you. I learned to test before trusting deeply. I learned that my "ready" may not be the Spirit's "ready." This insight was a valuable lesson.

I came to understand that the Spirit's "ready" for me required patience, discernment, reading and prayer. Several people of grace along the way listened to my ramblings. Women saints bathed me in prayer, held my hand and pushed and challenged me onward. I stumbled along the way, fell and failed but always there were those who encouraged, picked me up, and even carried me.

I heard and read stories of ministering women who created new paths as well as those who continued following in a long-held contextual tradition in spite of difficult circumstances. These were women standing firm as they heard the call deep within them. These were women who believed that the God who called them would never forsake them.

As new guides and teachers came my way different questions emerged from my depths:

~ In my context could a woman married to a prominent pastor engage as an ordained minister?

~ Would this new authentic me be accepted by family and the wider church community?

~ Can a pastor, teacher be a "contemplative"?

~ How does one respect traditional norms and yet crack them wide open to make way for the new?

~ How do you communicate familiar scripture in innovative, non-threatening ways?

~ How might one model walking out one's prayers and not just say them?

~ How do you make welcoming the stranger real to those who have been broken and abused?

~ How does one leave family and friends to pastor in a climate and culture different than one's own?

So many questions came with no "right" answers. God is gracious. Teachers appeared when I needed them. Direction and answers emerged when it was time. Women and men stood by me with quiet prayers and hugs of encouragement. In new situations, those who took me in as family held me close when I felt alone. Pastors opened what appeared to be closed doors and provided numerous opportunities for me to grow and stretch.

When I feared I had not done my best, testimonies were spoken of the Spirit's movement in the lives of those I had encountered whose circumstances I was not fully aware of.

Upon reflection, no one journeys this ministry path alone. For we entertain angels unaware and the God who calls keeps us. Our task is to be faithful, humble and prepared.

My story is not unique. It is only a brick in the building of the kingdom of God. I, along with so many, have been held and hugged by women past and present; women who are our "she-roes" and mentors. They are the remarkable women who show us how to navigate our own journeys.

The "Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready." conference will be held at Green Lake Conference Center. There we will mirror the stories of women called to a variety of ministries.

We will honor those who were angels, past and present. We will pay tribute to those who sacrificed and provided us avenues for God's Spirit to break through and shine.

The scriptures ask, "Is there anything too hard for God?" The collective testimonies of the histories and present of American Baptist Women's Ministries and American Baptist Women in Ministry answer resoundingly with pride and humility with words of the hymn, "We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord. Trusting in His holy Word, He's never failed us yet."

ONE WOMAN'S MISSION BREWS NEW LIFE FOR MANY



By Rev. Rebecca Driscoll, Women in Ministry Intern



Residents of Rochester, N.Y., have many options when choosing where to buy their morning coffee, but one coffee shop has a particularly unique mission. Coffee Connection, a not-for-profit organization founded by Nancy Sawyer-Molina and managed by Executive Director Rev. Joy Bergfalk, specializes in empowering women with job skills training as well as supporting initiatives in environmental sustainability. It

is a great spot to stop by for a quick cup of coffee or bite to eat; they serve a variety of quiches, pastries, and other breakfast foods.

Rev. Bergfalk spoke at the recent installation of Rev. Dr. Sandra Hasenauer as the Executive Minister of the Rochester/Genesee Region of American Baptist Churches in April in Rochester, N.Y. She described the mission and vision of Coffee Connection with a story. One day a young man came in to the coffee shop and asked if Bergfalk was hiring. Upon hearing his inquiry, she asked him three questions: Do you have a history of substance abuse? Do you have a history of incarceration? Are you a woman? When the young man answered "No" to all of these questions, Bergfalk apologized that she could not hire him. She only hires



Rev. Joy Bergfalk is pictured at the entrance to Coffee Connection.

women who have a history of substance abuse or incarceration. As paid employees, women learn important job and communication skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.

The combination of job training and counseling creates a tight-knit and empowered community of women ready to begin new lives. Coffee Connection's social entrepreneurship and intern-to-employee model has allowed the shop to hire 17 women.

Coffee Connection also emphasizes a commitment to sustainable environmental practices locally and globally. The shop roasts its own coffee from fair-trade beans organically grown and sustainably farmed. In the café on South Avenue as well as at the Connection's Greenhouse Café location on Main Street in Rochester, you can also find a variety of merchandise that supports global environmental sustainability, especially in countries where coffee is grown.

Recently the women of Coffee Connection have created and launched a new blend of coffee named after Helen Barrett Montgomery. Montgomery was a prominent social activist, educator and writer in the Rochester community. She has special prominence in the American Baptist Churches USA (then the Northern Baptist Convention) because she served as the first woman president of the denomination in 1921. We are excited to have this blend of coffee available at the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit to highlight Montgomery and other women pioneers who have made significant contributions to American Baptist ministry throughout the years and today!

I was very inspired to hear Rev. Bergfalk tell Coffee Connection's story and its place at the intersection of ministry and social/environmental justice. It is one of the many ways in which women are at the forefront of innovative and transformative ministry models.

Thank you to the women of Coffee Connection for your ministry and your dedication!

Please stop by our booth at the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit to learn more about the incredible ways women serve and lead in ministry, and mark your calendars to attend the "Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready." conference June 16-19, 2020.



Pictured in Coffee Connection from the left: the author, Rev. Dr. Patricia Hernandez, and Tasha Wilson, Board of General Ministries Director.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN PUERTO RICO: A 120-YEAR-OLD JOURNEY



Rev. Laura I. Ayala, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Rio Piedras



In 1899, one month after Missionary Rev. Hugh P. McCormick preached the first sermon in Rio Piedras, Missionary Ida Hayes arrived in Puerto Rico to assist him. Women in ministerial roles thus were included from the beginning.

However, in the last 120 years women in ministry evolved. The early leaders were mainland U.S. missionaries --

Ida Hayes, Janie Pritchard Duggan, Lydia Huber, Marie O'Lake, Alice Owen, Laura K. Dresser, Albertine Bischoff, Ruth Chamberlain, Alta Simmons, Laura Fish, Ruth Howard, Edna Ruth Clingan, Clara Sherman, Margarita Zimmerman, among others. Then local missionaries enhanced the leadership legacy -- Felícita Sanjurjo, Luisa Más, Adela Tarrats, María Luisa Ruíz, María Ortíz, Antonia Navarro, Petronila Nieves, Isabel Acevedo, Trinidad Levy, Lolita Llabrés, Saturnina Vázquez, Angelina Larrosa, María Vázquez, Paulina Galarza, María S. Ramírez, María Fuster, Primitiva Rivera, Inés F. Quiles, Antonia Cuevas, Medarda Meléndez, Mercedes Meléndez and Dominga Colón (volunteer missionary-grandmother of Rev. José Norat).

Next came a third generation of women in ministry that moved from missionaries to Christian educators -- Palmira Díaz, Florita Muñoz, Antonia Vázquez, Violeta Jiménez, Monserrate Quiles, Carmen Irizarry, Alicia Soto, Emma Solivan, María Escobar, Ruth Maldonado, Julia Esther Rivera, María Luisa Urbina, Petra A. Urbina, Irma Violeta Cruz, Neftalí Alicea Ortíz (Perú 1960s), Rosa Crespo (Thailand 1977).

A fourth generation of women in ministry transitioned from Christian Educators to pastors and ordained ministers. These women leaders include Paulita Matos, Luz María Dones, Julia Batista, Irma Gómez, Yolanda Ortiz, Ingrid Roldán, Magda Aguirre, Doris García, Delyris Carrión, Kristina Gutierrez, Ketley Pierre, Evelyn Almonte, Aurea Rodriguez, among others. This generation benefited from Puerto Rico's transition from an American Baptist Home Mission Societies' (ABHMS) mission field to a Region in 1962. Our Executive Ministers early on became advocates for women in ministry. Rev. Angel Luis Gutierrez (1969-1971) not only supported his wife into ministry (Rev. Miriam S. Rodríguez-Gutierrez)

but was also instrumental in Pastor Luz María (Marilú) Dones' call to pastor a church. She is the first woman called by a local church as a Senior Pastor. In 1979 our region passed a resolution to support women in pastoral and ordained ministry. That same year the first woman was ordained: Rev. Petra A. Urbina. Ten years later with over 15 women in pastoral ministry, the first woman Executive Minister was called: Rev. Yamina Apolinaris. Between 2006 and 2016 the number of women in ministry doubled, from 60 to 122. In 2017, among all clergy in our region 41 percent of women were senior pastors, 38 percent of women were associate pastors and 28 percent of retired ministers were women. Currently, Puerto Rico has the highest percentage of women serving in ministry of any region.

My own journey reflects that of my region. I accepted Jesus Christ and became a member of the First Baptist Church of Caguas while Rev. Apolinaris was Executive Minister of the region. Her leadership taught me, and many others, that as women we could aspire to any leadership position within the local church and beyond. Moreover, those pioneer women in ministry set a high standard as they finished M.Divs, D.Mins and Ph.Ds. They have proven themselves as loyal and faithful servants who have impacted thousands of lives through their ministries.

Now, 120 years later in Puerto Rico's remarkable Baptist history, I am a woman in ministry and Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Rio Piedras, established by Rev. McCormick in 1899. All praise, honor and glory be to our God! As the scripture in Galatians says: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

I hope you'll join me and many others at the "Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready." conference in 2020 to celebrate the history of ministering women in Puerto Rico and to learn the histories of women in many other regions.



CELEBRATING MINISTERING WOMEN: SHARING OUR STORIES



By Rev. John Polite, III, Co-Convener, American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) Advisory Team



The history of American Baptist Women in Ministry is too rich and storied to just be put into words. It consists of missionaries and school founders, seminary presidents and Bible translators, medical professionals and theologians. Thus, our preview of the “Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready.” conference at the ABWIM After Party (June 21 at 9:00pm)

during the 2019 Biennial Mission Summit will be an interactive, artistic, celebration of history-making “sheroes” who were led and guided by God to blaze trails in the face of resistance, oppressive dogma, and sometimes danger.

First, throw out any notion of “another stuffy reception.” The team planned a party that will be hosted by a DJ who just happens to be one of our American Baptist Executive Ministers. (You’ll have to come or visit our website to find out who!) The DJ plans to “spin” a playlist that celebrates women and their accomplishments! Maybe a little Aretha or Gloria Gaynor? How about some Chaka Khan or Cyndi Lauper? Why not Diana Ross or Donna Summer? Refreshments will be in abundance, as will interactive table activities and party favors.

Now, back to the “sheroes.” It is our belief that the pioneers and trailblazers of ABWIM are bigger than life and deserve to be treated as such. That’s why our After Party, and afterwards our ABWIM website, will feature artistic renditions of ABWIM “sheroes” who will be depicted as the superheroes they are. Who are the “sheroes” of ABWIM in your opinion? Join us for our After Party to discover that some of your personal “sheroes” will possibly be highlighted at our gathering.

Most importantly, we will recognize that the story of ABWIM is greater than the notable names of the past. The story continues to be written through all of you. Therefore, we will provide a large timeline at the After Party in which you can include your ministry story. With your ABWIM colleagues, you’ll SEE just how rich and full and vast the contributions of American Baptist “Ministering Women” are. So be prepared to share and display your story. Bring a picture of yourself -- either head shot or action shot of you in your ministry element – to display alongside your story. We also plan to share stories (with permission) on our ABWIM website at www.abwim.com!

The conference, “Celebrating Ministering Women: Radical. Redeemed. Ready” will be held June 16 – 19, 2020 at Green Lake Conference Center. Everyone is welcome and invited to attend! Come bring your stories!

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING MINISTERING WOMEN!



ABWIM Advisory Team from left: Rev. Atula Jamir, Ph.D., Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles, Rev. Dr. Patricia Hernandez, Rev. Betty Wright-Riggins, Rev. Darla Dee Turlington, Rev. John Polite, III, Jeremy Fackenthal, Ph.D., Rev. Nikita McCalister. Absent from photo: Rev. Soozie Whitten Ford and Rev. Miriam Mendez.

Radical.
Redeemed.
Ready.



Celebrating
Ministering
Women

June 16-19, 2020

Green Lake Conference Center | Green Lake, Wisconsin



*Rejoicing with American Baptist
Women in Ministry as we
celebrate the 40th anniversary!*

All Are
Welcome!

www.RadicalRedeemedReady.com

*This conference is a partnership of
American Baptist Women in Ministry and American Baptist Women's Ministries*