

November 2019

Email: melissa@abcgrr.org or nancy@abcgrr.org



A Word From Paul Gibson ABCGRR Executive Minister

Recharged, refocused, renewed and ready to go. That is what my sabbatical did for me. Thanks to the region for letting me “get away” for the month of October. I am sorry for the important events that I missed during that time, but I look forward to spending time with many of our churches in the months ahead.

FAMILY. That’s the word I seemed to reflect on more than anything else while I was away. I was reminded **we are one family, called by our Father in Heaven, to demonstrate to the world our love for them and our love for each other.** To do that we have the example and words of Jesus, and the power of His Spirit.

It is very fitting for this time of year. Two of the biggest family gatherings of the year, **Thanksgiving and Christmas**, are coming up. Someone said to me that these times can be very **awkward for many families** because they don’t get along. But we still get together and try to make the best of it. Many times, **we do it because mom and dad want us to be together.** I am really looking forward to being together with our families, even if there might be some awkward times and conversation. After all, we are family.

I was also thinking about **our regional family.** Sometimes it can be awkward when we get together because we don’t agree on everything. Well, we don’t have to agree on everything, but we do have to love each other. Our good Friend and Savior, **Jesus, commands us to do that.** It is also good for us to have a family gathering every other year. Our GRR Biennial gathering is scheduled for **September 24-26, 2020 at Central Baptist Church in Springfield IL.** Plan now to come join your family.

We have another event happening later in 2020 that can divide families as well as The Church. Can you guess what event I’m talking about? The 2020 election for

president and other offices. I am asking you to be a Christian Democrat, Christian Republican, Christian Independent, etc. Don’t put your party affiliation ahead of your faith. We need to demonstrate to our communities that we love each other, even if we vote differently.

To help us in that, **I’m asking every church in our region to make a commitment to three things:**

1. Commit to praying for all GRR churches, that others will know we are Christians by our love for them and for each other.
2. Commit to taking a special regional offering on September 13, 2020.
3. Commit to having at least one “representative” from your church at our GRR Biennial in Springfield IL, September 24-26, 2020.

Family, I hope that God will allow your family to celebrate His love during this very important season. **And...be rightly related to God and find your joy there, and out of you will flow rivers of living water. Be a vessel that God can pour His love through.**

Church Revitalization Initiative October Update

I have found this month to be both exciting and disappointing. There are many churches in the **Church Revitalization Initiative** that are making great headway, but others not so much. As I continue to visit with pastors each month, some face to face and others by phone, it continues to be very difficult work to **revitalize** a church. I have seen pastors and leadership teams looking hard at themselves in order to discover and discern the most effective route they should take to **Revitalization.** But the common thread with the churches that are moving toward Revitalization is that their mindset is changing. They are looking beyond the walls of church to see what the Holy Spirit has for the church as well as themselves. Please continue to pray for CRI pastors and churches that they will move forward to **Revitalization.**

Wally Holt
CRI Coordinator

Great Rivers Region Scholarship Programs

Scholarship programs exist in the Great Rivers Region to assist young people **who are members of Great Rivers Region American Baptist Churches** to secure a college and/or seminary education. Scholarships for any college student (regardless of major) or seminary student from the Gernenz-Shurtleff/Wilcoxon Scholarship are available. Ministerial students attending ABC-related schools and seminaries in preparation for ministry can also apply for the Harold O. Long Scholarship. **All applications must be received in the GRR office by April 1, 2019.**

To receive an application for these scholarships, email/write to:

Scholarship Committee
Attn Melissa Gibson
PO Box 13457
Springfield IL 62791

Phone: 217-726-7366
Email: melissa@abcgrr.org

Missionary Concerns

We have had to bring several missionaries home temporarily because of unrest in the areas they serve. The countries involved are Bolivia, Haiti, and Hong Kong. Please be praying for them and the countries.

Help Needed: Larry and Becky Stanton's support has taken a hit because of several circumstances. If you or your church could give to their support, or up your support to them, it would be a great blessing. They are doing a great work.

New Members of GRR Churches

University Baptist Church, Champaign—Robert Dicks, Ju Huang, Xijing Li, Mike Stibski.

Grace Baptist Church, Kansas City—Barbara Sharpless, Rosalee Wilson, Joseph Buhlig, Cassie Vivian, Lyle Lee, Judith Lee, Barbara Call, and Cynthia Call.

Mainstream Contact Information: Send your stories of mission/ministry. Please also send the names of new members to nancy@abcgrr.org or melissa@abcgrr.org
GRR Website - Interim Webmaster: Julie Romanowski - jr.romanowski@gmail.com

Springfield Vision Day Report

On November 9th, over 70 church staff members and volunteers throughout the Great Rivers Region and surrounding community gathered to experience a Fresh Expressions Vision Day at Central Baptist Church in Springfield, IL. Fresh Expressions' Mission Strategists and Trainers, J.R. Briggs and Jim Pace, facilitated the day of learning and conversation. Attendees spent time learning and reflecting on the reality of the changing landscape of spirituality in our culture. We wrestled with how the statistics we often read about are given witness to among our own families and friends. In response, our churches tend to lean into an exhausting bag of strategies to try to get people more interested in connecting with us with mixed results. Through practicing the principles of listening, service, contextual mission, and authentic discipleship, we can be a part of "taking the church Jesus loves, closer to the people Jesus loves." Ranging from dinner churches to knitting churches and many creative endeavors in between, this is happening as fresh expressions of church are created in established churches throughout our country. Fresh Expressions Vision Day challenged us to wrestle with current realities and practices and inspired us to imagine new possibilities for ministry.

Josh Sabo
Springfield Vision Day Host

