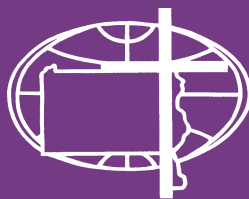


Notes & News, Thoughts & Views



For ABCOPAD Churches from Rev. Mark Mahserjian-Smith
Acting Regional Executive Pastor; Regional Pastor for Mission and
Communication — 570-435-2001 — msmsmail@abcopad.com

Volume 34, Number 1

January, 2024

Recently, I've had several discussions with people in our Region regarding how many months ABCOPAD has been in transition. Since Pastor Frank Frischkorn announced his plans to step down from being our Executive in 2021, ABCOPAD has been in a long season of transition. It's hard to believe it is now 2024, and the transitional season continues.

During a phone conversation with ABCOPAD Vice President Lori Jennings, Lori explained that the Regional Executive Pastor Search Committee has been hard at work for almost a year, with very few breaks, all to move the Region forward as quickly as possible.

I know that is true. I shared with Lori that often, when following Jesus, it is more about the Journey than the destination. This is a common theme throughout Scripture. All of us are familiar with the Children of Israel wandering in the Wilderness for a generation before entering the Promised Land. God needed the Children of Israel to learn many valuable lessons before entering the land he promised to Abraham and his descendants. It was more about the Journey and less about the destination.

God taught the Israelites to trust him for everything during their time in the Wilderness. They learned to trust God for the water they would drink and the food they would eat. God would also teach them to work as a team, a necessary

requirement for the battles they would face to possess the land. God forged the Nation of Israel during their 40 years in the Wilderness. It was more about the Journey than the destination.

ABCOPAD has been on a similar journey. God has used the last two-plus years to teach our Region to trust Him. Our Region has been active for the past 24-plus months. We have tried new staffing models, adapted long-standing ministries, and created new programs. We have built new teams of people to conduct and grow Regional ministry.

I want to thank President Bryon Luke and Vice President Lori Jennings for the beautiful way they have provided information and updates during our Journey. Before our Christmas Break, Bryon and Lori provided a recap of 2023. In case you missed it, we are including the recap in this month's issue of Notes and News. Thank you for continuing your Journey with us. Thank you for all your prayers and support over the past two-plus years of transition. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we have tried new things and learned throughout the process. God is NOT done. Two thousand twenty-four promises to be another year of walking by faith on this Journey of following Jesus together.

Blessings, Mark



Fall/Winter 2023 Update

Merry Christmas ABCOPAD Family!

We apologize for the length of time between updates. But, rest assured, we have been hard at work these past 6 months!

Search Committee Update:

Our ABCOPAD Search Committee has been meeting at least twice a month and each Committee member worked on tasks individually since May of this year, to find our next Regional Executive Pastor. It is quite a process! Rev. Sooji Whitten-Ford, Interim Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries, ABCUSA, has provided guidance and support to our committee

throughout the process. This valuable benefit was provided to our Region, at no cost. We've had 9 great candidates apply and interviews and discussions are ongoing.

The Executive Committee of the Board expects to recommend a candidate for Regional Executive Pastor to the full ABCOPAD Board in the first quarter of 2024.

American Baptist Women's Ministries

Our Regional American Baptist Women have been on the move this year! With a very successful August 2023 Thrive retreat with almost 100 women gathering from around the region, the ABWMOPAD Board met in September to start planning the 2024 Retreat and discuss upcoming plans and changes for

ABWMOPAD. During that Board Meeting, a decision was made to end promotion of Love Gift and instead introduce a new opportunity for Over and Above Giving. Want to know more about the change? You can find that here: [8 ThingsToKnow.LoveGift.pdf](#) ([abcopad.org](#))

Thrive Retreat 2024 will be August 16-18 at Camp Hebron. Look out for registration information this spring and updates will be posted here: [ABWMOPAD Thrive Retreat 2023](#) ([abcopad.org](#))

American Baptist Men's Ministries

Our Regional American Baptist Men's ministry has been going through a re-visioning process in 2023. A couple of smaller gatherings took place at Camp Ichthus in the summer and fall in the East and a breakfast gathering in the Southwest at Bethlehem Baptist Church and another in the Northwest at Camp Judson, have been opportunities to connect and gather feedback on what our men would like to see in our ABM going into the future. We look forward to seeing what 2024 will bring for the men of our region as they follow and serve with a Christlike heart and mindset.

ABCOPAD Staffing for 2024

The Regional Board voted at the December 5th Board Meeting to keep staffing, including our Geographical Pastoral Servants (GPS), the same as we had in 2023. Our GPS have also graciously agreed to keep serving!

So many pastors and church leaders have shared how much you valued the connection and support you have received from our Region through our GPS, it was an easy decision to make! If you haven't yet connected and would like to reach your GPS and learn more about what the Region has to offer its local churches, pastors and leaders with support and guidance: https://www.abcopad.org/About_Us/Geographic-Pastoral-Servants/

We also want to give a shout-out to our Regional Ministry Associate (RMA) for Women in Ministry, Apryl Crownover-Glunt. Pastor Apryl has been hard at work making phone calls and connections with the women clergy in our Region. If you haven't connected with Apryl, she would love to hear from you: Regional Ministry Associates ([abcopad.org](#))

If you have a chance, please drop a note to Secretary, Denise Veselicky, dveselicky@abcopad.com and Treasurer, Caryl Casey, ccasey@abcopad.com. These two powerhouse ladies keep the whole ship moving along for ABCOPAD. They tend to move steadily behind the scenes so well, that no one realizes how much they really do!

Ever wonder how our ABCOPAD Region Facebook posts and website continue to keep information updated? RMA Bud Russell is the whiz behind all of that. Bud can be reached here: Regional Ministry Associates ([abcopad.org](#))

Where in the World is Mark Mahserjian-Smith?

Our ABCOPAD Region went through a visioning process that finished up early in 2023. That process revealed a great need for our Region to reconnect with our local churches, rebuild partnerships and make sure our churches are aware of the services that their Partners in Ministry relationship and support can provide them upon request.

In addition to the great work our GPS and RMA have been doing to reconnect with our churches, our current Acting Regional Executive Pastor, Mark Mahserjian-Smith, has been burning up the roads all year visiting with pastoral leaders, lay leadership and congregations. Mark has had 158 in person meetings across PA & DE with Pastors and Congregational Leaders and that doesn't include the hours spent on Zoom and telephone conversations. He also attended 52 different services including worship, installations, and other celebrations. In addition, he's had 64 meetings and training sessions with staff, Board Meetings and LLC groups.

Knowing all of that, you won't be surprised that Mark has traveled close to 24,000 miles on the roads of PA and DE this year! Oh, and in his spare time, Mark went on two mission trips to La Paz and attended the ABC Biennial in Puerto Rico this year.

2024 ABCOPAD Biennial Conference – SAVE THE DATE

The 2024 Biennial Conference is set for October 17-19, 2024 in Altoona at the Blair County Convention Center. This is looking to be a wonderful and meaningful event, hope to see you there. Look for more information coming early January!

As we move into 2024...

We ask that you continue to pray for the Search Committee as they discern God's will, the Regional Board for big decisions to come, for our current Regional Staff as they work through the challenges before us and our entire region of churches and families, as we all work together to figure out what God is leading us to do next. It's a very exciting time to be part of God's plan!

Please reach out to us if you have any questions and we thank you for your continued support, prayer and partnership with the ABCOPAD region.

On behalf of the ABCOPAD Regional Board and Staff, we wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas Season and the happiest New Year!

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,

Bryon Luke, President
bryon.k.luke@gmail.com
215-206-1738

Lori Jennings, Vice-President
lorijennings0316@gmail.com
610-209-5929



Rev. Dan McDowell
Southeast Geographic
Pastoral Servant
bigbaldpastor1@gmail.com

¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John..."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."
(Luke 1:13, 18-20)

During Advent at my church (GraceCrossing Community, Phoenixville) we focused our attention on the individuals who surrounded the birth of Jesus. Two of the people I talked about were Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist) Simeon, who was present at the dedication of Jesus at the Temple.

As I reflected on Simeon, one of the things that struck me was the similarity between him and Zechariah. They were both devout elderly men who were men of prayer. And they both were approaching the final season of their lives. But they approached it somewhat differently.

As the scripture passage above indicates, when Gabriel told Zechariah that the Lord was about to miraculously answer his prayers by giving him and Elizabeth the child they had longed for all of their lives, he responded in doubt. I have to admit something if I am honest. I am 64 years old. If someone told me I was about to be a father again, I might not only say (in essence) "Are you sure?!" I think my head might explode!

But then again, I have never laid eyes (knowingly at least) on an angel. And I would like to think that if I had that kind of encounter my heart would be more open to the miraculous work of God. That seemed to be what the Lord expected of Zechariah because when he expressed his doubts, he was (temporarily) struck dumb as a consequence.

Now let's turn our attention to Simeon:

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

(Luke 2:25-31)

So, while Zechariah doubted the Lord in his crucial moment, Simeon praised God and celebrated his answered prayers. What was the difference between them? After all, Luke 1:6 says Zechariah was "righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly".

It seems the difference had to do with the Holy Spirit. The verses above declare that "the Holy Spirit was on" Simeon and that the Spirit revealed he would not die before seeing the Messiah. And it says he was "moved by the Spirit" to go into the Temple the day that Jesus was being dedicated by his parents.

Even though Zechariah had prayed for many years for the child that the Lord granted him, he had clearly stopped expecting that prayer to be answered. Simeon, on the other hand, also prayed but he did so expectantly and with a sense of inner assurance that the Lord would fulfill His promise to him.

I suspect that many of you reading this are (like me) not "spring chickens" any more. As we look forward to the year ahead of us, these stories speak to me about my prayer life. What am I praying for as I approach the final season of my life? Am I in tune with the Holy Spirit? Am I seeking God's priorities or my own? Am I praying expectantly or am I just going through the motions?

What are you praying for in 2024? How fervently are you offering those prayers? It seems to me that if we just go through the motions of prayer, without any real vision for the future or expectations that God is going to do great things, we too will be struck dumb. We will have nothing to say to the world around us, or even to the church that is (or should be) so dear to us.

May the Lord grant you an inspired vision for the works of His salvation. And may you finish this season of your life well! God is not finished with us yet!



Rev. Tim Schwartz
Northeast Co-geographic
Pastoral Servant
tschwartz@abcopad.com

I had a learning experience a couple of weeks ago while chatting with a couple of young adults in my congregation. We were chatting about the role of the church in a culture that has shifted over the last few decades. I told them at one point we lived in a culture where we, as the church, could have a “Field of Dreams” mindset – that if you build it, they will come. If you build a good Sunday school or VBS, people will come...if you build a good worship service, people will come, etc. We don’t live in that culture anymore. We live in a culture where people don’t respond to the church in the same ways they once did. We live in a culture where the church needs to make repeated, concerted efforts to invite people into the community of Christ. We live in a culture where hospitality speaks volumes. I shared with them my thought that we would be in a better place if we focused on being more hospitable (a welcoming community of loving and serving strangers) and invitational (persistently and lovingly inviting people to join the church community). I shared with them that we can be persistently opening doors for people to walk through to participate in the community of the church.

As I spoke about Field of Dreams, the young adults stared back at me with blank faces. They had no idea what that was or had ever seen the movie. So, I had to back up a bit and tell them that Field of Dreams was a baseball movie from 1989 starring Kevin Costner (known more as John Dutton in Yellowstone than his famous roles in Dances with Wolves, The Bodyguard or Robin Hood) about a man who hears a phrase from the heavens (If you build it, he will come) that changes his life.

Here is the lesson that I learned: in using the Field of Dreams metaphor, I realized in the conversation I was expecting these two young adults to be on my turf to understand what I was talking about. I expected them to know the Field of Dreams metaphor. That movie was released before they were born and was not a movie that everyone in their generation would have seen. If I wanted these young adults to understand what I was talking about, I needed to be on their turf in the conversation. I needed to use a metaphor they would understand. I needed to be hospitable to them in my part of the conversation. I needed to move toward them instead of expecting them to move toward me.

Many times in our congregations we expect those outside of the church to come onto our turf (which is usually showing up at the Sunday morning service) to get connected to the church. In that expectation, we are asking those outside of the church to step over a huge barrier to get connected. Would it be better for us as the church to step over that barrier toward them? Should we go into the place where non-churchgoers live/work/play in order to engage them?

One of the works of the church is to go to the places where non-churchgoers are and engage them on their turf. Our posture should be one of going towards people instead of waiting for people to come to us. In this culture we can no longer be of the mindset of “If we build it, they will come.”

In 2024, let’s go outside the walls of the church building and engage people where they are. It is clear that there are barriers between the church and the world. Many times we have expected the world to overcome those barriers to connect to the church. Maybe it is time for us to overcome the barriers to connect to the world.

News From our Associations (www.abcopad.org)

Central Union

After 30 years, **New Covenant, Pottstown**, concluded its ministry on Christmas Eve. “We hope to carry our candle onward and share the love and hope of Jesus that we have experienced here with all those we encounter, wherever each one goes. God bless each one. All is well.”

During a recent worship service at **Abington church**, Rev. Ulanbek Karpov (of the LIFE CHURCH FOR ALL NATIONS) shared a short slideshow recapping its ministry, which was made possible by Abington sharing its facility with this congregation largely made up of immigrants from former Soviet Union countries. It is an exciting, dynamic, and growing ministry.

Delaware

At **Calvary, Newark**, teens gathered for their annual Christmas party, complete with white elephant exchange and a human wrapping contest!

At **FBC, Dover**, the women gathered for their annual Day of Renewal with the theme “Strength and Courage.” They focused on women in the Bible who demonstrated those characteristics in their faith to God. They began with a continental breakfast, several breakout groups, an easy craft, and lunch.

Laurel

Rev. Mark McCallion, former ABCOPAD President and one of our Regional Ambassadors, has accepted an invitation to be the Interim Pastor at **FBC, Jeannette**.

Northumberland

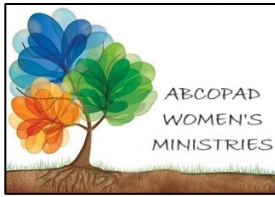
An ABCOPAD Grant was recently awarded to **Hepburn church** to assist in upgrading technology at the church.

Riverside

Members and friends were invited to send a single Christmas card and donation to the **Upland church**. The card was hung on the Church Christmas tree and donations were used to provide a meal for the Upland Police Department and the Upland Fire Company. Nice!

Ten Mile

Jefferson church held a catered Christmas Party with 30-some in attendance. Rev. Dr. Kevin Roberts gave a “pop” quiz about the events within the Christmas Story according to the Scriptures. There was a lot of laughter and “Wow...I didn’t know that!”



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Let's get 2024 started right!

*'Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He has opened for us through the curtain (that is, His flesh), and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And **let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works**, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.'*
-Hebrews 10:19-25

Many have shared with me fond memories of gathering at things called *House Party* and *Circle Meetings*, and no matter whether you use those terms for get togethers with Baptist Women, or have adopted other titles for your meetings, like *THRIVE SISTERS*, *Ladies Aide*, *Mission Society*, or *Women's Group*, or *something else*, the goal of any of these gatherings was and is to grow us up as strong, faithful women in ministry for the Kingdom of God, and to know we are loved and supported by our Sisters in Christ.

Women across Pennsylvania and Delaware were invited to an information Zoom meeting in November of 2023. What a **JOY** it was to see so many faces and hear concerns and support via that internet connection! At the end of the meeting, so many smiles, hands waving goodbye, words of love being shared – it was a very warm, sweet time for sure (picture the end of every Waltons show when voices could be heard from all over the house as loved ones were going to sleep for the night – it was THAT!).

After seeing the love and support shown in that Zoom meeting, leadership discussed that we should have more Zoom calls, maybe quarterly, and call them *Virtual Circle Meetings*. That seed has sprouted and our very first *Virtual Circle Meeting* will be held on **Monday, February 12, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.** So, mark your calendars and watch for a Constant Contact email with more details and how to register. If you know me, you know I love to use acronyms – they help me remember! This is how the Virtual Circle meeting will go: **Activity Bible lesson Worship Mission focus** – can you see it? **ABWM!** During the 2023 THRIVE Retreat, a discussion was held about what ladies do at their ABWM meetings – a summary of activities across PA & DE included each of the elements in the acronym 'ABWM'. So that format will be what is used for this first *Virtual Circle Meeting*. I hope you can join

us as we give this idea a trial run. You can gather your group together, sit in with a sister or two, or you can join right from the comfort of your own home.


The Constant Contact will contain:

- a link to join the zoom call
- a link to a printable document, a game with instructions that we will use as an icebreaker
- a discussion guide for one of the chapters in the 'Reach Out – Gather In' book that was given to each 2023 THRIVE Retreat attendee (having the book will be a plus, but I will make it easy for anyone to join the discussion)

On the Zoom call, we will do the **Activity game** and share **Bible truths** about being hospitable. We will join in some **Worship music** together, and we will catch you up on some exciting **Mission stuff** that has been happening over the last couple months. Can you see it?

We are looking forward to seeing **you** on our first *ABCOPAD Women's Ministries Virtual Circle Meeting!*


COMING EVENTS



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024 6:30 PM

ZOOM CALL – VIRTUAL CIRCLE MEETING


Watch your email for registration and other links



FRIDAY - SATURDAY, APRIL 19-20, 2024

SPRING LEADERSHIP MEETING

Please pray for your leaders as we seek vision and plan for the future of ABCOPAD Women's Ministries



FRIDAY – SUNDAY, AUGUST 16-18, 2024

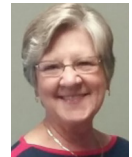
2024 THRIVE RETREAT at CAMP HEBRON

Retreat information and registration will be mailed and online late April/early May. Cost \$175.00

Jodie Vasbinder, Spiritual Enrichment Coordinator/Director



Sue MacDonald, President





Ms. Caryl J. Casey
Treasurer
800-932-9442
ccasey@abcopad.com

The start of a new year is a good time to think about how and when we do the things that are important. When I think about some of the reasons ABCOPAD continues to thrive, I believe it has much to do with our willingness to Adapt, Adjust and Acclimate. What do those things mean in the everydayness of life in this region? It means that while we always want the information, we share to be current and meaningful we need to recognize that we are part of a bigger function, and we can't always control how that affects us.

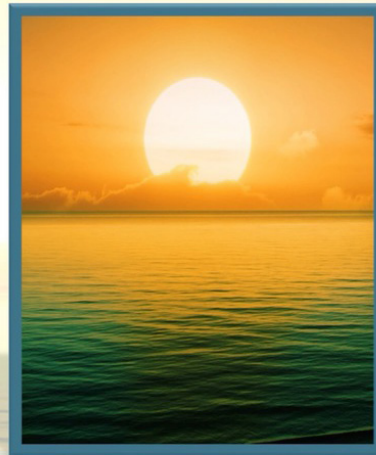
Late in 2022, ABCUSA began the process of having regions enter the mission giving from their churches into a new program that also maintains pastoral and lay leadership as well as church information. As we worked through the

bumps and potholes in the road of learning a new system, deadlines for monthly closings changed from month to month, access to reports became more challenging and other information that you look for in Notes & News was held up while we waited for the mission giving data to become available.

We've decided that it would be better to have our numbers run a month behind and to know that what we are publishing is correct and that we are not putting undue pressure on other members of our team and their workloads (Thank you, Denise and Donna for being so willing to work with our new constraints!) We have not yet closed December's missions so, in February's Notes & News you'll see the year-end totals for 2023 giving. After that, we'll be on a new schedule with the figures being a month behind but knowing that they are accurate and reflect any changes or adjustments. Thank for your understanding and for financial support as we seek to further the kingdom of God both here in our region, the U.S. and internationally.

Caryl

And we know
 that God causes
 all things to
 work together for
 good to those
 who love God, to
 those who are
 called according
 to His purpose.



Romans 8-28



February, 2024 Deadline:

Items to be included in the February issue of Notes & News need to arrive by 5 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 1.

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



Rev. Dan McDowell
ABCOPAD Southeast GPS
dmcowell@abcopad.com

Toward the end of 2021 I was honored to be asked to serve in a transitional role as one of six “Geographic Pastoral Servants” in ABCOPAD while the Vision Committee and the Board of Directors sought God’s guidance for future leadership following the resignation of our Executive Pastor. I accepted the role because I knew that over my decades in pastoral ministry, the only thing that kept my head above water when I was drowning in a sea of challenges and conflicts, was the counsel and support of my colleagues in ministry.

In many ways we are still trying to emerge from the after-effects of the pandemic that swept the world in 2020 but COVID only threw gasoline on an already raging fire of change and cultural shifts that had our heads reeling. I am comforted by the fact that God’s church has endured far greater challenges. While the church of tomorrow isn’t going to look much like the church of yesterday or today, the Lord has a plan that we can trust!

Todd Bolsinger, the author of “Canoeing the Mountains” is quoted as saying “What is in front of you is always different from what is behind you.” We can count on three things when it comes to drastic change:

1. Change is constant.
2. Change is uncomfortable.
3. Change causes us to rely on Jesus.

For me, embracing my responsibilities as a GPS has caused me to navigate a huge learning curve. I have had to learn technology I never considered before and gain an awareness of issues and challenges pastors and congregations are having that I never knew. And now I am trying to learn how to help churches through the transition between pastors. It is a daunting challenge (but also a privilege!) Thank you for giving me this opportunity – and thank you for providing the support that your brothers and sisters in Christ throughout ABCOPAD need through your generous support of Partners in Ministry. You are making a difference. I have seen it!

Partners in Ministry
Fulfilling Christ’s Mission in the World

You can give to
Partners in Ministry...

1. Through your local congregation’s weekly offering by designating your gift to ABCOPAD - *Partners in Ministry*.
2. Through ABCOPAD’s Online Giving option, available on the Regional website (www.abcopad.org). Your church can receive mission-giving credit for your online gift.
3. By giving through your mobile device (www.abcopad.mobile).
4. By sending your check (made payable to ABCOPAD WMS) to: ABCOPAD; P.O. Box 421; Hatboro, PA 19040

Thank you for your giving to **Partners in Ministry** and for your partnership as we minister together in Pennsylvania and Delaware.



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BEYOND THE BULLETIN - Intentional Worship

Led by Heidi Clark

Online January 22 & February 3

with Synchronous Meet-Ups on
Saturday, 1/27, and 2/3 from 8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Mission & Vision of Beyond the Bulletin

**Our God is intentional;
therefore, our worship should be intentional.**

Beyond the Bulletin is a **free** two-week online course that addresses the need to educate and empower ABCOPAD servant leaders in planning intentional worship that glorifies God and is relevant to their community.

At a Glance: Beyond the Bulletin

- Discover planning intentional worship that glorifies God and is relevant to your community.
- Dive deep into the biblical, theological, and historical pillars of intentional worship.
- Be a part of action research.
- Earn CEUs.
- Connect with other Christian servant leaders.



Heidi Clark

Heidi has served in ministry for almost 30 years as a musician, servant leader, and educator.

She has a B.S. in Music Education from Duquesne University and a Master's in Music from the University of Connecticut, and is currently completing doctorate work in worship studies with the Institute for Worship Studies in Jacksonville, Florida. She has been the Director of Worship and Art for the past two decades at the North Hills Community Baptist Church (Pittsburgh). Her passion is to educate and empower others in worship leadership.



To Register, www.beyondthebulletin.com