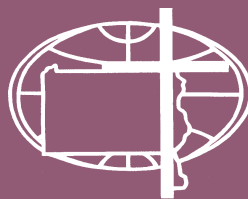


Notes & News, Thoughts & Views



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 33, Number 4

April, 2023

John 21:10-14 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Every Easter Season, my mind drifts back to one of my first Easter ministry experiences. As a new student at Eastern Theological Seminary, I needed to find an internship. My wife Susan and I were living in Upper Darby, PA, and ended up serving at a United Methodist Church in Lansdowne, not far from our home. Due to a variety of reasons, including my recent wedding to my wife, I started looking for internships a bit late, and all the Baptist churches in the area already had interns. As a result, I found myself at a United Methodist Church in downtown Lansdowne. The church was surrounded by low-income housing, including apartments within walking distance of the church. My primary responsibility as the Seminary Interim was to create a Children's Ministry and Student Ministry, so I focused on the kids in the neighborhood.

Back in 1986, I was still VERY inexperienced in ministry. My wife Susan and I decided to do an Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday Morning and dye real hardboiled eggs for the event. On Saturday night, we dyed dozens of hardboiled eggs to hide around the church in the morning. We also had the children who attended the service decorate Easter Baskets during Sunday School, which would later be used to collect their Easter Eggs before the worship service. I had an Easter Story ready for the Children's Message explaining to the kids the symbolism behind the "Easter Egg," symbolizing the resurrection and a prize for the child who found the most eggs. Everything seemed to be going precisely as planned on Easter Sunday morning.

During the worship service, with so many children attending from the low-income housing surrounding the church, things began to go awry. Shortly after the service began, my wife

Susan and I could hear hardboiled eggs cracking and being shelled. These kids, who probably had not eaten breakfast, were now eating their Easter Eggs during morning worship. Eggs were being peeled, and eggshells were falling on the sanctuary carpet. It was too late to stop the cascade, as child after child saw their friends peeling an Easter Egg and repeating the activity.

As you probably already guessed, the old guard of the church was none too happy watching kids peel and eat Easter Eggs in their sanctuary. The frustration and growing anger for what was transpiring were palpable. I realized my days of ministry at the church were probably numbered with this career-ending mistake. Fortunately for me, the Senior Pastor, along with a couple of congregational leaders, was impressed by the large number of children in attendance and thought it was delightful having kids eat their morning breakfast in the sanctuary.

Since then, there have been many memorable Easter breakfasts in my ministry. There have been many Easter mornings when I have been up before sunrise celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death and enjoying breakfast with my family and congregation. One of my favorite stories in scripture is Jesus having breakfast with the disciples post-resurrection. The disciples recognize Jesus following a miraculous catch and then enjoying a sunrise meal on the beach. Amid despair, uncertainty, and mourning, it is during a meal with Jesus the disciples find hope, encouragement, and strength.

Back in 1986, I hope those kids who had an Easter Breakfast in the sanctuary encountered our Risen Lord. I hope they discovered Jesus, who not only wants to care for their spiritual needs but their physical and emotional needs as well. I hope there are many opportunities for us, as Jesus followers, to invite people to hear the Easter Story and find a Savior who loves them. Praying you've had a wonderful resurrection celebration.

Blessings,
Mark



*A generous person will be enriched,
and the one who gives a drink of
water will receive water.*

Proverbs 11:25 HCSB

Once upon a time in a land with fertile soil, plentiful sunshine and perfect rainfall, there lived a community of winemakers. Each winemaker took pride in their vineyard and worked it with great care to produce the best possible grapes for their wine. Their wines and community were well known for their excellence.

A difficult season fell upon the community and each winemaker put all they had in energy and finances to produce what was a meager harvest when compared to previous years.

The leaders of their community made the decision to celebrate such work in the face of hardship with a festival. Mindful of the sacrifices each one had already made during the season, the leadership announced that each winemaker should bring just one bottle of their best wine to add to a community vat on the day of the festival. The combined wines would symbolize to the community the importance of each one's efforts to provide for the entire community.

When the day of the festival arrived, the large barrel was set on top a platform in the town square where everyone could watch the process of joining their wines as each winemaker came forward, climbed the steps to the platform and added their best to the community vat.

When each winemaker had poured their contribution into the vat, the master vintner blessed the wine and with a glass in hand, turned the handle on the spout to enjoy the first taste of the community wine.

To everyone's surprise, what came from the community barrel was as clear as water – in fact, it was water! A gasp rose from the crowd as the master lifted the glass above his head for all to see.

Each winemaker secretly thought to themselves that if they dumped just a bottle of water into the community wine barrel no one would be the wiser, after all, they had been through a difficult season and could not spare one bottle of good wine.

The community learned an important lesson about generosity that day.

Love Gift giving began in 1932. During the Great Depression when American Baptist Churches faced a half-million-dollar deficit. Fearing that the financial crisis would curtail God's work, the women were challenged to give out of their excess. Receiving the challenge, women began the over-and-above contribution called Love Gift.



From the very beginning, women collected these gifts in small boxes, which eventually became known as Love Gift boxes.

American Baptist women continue their generous giving through various programs such as Region project, Conference/Retreat project, local missions, and Love Gift. Love Gift supports the full range of American Baptist mission.

Love Gift remains a contribution over and above our regular giving. We give out of a sense of LOVE, FAITH, and GRATITUDE to God for all His blessings, and in recognition of our need to share these blessings with others. It is an offering to God. This past year has been very different for us, and in many ways, it may be as challenging as the churches felt in 1932. So, like the women of 1932, let's rise to the challenge of funding mission out of our excess.

You do not need a little box to donate to LOVE GIFT! But it is fun being creative in how much and when to add to your offering box. *(Like finding money in pockets, the dryer, for your birthday or a special occasion of your choosing.)* You can give a Love Gift at the link below. Select LOVE GIFT DONATION in the designation area.

<https://give.ministrylink.com/app/giving/abwmopad>



A percentage of the LOVE GIFT collected in Pennsylvania and Delaware is returned to our Region to carry out mission and ministry in ABCOPAD. Because the women are predominantly the donors to LOVE GIFT, the ABCOPAD Board has returned 10% of what the Region receives to help the Women's Ministries of ABCOPAD continue to Thrive. This is true partnership!



Rev. Cristy Wise
Southwest Geographic
Pastoral Servant
wisefour14@gmail.com

Life is crazy!! Do I hear an Amen?? Things are going along great and then suddenly, the rug gets pulled out from under you and you must completely re-adjust your calendar...things you had so nicely lined up to do...spaced out...organized...getting ready for Easter and then...your entire life gets turned upside down. That is exactly what happened to me this past week.

My brother-in-law Rick DeMeo was battling ALS. This past Thursday, I got a call early in the morning to come to Pittsburgh right now; it looked like God was calling Rick home. I spent the entire day with him and my sister...things were not good when I left at 9 pm. I said my last words to Rick on this side of Eternity. God called him home early Friday morning. Vicious disease in every way, but Rick fought the good fight and finished the race.



Why do I share this? How is this about a Hallelujah moment? As people came into the church for the viewing, they were lined up from 2:30 until 11 pm. They wanted to share what Rick meant to them and how he had impacted their lives for Jesus. Even one of the doctors came, stood in line, and shared how her faith has been changed because of Rick's love for Jesus and from a family that exhibited love for Rick through his 5-year journey with ALS. Hallelujah!

Isn't that what Easter should be about? What does the Cross mean? How has the Cross changed your life? If it has changed your life, do others know it? Do the people in your life know that you love Jesus, that He died on the Cross for our sins, rose again and defeated the grave! Why? So, He could provide a way for us, His children, to spend eternity with Him!

Over and over again, stories were shared about how Rick - whether coaching or training kids for baseball, working on his fundraising job, serving in the church, being with his boys, supporting his wife in her ministry as Children's Pastor - was always sharing Jesus. Asking how your devotion time was going, praying with and for you, sharing Jesus in word and deed with those God placed in his life. What a testimony of a life lived for Jesus.

That is what the message of the Cross is all about! Are we sharing it with those in our lives? We need to be letting others know what Jesus has done for each of us as believers by way of the Cross! Your loved one's eternity depends on it!

As a GPS, if there was anything I could encourage our churches to do...is make sure that we are training up disciples! Our world is hurting. Our world is suffering. People need Jesus. We should love people and use things; however, the world has flipped that. May we NEVER water down the Gospel...may we preach with boldness the message of Saving Grace through Jesus Christ...the ONLY way to Heaven.



My 17-year granddaughter was at a conference, and she shared something she learned: "As long as we have a pulse, we have a purpose." AMEN! If we are fulfilling our purpose in life, then when there is no pulse, our testimony (purpose) will live on in the lives of others. Rick, even though he could not speak...had a purpose as he fought this battle.

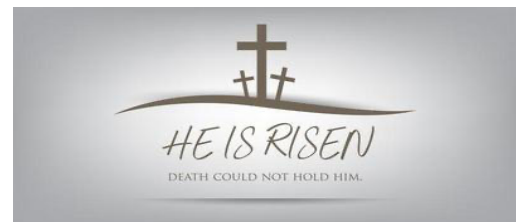


A void has been created within my life; but knowing it's Heaven's gain is extremely comforting. Prayers, please, as we journey through this loss. May his life, even though you don't know Rick personally, be an encouragement to you to keep sharing

Jesus in EVERY aspect of your life!

For we know that HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN indeed! Rick has the best seat for EASTER this year! Hallelujah!

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9





Rev. Dan McDowell
Southeast Geographic
Pastoral Servant
dmcowell@abcpad.com

Luke 22:19 NIV

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 24:30-32 NIV

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

I am writing this on Maundy Thursday in the midst of Holy Week, so I find myself reflecting on the deep meaning of the Lord's Supper today, but it is especially poignant to me this year for several reasons...

For one thing, I am preaching on Easter Sunday about the resurrection appearance that Jesus made to two of His followers (one of them named Cleopas and the other unnamed) on the road to Emmaus. I have heard a number of sermons about that encounter with the risen Christ over the years and it has always seemed like a surreal — almost dream-like — situation. Why did they not recognize Jesus at first?

I have heard several explanations for that, but none of them have really satisfied me. At least not from a rational perspective. I can't imagine being on a long walk with someone who meant a lot to me (even after their death) without recognizing them, their voice and their personality... It has always seemed to me that the Lord somehow prevented them from recognizing Him until He broke bread with them.

The powerful experience they had with Jesus in the upper room, shortly before he was arrested, tried and crucified, suddenly came back to them, along with His words to "...do this in remembrance of me."

When Jesus left them, they immediately went to find the 11 remaining disciples and proclaimed:
"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:34b-35 NIV)

They had heard the testimonies of the women who had found the empty tomb and been told of Jesus' resurrection by the angels who appeared there. Their testimonies had even been confirmed by Peter... but they were still unsure about the whole situation before Jesus appeared to them in person. And even then, it only dawned on them gradually that they had just met with the risen Christ!

I find some comfort in that. I can't say that I have ever had a "thunder and lightning" experience with God. I have had mountain-top experiences at church camp, at retreats and conferences and even when I have met with the Lord in a quiet place, but it usually takes me some time to sort things out in my mind and for God's words to me to sink in. That seems to be the case for Cleopas and the other disciple as well.

I mentioned that there are several reasons that this passage of scripture has been especially meaningful to me this year. One of the main "pillars" of the congregation I serve in Phoenixville (Tom Ashbaugh) suddenly passed away last week. I say "suddenly" even though he has been in a ferocious battle with cancer for years. But he was with us, leading worship on March 26 and was with the Lord by Palm Sunday. It sure felt sudden to me!

I have to admit, I am still reeling from it. We knew we counted on Tom to do a lot of things, and we had been quietly trying to figure out how we would manage to go on without him when the time came. We just didn't think that time would come so soon. He was supposed to sing at our Good Friday and Easter services! And I can't begin to tell you how many other things he quietly, efficiently took care of without fanfare. Thankless, seemingly mundane but vital things...

Part of me is grateful that Tom will no longer have to endure chemotherapy or radiation treatments. And I am certainly grateful for the legacy he leaves behind. But I find myself like Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, feeling uncertain and somewhat melancholy in his (albeit) temporary absence. There are times when I find myself walking with Jesus, yet experiencing confusion and uncertainty. I wonder where Jesus is, and what in the world is going on, even when Jesus is carrying me through a situation.

Like Cleopas and his friend, our experience with the risen Christ tends to dawn upon us slowly as we look back on things and realize how He appeared to us and spoke to us... and how "our hearts burned within us". Once we experience Him personally and realize His presence, our salvation becomes complete and our lives change as His Gospel becomes our mission.

I pray that you will at least glimpse the risen Christ every day as He walks with you on the road of life!



Rev. Randy Powell
Northwest Geographic
Pastoral Servant
pastorpowell@hotmail.com



“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” — An Easter reminder that God has already solved our biggest and most important problems.

In J.R.R. Tolkien’s masterpiece, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the titular fellowship arrives with its nine members at the Gates of Moria, the old entrance to the ancient dwarf kingdom long since abandoned. The fellowship are in desperate straits, their first attempt to move

forward with the quest of destroying the One Ring had been defeated soundly when a blizzard closed the mountain pass. Now, with wolves approaching they find themselves facing a locked door. Gandalf purposes to lead them under the mountain to the other side, but the way forward is blocked. Unless Gandalf can decode the door’s cryptic message, “Speak friend, and enter” by recalling the password that will open the magically sealed doors, this entire mission may end in failure before it accomplishes anything.

As the scene unfolds, Gandalf tries potential solutions in great number, all end in failure. Despite all his wisdom and skill, nothing works. That is until someone with a lot less wisdom and skill, the hobbit Merry, realizes that they had the answer all along. The door’s message should have been translated, “Speak ‘friend’, and enter.” As soon as Gandalf spoke the Elvish word for friend, the doors came open. The mystery of the sealed doors was really no mystery at all, the answer was written in plain sight.

As the Easter narrative begins in Mark’s Gospel, we see Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome on their way to the tomb to honor Jesus by further preparing his body for its final burial place. Having come very early in the morning, after a Sabbath when few of Jesus’ followers could have known any peace following his horrific murder on a Cross, the women don’t realize until they reach the garden that they don’t have a plan to remove the large stone from the tomb’s entrance. Thus, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” is a question that needs an answer, one the women don’t have. Or so it seems to them.

In reality, God had already moved the stone, the tomb of Jesus had already been transformed from a place of sorrow, into history’s most incredible victory monument. There was nothing wrong with the women being concerned about the stone, it was a legitimate obstacle from their point-of-view, but keeping with the pattern found in the scripture’s of God’s will and purpose being in motion whether his people are aware of it or not, God had answered their question before they even asked it.

We sometimes forget this, or at least don’t act like we know it, but God has already answered all of life’s most important questions for us. There are no riddles left for us to solve before we can move forward, when Jesus rose from the grave, the question, “What is the meaning of life?” had a full and powerful answer. So too did, “How am I supposed to live my life?” and “What happens to us when we die?” God has not called us to serve a cause that we can hope might succeed, but one in which the victory has already been secured, no need for us to worry about rolling away the stone.



News From our Associations (www.abcopad.org)

Abington

Berean, Carbondale is celebrating its 175th Anniversary in 2023. The formal celebration will be in the coming months, but the church was founded on March 1, 1848. This momentous news was celebrated by the Scranton Times-Tribune on Monday. Pastor Debbie Loessy graced the front page next to a lengthy article about the history and ministry of the church in the city of Carbondale.

There is a large population of Welsh immigrants in the Scranton community, and Sunday marked the observance of St. David's Day, (the patron saint of Wales) at **United, Taylor**. Lead Pastor, Rev. David Barrett did a great job both recognizing the day, as well as preaching a solid message from Luke 9, lifting up the need for each of us to take up our cross and follow Jesus. The service concluded with Communion.

Allegheny River

FBC, SHINGLEHOUSE had a wonderful Sportsmen's Banquet earlier this month with a great response to the Gospel. Special Speaker was Todd Vincent, Texas Outdoorsman, whose grandfather was an AB pastor. We had great food (meatloaf made from venison, elk & beef), great door prizes and a great time was had by all who attended. We have 10 individuals currently taking the new Membership Classes. PTL!

Central Union

Thanks to a generous grant from ABCOPAD, **Lower Providence** was able to purchase an *automated external defibrillator* or AED. On Sunday 3/26, 13 members of the congregation took part in a training/certification class. Lord willing, what we learned will never be needed.

Pastor Jonathan Matthew recently had a baptism at the **Exton Community** where the congregation has been reaching out to the Asian Community in significant ways. God has been blessing his efforts!

FBC, Kennett Square, celebrated the baptism of three new believers. Pastor Tony Tillford performed the baptism, and Pastor Dan Nicewonger prayed over the candidates.

Royersford is hosting an afternoon with AB missionaries Sarah and Luis Matos on April 23, 3 p.m. Come meet them and learn about their work in Oaxaca, Mexico. Call 610-948-4170.

Centre

Don Witherspoon, member of **Altoona, Mt. Zion Missionary**, was inducted to the Claysburg Area Hall of Fame on April 1. For more than 30 years, Don served as a **Committed Leader of the NAACP** through people advocacy, scholarships and relationships. He touched so many lives...and he loved golf! Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant — Matthew 25:21

Parchment Valley Conference Center fully embodies its mission statement: "Where Lives Are Changed." Kathy Staje (**Liberty, Blanchard**) reports that a team of ABCOPAD volunteers travelled to the camp in West Virginia to help the camp get ready for up to 3,000 campers who will be there this summer! Servant Hands at Work!

Delaware

Bud and Carol Russell welcomed several dozen fellow travelers to Dover for an Experience Israel Orientation Meeting. There are 48 folk going to the Holy Land in May. It was a great opportunity to get acquainted with each other. Carol provided all the nitty-gritty details of the trip (flight info, accommodations, packing tips, etc), Bud spoke of the daily schedule and opportunities for personal spiritual development. The program also included several excellent devotional video clips from locations in Israel.

Friends and members of **Christ Memorial, Dover** gathered over the weekend to celebrate its 60th Anniversary of work, witness, worship in the community. Pastor Jeff Collins delivered the message "Legacy" (which included a number of "volunteers" who demonstrated how a cathedral is built with flying buttresses! It was hysterical!!!) A grand day!

FBC, Holloway Terrace; 308 West Ave; New Castle, DE 19720 is accepting donations until June 4th of non-perishable food, clothing and hygiene products for victims of the recent tornados. Call 302-654-1710 for more information.

Harrisburg

The search committee and leadership of **Colonial Park Community** gathered for an afternoon of dreaming. As they're preparing to call their next pastor, they wanted to drill deeply into WHO they are (what gifts and passions has God uniquely gifted them with) and WHERE they are (what opportunities for making disciples exist right within their neighborhood). A conversation that began by naming limitations quickly became one focused on opportunities & possibilities. By the end they had created a list of exciting, concrete ideas for blessing and building relationships with their neighbors!

Monongahela

Working on a Women's Mission Project, ladies of **Olive Branch** created Valentines cards for the "Day of Love" for an orphanage/school in Brazil. Each of the 125 students will receive a personalized card. It was an enjoyable time full of laughter and friendship. Being the hands & feet of Jesus!

Oil Creek

Meet Dan Cass, lead pastor at Greenfield, North East. Pastor Dan has recently reported on many of the good things happening at Greenfield including plans for a HUGE Vacation Bible School this June and a Disaster Relief Team heading to Kentucky over Memorial Day weekend.

Reading

Pastors from the Reading Association met to review John Spatig's (*Associate Pastor FBC Bethlehem*) ordination paper. What an amazing opportunity for relatively new pastors and pastors with decades of service in the association to gather, affirm and challenge Pastor John in this next stage of his ministry calling.

Ten Mile

The congregation at **Jefferson** rolled out the red carpet to their new pastor — Dr. Kevin Roberts. Welcome to ABCOPAD!

The youth group at **Jefferson** recently visited the **Ark Encounter** in Williamstown, Kentucky.

Ten Mile held their Spring Meeting at **WWJD** (West Waynesburg Jesus Distributors). The meeting began with a Concert of Prayer led by Pastors Jim and Cathie Carpenter (lead pastors at the church) followed by a short business meeting to talk about future plans for the Association.

Other Item of Interest

The **Charis Institute at Regent University** is conducting a nationwide survey focused on the well-being and help-seeking attitudes of pastors. The link to participate is:
<https://pastoralwellnessresearch.com/charis2/?group=ABC>

	2022	2023
United Mission Basics	\$22,873	\$21,130
Love Gift	\$2,317	\$1,969
Partners in Ministry	\$25,482	\$26,929
Annual Offerings		
AFC	\$20,869	\$19,218
WMO	\$1,718	\$1,039
RMMO	\$3,207	\$1,083
OGHS	\$24,439	\$3,977

The cumulative comparison figures

United Mission Basics is behind thru Mar. 2023 by (\$5,734).

The decrease in United Missions (includes UMB & Love Gift) amounts to (\$3,868.) less in actual dollars, that ABCOPAD received thru Mar.

AFC is behind by (\$923) thru Mar. This decrease amounts to (\$271) less in actual dollars, that ABCOPAD received thru Mar.

Partners in Ministry is behind by (\$7,387) through Mar.
In actual dollars, from UM, AFC and PIM,
ABCOPAD has received (\$11,526) less thru Mar.



May, 2023 Deadline:

Items to be included in the April issue of Notes & News need to arrive by 5 p.m., Thursday, May 4.

Please send all material to Denise Veselicky via one of the following:

Mail: ABCOPAD • 159 N. Bellefield Ave. • Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2609 • **Email:** dveselicky@abcpad.com

Phone: 888-687-0883 • **Fax:** 412-687-3941

Thank you! Donna L. Schneff, designer • deeschneff@gmail.com

**American Baptist Churches of
Pennsylvania and Delaware**

Pittsburgh Baptist Association
159 N Bellefield Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Pittsburgh, PA
Permit No. 379

Address Service Requested

2023 Pastors & Spouses Retreat **Restore, Receive & Revive - June 7-9**



I don't know about you, but I've been enjoying the taste of spring/summer weather we've been enjoying this week after Easter. The sunshine and warmer temperatures have reminded me of how much I am looking forward to our Pastor and Spouses Retreat that taking place in just a few months! Maybe in the busyness that was Lent and

Easter, you've neglected to register. If that's the case, now is the time to do so! We need to have the final numbers for the retreat center by the beginning of May, so please finalize your plans and follow the link below to register today!

If you're on the fence about the retreat for any reason, please reach out to me so we can chat about your concerns or hesitations. I'd love to help remove any obstacles that might be standing in your way, especially if they are financial, as we have a few scholarships available.

<https://www.abcopad.org/Events/2023-Pastor-Spouse-Retreat.aspx>

Rev. Rob Rice
North Central
Geographic Pastoral Servant
rrice@abcopad.com

