

Metro Chicago *EWIND*

Seeking Justice • Loving Mercy • Walking Humbly

A weekly electronic newsletter from and for the American Baptists of the Windy City and its environs, covering matters as diverse as our region.

Church Highlight . . . The Community Church of Wilmette



Our four-year-old son loves churches. When we are on vacation, he will see a church and want to go in. I'm sure that this is partly because my wife and I are both pastors, which means our two young boys stay surrounded by church life. Our son thinks of congregants as extended family members. He constantly talks about people from church, prays for them at night, and shares stories about people at the dinner table. Maybe this will all change, and it is ok if it does. At the moment, though, our son wants to share life with, what he calls, his "church friends."

It has been an exciting time within our congregation as we've welcomed in members and have experimented with activities for our wider community. Our church talks a lot about what it means to do life together, yet for our members that life began with an invitation. None of our current

members were part of founding families, and the few that grew up in the congregation had a gap before they returned as adults. Each member has a memory of someone welcoming them into the life of our church and inviting them to participate in our rich 103-year history of ministry within the community.

Recently, a mom from one of our newer families commented how grateful she was that the church intentionally created space for people of all ages. I think that's true. Last year we did a series of videos interviewing members. One member described our congregation as a place "to find out what you are capable of as a Christian." This challenges us to create a safe space where people can explore, and it begins with an invitation.

I am grateful to be part of a congregation, and a region, where I can call you all my "church friends!"

Peace,

David Van Brakle, Pastor
Community Church of Wilmette
www.ccwilmette.org

Call For Nominations – ABCMC Interim Executive Minister

As the search for our Interim Executive Minister of ABCMC begins, we would like to extend the offer to all who have not yet had the opportunity to submit the names of your nominees for the position. We have a strong list developing and appreciate all of your prayerful input. This person will lead us through strategic conversations about mission and vision and help guide us as we journey into the future of our shared life as a region.

To nominate someone, please send their name, title, and contact information (telephone and email) to Rev. Carol Jamieson-Brown. She will be in touch with them to solicit an application.

Alternately, we also welcome applications to the position. To apply for the position, please send a resume/vita and a cover letter that speaks to your experience with ABCMC and why you are interested in the position.

There is a firm deadline of midnight July 5, 2016. Email is highly preferred (pastorcarolfb@yahoo.com). Snail mail should be postmarked July 5, 2016 (107 Westwood Drive, Park Forest, IL 60466).

An Invitation to Sign

Rev. Al Sharp, a longtime member of Hyde Park Union Church and Executive Director of Clergy for a New Drug Policy, has submitted the following open letter to Governor Rauner, asking for your prayerful consideration about adding your name alongside other Illinois Clergy. If you are a clergy person interested in signing this letter, please email Rev. Sharp at revaesharp@gmail.com.

Dear Governor Rauner,

As clergy in Illinois, we urge that you sign Senate Bill 2228, which provides for civil enforcement, not criminal penalties, for marijuana possession in our state.

In issuing an amendatory veto of similar legislation a year ago, you called for a reduction to 10 or less grams in the amount that can be possessed; and an increase in the fine for the law's violation of no more than \$200. The bill now before you reflects these changes.

Individuals possessing less than or equal to 10 grams (approximately one-third of any ounce) of marijuana would be charged with a civil, not criminal law violation with a fine of no more than \$200.

Most of this amount would be used to defray enforcement costs; a portion would be used to fund drug addiction services.

As you know, over 100 Illinois cities and towns, including Chicago, already have enacted local ordinances calling for civil sanctions comparable to a traffic ticket. This patchwork of ordinances and laws has led to uneven enforcement across the state.

We are especially concerned that current laws concerning marijuana possession result in "collateral consequences" which can follow individuals for life. A criminal record – and in many cases even a record of arrest – may seriously undermine an individual's access to employment, education, public assistance, and housing. Furthermore, enforcement of current law is highly discriminatory. In Illinois, African Americans are more than 7 times more likely to be arrested than white people even though use is the same across racial groups. Illinois ranks 2nd in the U.S. in arrests of African Americans for marijuana possession.

Current expenditures could be directed toward more urgent enforcement priorities. Local jail and county correctional facilities in

Illinois spend more than \$20 million annually housing individuals for marijuana possession charges. In 2010, Illinois spent over \$126 million on police, judicial, and legal costs associated with marijuana possession.

We applaud your commitment to reduce the prison population in Illinois by 25% over the next 10 years, and both to reduce state costs and to redirect resources to more productive purposes. This legislation is consistent with these purposes.

While first offenders for marijuana use do not generally face prison, even one or two subsequent charges can lead to this result. Further, individuals often spend up to 25 days in jail for low-level marijuana charges, jeopardizing jobs, and straining families, only to have their cases dismissed.

We call upon you to sign this bill at the earliest possible date.

For Your Calendars:

**Our August Family Council Meeting
has been rescheduled for
August 20th at 9 am
(registration and breakfast at 8:30 am).
Location TBA**

refugeeONE

Back-to-School Drive

Having the right school supplies is the first step in doing well in school for any child – for children newly relocated to Chicago as refugees, the need is even greater. You can help RefugeeOne ensure that the youth in their program are equipped to do well in their studies next fall by donating school supplies or making a \$25 gift to cover the cost of a backpack filled with a student's needed supplies!

The RefugeeOne office will be open for donation drop-off on July 25-26, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm and July 27-28, 8:30 am - 6:30 pm.

Items Needed:

- Pens, pencils, crayons, markers,
- Backpacks colored pencils, highlighters
- Scissors, glue sticks, rulers
- Spiral notebooks, folders, lined loose-leaf paper

See the full list of needed supplies and additional information on the donations calendar. (www.refugeeone.org)

Special Prayer Request



Pastor Thomas Aldworth (Morgan Park Baptist Church) is asking for prayers for his wife, Beth. She will be facing serious and complicated surgery on Wednesday, July 6 and is in great pain. Please keep Beth and Thomas in your prayers.



Bi-Annual Intercultural Conference
by The Massachusetts Baptist Multicultural Ministries
Sponsors include the American Baptists Home Mission Societies

Bold Conversations

*"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."
2 Timothy 4:2*

August 12-13th 2016
DoubleTree by Hilton, Leominster, MA

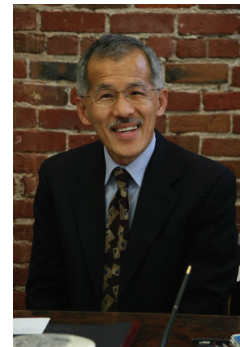
Featuring:



Rev. Dr. Eric Law
Founder &
Executive Director
The Kaleidoscope Institute



Dr. Jeffrey Haggray
Executive Director
American Baptist Home
Mission Societies



Rev. Don Ng
Former President
American Baptist
Churches USA

In times when differing perspectives on challenging topics can result in polarization, alienation, misunderstanding and exclusion, Christians are called upon to engage in bold conversations that encourage sincere listening and respect.

Join us in bold conversations in a setting that is healthy, open, safe, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led. Learn by example how to allow people to be their whole selves and embody the truth of their witness to lovingly engage with others who may disagree. We will create a safe space for people to witness and share their stories. We will learn and unlearn from one another. Our goal is not to come up with a statement but practice bold conversation with truth and grace for us to learn from one another and enrich the practice of multicultural ministries in our community and churches.

Register online today at www.mbmm.org or by phone at 781-457-8058

Young Adult Scholarships Available!

Clergy eligible for Cultivating New Life Grants from American Baptist Home Mission Societies

Lectionary Studies for Sunday, July 10, 2016 – Dr. Jay Wilcoxon

8th Sunday after Pentecost Year C

Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37.

The judgment of God can mean the death of a nation, though God's will is for the compassion of the Good Samaritan.

After four weeks on Elijah and Elisha, the Lectionary selections from the prophets move to **Amos and Hosea**. These prophets spoke the word of God against Israel about a hundred years after the times of Elijah and Elisha. The words they brought were the judgment of God upon a mercenary and faithless nation.

Amos 7:7-17

This Sunday's Amos reading begins with an **announcement of doom** on the kingdom of Israel, and specifically on the dynasty of Jehu, now headed by Jehu's greatgrandson, Jeroboam II (reigned over the northern kingdom approximately 786-746 BCE). This announcement of doom is delivered at a major sanctuary of the northern kingdom, Bethel, called "the king's sanctuary" (verse 13), and was probably delivered at the time of a great festival-assembly at that ancient holy place.

Amos intended to get the attention of masses of people from all over the kingdom. When he began to succeed, the head priest of Bethel, Amaziah, pronounced that "the land is not able to bear all [Amos's] words" (verse 10, NRSV). After reporting Amos' treasonable oracles to the king, the royal priest commanded the prophet to return to his provincial town in Judah and never approach the royal sanctuary again (verses 12-13).

So, Amos had delivered God's condemnation of Israel. If there is a prophet anywhere who is **truly a doom prophet**, with only words of condemnation and disaster, it is Amos. There is one add-on passage at the end of the book that portrays a glorious future for David and the land (Amos 9:11-15), but otherwise the book is unrelenting doom for Israel. Amos in his own time, announced, in several powerful speeches, the death of Israel. (We will look more closely at this death announcement next week.)

Two points of enormous importance may be simply stated, without much development.

First, Amos itemizes at length the reasons for God's condemning Israel to death. The reasons are *the repeated and ingrained violations of social justice*. Israel will die because they "sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals" (Amos 2:6). It is a time of prosperity and the well-to-do are engrossed in luxuries, busy denying justice to the less powerful, and ignoring the plight of the truly poor. The existence of a nation is weighed in the divine scales of justice and found wanting. The nation will go.

Second, Amos is the earliest voice in a world-wide development of human spirituality. By insisting that Yahweh, the God of Israel, can cast away this chosen people, the God who spoke through Amos rose above a religious life based on racial, ethnic, and geographical roots.

Amos delivers the first affirmation of a **God who transcends** the tribal and national orders of the human world.

Amos delivers the first word of what some historians and philosophers call "the Axial Age," the historical period (roughly 800 to 200 BCE) in which there emerged the great universalist religions and wisdom traditions that still define the main global communities of faith. (See more in the discussion of the Gospel below.)

This, of course, is **not Amos' way of expressing it**. He was a man who, in the wilderness of Tekoa, saw visions, heard words, and found himself sent from behind the flock to deliver God's overwhelming word of justice to Israel (verses 14-15).

But his intensity for justice was driving toward a vaster vision for humankind.

Psalm 82

The Psalm reading also has to do with **divine judgment**.

Psalm 82 is set in the heavenly council of the gods, the standard religious cosmos of Mesopotamian and Canaanite religious institutions and traditions. God the Lord is in fact delivering judgment upon the divine council itself! (Later Jewish and Christian traditions understood these to be angels, or even earthly princes and judges.)

God indicts the lesser divinities, the members of the Cabinet, if you will.

How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?

How should they be using their heavenly powers instead?

Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
(Verses 2-4, NRSV.)

The word of judgment that Amos delivered to the prosperous in Bethel, God delivers in person to the other mighty powers of the heavenly world, who are understood to influence and direct the affairs of their favorites on earth.

And what is the conclusion of this judgment?

You are gods,
children of the Most High, all of you;
nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince. (Verses 6-7.)

Just as the elect people Israel may be condemned to death on earth, so God the Lord can do without these unreliable heavenly beings. This psalm virtually announces **the death of all heavenly powers** except God the Lord. (These powers would, of course, return later as various kinds of angels and those "elemental spirits" to be heard of in this month's Epistle reading.)

[Continued on page 5]

Lectionary Studies for Sunday, July 10, 2016

[Continued from page 4]

The absolute scale on which heavenly beings also would be weighed was justice and compassion, for the poor and powerless. These, the poor and powerless, are truly the people of God.

Colossians 1:1-14

As the prophetic readings have shifted to different books, so the Epistle readings for the next four weeks are from a different letter of Paul – or, perhaps, a letter written under Paul's name.

Colossians in one of the letters that many historical scholars think was not written by the real Paul, the Paul of Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans.

My personal experience is this: several sections of this letter are unusual (if not strange) compared to the main letters, but taken by itself I could accept it as a letter by Paul. The problem is the great similarity of Colossians to Ephesians. I long ago concluded easily that Paul did not write the Pastoral letters (I & II Timothy and Titus), though some passages in them could be snippets from actual letters of Paul. The biggie for me was Ephesians. The thick, lugubrious language of Ephesians 1-3 is so different from the main letters that I cannot conceive them as coming from the person who wrote Romans, even at a much later time. And it is exactly that kind of Ephesian language that appears in several sections of Colossians.

As Ephesians goes, so goes Colossians. One of Paul's followers with special interest in the three churches of the Lycus valley (a hundred miles east of Ephesus) wrote it, probably between 70 and 90 CE. The author of this letter was the spirit of "Paul" as carried forward by his faithful companions and followers.

In **our reading** we have a thanksgiving (verses 3-8) and a report of prayer on behalf of the Colossian community (verses 9-14). The writer thinks easily in terms of the Pauline faith-love-hope trilogy. Thanks are given for "your faith in Christ Jesus," for "the love that you have for all the saints," and for "the hope laid up for you in heaven" (verses 4-5). The hearers are given a sense of being a part of a vast world movement. "Just as [the gospel] is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it" (verse 6).

The Colossians were won to the faith by Epaphras, one of their own people, "our beloved fellow servant...a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf" (verse 7). Epaphras also did jail-time with Paul ("my fellow prisoner," 4:10), and is only one of a handful of associates of Paul mentioned in the conclusion of this letter.

Luke 10:25-37

The Gospel reading continues Jesus' "journey" toward fulfilling the Reign of God.

Luke places here an incident that other Gospels put in Jesus' last week in Jerusalem: It is the lawyer who asks the question about **the greatest commandment**. In Luke's adaptation, Jesus and the lawyer reach a common mind about the two great

commandments, but then Luke adds the lawyer's question, Who is the neighbor? This addition gives us the parable of **the Good Samaritan**.

The parable is too well known to go over here. Let us focus on two phrases. The Samaritan comes down the road and sees the victim of the mugging, and "he was moved with pity" (NRSV) or "he was moved with compassion" (New Jerusalem Bible). And after the parable is complete, the lawyer says that the neighbor was "the one who showed him mercy" (NRSV). The God whose reign Jesus is preparing for in his journey to Jerusalem is a God of compassion and mercy.

Karen Armstrong has characterized the Axial Age in human history as turning decisively on a heightened sense of **compassion** in the development of the great religious and wisdom traditions. Here is one of her summary statements of that theme.

In the cities and empires of the Axial Age, citizens were acquiring a wider perspective and broader horizons, which made the old local cults seem limited and parochial. Instead of seeing the divine as embodied in a number of different deities, people increasingly began to worship a single, universal transcendence and source of sacredness.... [As social injustice became more obvious to sensitive leaders], prophets and reformers arose who insisted that the virtue of compassion was crucial to the spiritual life... In this way, during the Axial Age, the great confessional faiths that have continued to guide human beings sprang up in the civilized world: Buddhism and Hinduism in India, Confucianism and Taoism in the Far East; monotheism in the Middle East; and rationalism in Europe.

Despite their major differences, these Axial Age religions had much in common: they all built on the old traditions to evolve the idea of a single, universal transcendence; they cultivated an internalized spirituality, and stressed the importance of practical compassion. (This quote is from *The Battle for God*, 2000, p. xii [p. xiv in paperback ed.]. Ms. Armstrong has elaborated this perspective at greater length in *The Great Transformation*, 2006.)

The Good Samaritan – the neighbor – was a person who *practiced practical compassion*.



EWIND is the official publication of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. Published each Monday, the deadline for submission of materials is Thursday of each week.

We welcome information on events that occur within ABCMC member churches. All articles/information for publication should be submitted electronically to abcmetrochicago@gmail.com.