

Report of the Interim Executive Minister

My grandson sings a song that goes, “Zoom, zoom, zoom we’re going to the moon.” We had no idea that in 2020 we would all learn how to Zoom on our computers, iPads, and phones! The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives forever. Our approach to being the church has had to adapt to this new reality. In the midst of it all we have found new ways to reach people with God’s love in Christ. We have discovered what is really important about being the church.

In addition to adjusting to the new realities of the pandemic, ABCORI has also gone through a major transition with the retirement of Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles. It was sad not to be able to have an appropriate retirement celebration with him. We are pleased to share that he is doing very well with regard to his health challenges.

I began work as your Interim Executive Minister on July 1, 2020. During July and August I served remotely from my home in Chicago due to pandemic concerns. Finally, on September 1, I arrived in Rhode Island to be with you all in person. Still, much of the work remained on Zoom even though we held some in-person meetings outside at Canonicus.

It has been a pleasure to get to know and work with the great staff of the region. We meet monthly together, and I meet often with them individually as well. In January I met with each one individually for a six-month evaluation session. We went over their work performance and discussed their concerns and dreams.

In addition to a great deal of administrative work, each Sunday I “attend” two to six worship services, which is possible when doing it remotely. It has been wonderful to experience the rich diversity of our congregations. The region’s pastors have had many Zoom meetings to support one another through the challenges of leading in a pandemic. I look forward to one day meeting face to face with them. I have regularly communicated with everyone through our *Connections* weekly newsletter.

Much of my time is devoted to assisting churches with their search for a new pastor. We are pleased that North Scituate Baptist Church called Rev. Kim Nelson to be their pastor in July and that Warwick Central called Rev. Samuel Chesser in December. There are still 14 churches in pastoral transition.

Recently I have focused on analyzing the financial health of the region as we prepare for the 2021 budget. I will be working more in this area in the next few months. We have before us the challenge of repairing the dam that creates beautiful

Lake Adams at Canonicus. We await word on our grant proposals as we try to reach our goal of raising at least \$100,000 to help pay the balance of the \$500,000 to \$600,000 total cost.

Finally, it was so impressive to watch the way the region came together to accomplish the ordination council for Linda Moore. It was certainly a challenge to adapt such an important region event to a virtual format. With Linda Bausserman as chair of SCOM, and Kathryn Palen, Associate Executive of Elder Care, working the technology, and Linda Moore's open spirit, it went very well. We hope the annual meeting will go as smoothly!

It is a pleasure to serve alongside the people of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island. I pray that at the next annual meeting you will welcome a new settled Executive Minister in person rather than on Zoom!

Grace and peace,
Rev. Douglas Harris (Doug)