

REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE MINISTER

Welcome to the 2017 Annual meeting of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island. As you review the Book of Reports you will be reminded of the variety of relationships and ministries that have shaped our shared journey in 2016. You will read reports from our Regional administrative and ministry teams, as well as the reports from our vital affiliated ministries.

2016 was marked by some significant changes in the staffing of our Regional ministries. During the year, we said good-bye to Rev. Melanie Towle and Rev. Marie Carpenter. Melanie had served with a deep passion and unwavering commitment through our Camping Ministries and Marie had expanded the impact of our Elder Care Ministry through the development of new relationships and networks. However, even as these two departed, we welcomed two new members to our Regional team.

Deborah Guilmain came on board as the Interim Director of Camping Ministries last spring and did a remarkable job enlisting, training, and developing an outstanding team for last year's camping season. Following the camping season and a period of discernment, Deborah agreed to drop the "Interim" from her title and continue serving as our Director of Camping Ministries. We are experiencing some fresh energy as Deborah has reached out and encouraged a renewed engagement from many gifted individuals within our Region.

Following an extensive, nationwide search, Rev. Kathryn Palen joined us in the fall of 2016 as the Associate Executive for Elder Care Ministries. She is building on the good work of her predecessors, Kathy Black and Rev. Marie Carpenter, by intentionally focusing on creative connections in ministry to and through our member churches and partners in Elder Care concerns. Under Rev. Palen's guidance, the office for Elder Care Ministries has returned to the Region Offices at Canonicus Camp and Conference Center allowing for daily interaction and fresh collaboration between all our Regional ministries.

In other staff changes we welcomed Matt Black's return as our Facilities Manager at Canonicus following his brief sojourn in Florida, Ellie Phipps as our Hospitality Coordinator and Susan Lepore as our Online Communications Specialist.

These staffing changes are more than simply putting new people into offices and fulfilling job functions and responsibilities. There is renewed vitality for empowering one another for our shared ministry. There has been fresh opportunities to reflect on how we work together to serve and represent you, the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.

The joyful experience of fresh connections among your Region staff is representative of a broader focus that Ken Marrocco, Region President, has identified. Ken has encouraged us to identify avenues of connections between our churches, our pastors, and our Region. Through his leadership, we are beginning to imagine new initiatives that will encourage current connections, enable new connections, and envision fresh opportunities for ministry within and between our churches. As a sign of this intentional focus on building connections, you may have noticed that the Region's weekly electronic newsletter, formerly known as "E-notes," has become "CONNECTIONS." Thanks to the leadership of Susan Lepore, CONNECTIONS is becoming a

vital tool for all of us to connect with opportunities in ministry and mission. (*Shameless advertising: If you do not already receive the CONNECTIONS newsletter by e-mail, sign up by sending a request to info@abcori.org or subscribe on our website, www.abcori.org, by selecting the "Connections" tab on the home page.*)

In the fall of 2016, our Region facilitated some fresh connections between the ministers in our churches that serve in bi-vocational settings. Through a collaboration with the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, we were able to receive a grant that funded a weekend retreat for 10 pastors and their spouses from each region. Under the gifted leadership of Dr. David Bartlett, Yale Divinity (retired), and Rev. Dr. Réppa Cottrell, these remarkable pastors shared in worship, Bible study, table fellowship, and collegial conversation. In many ways, this singular event is representative of all of our work together. As the pastors were encouraged, their churches were blessed. As relationships were established and renewed, new connections were imagined.

It is a unique joy to serve you as Executive Minister. Every time I sit with a pastor or visit with a church group, every opportunity you provide me to share from your pulpits, every moment of prayerful discernment of where God is at work within and among you, reminds me of the great connections you set before me. Thank you for connecting in our shared mission "to resource our people and engage in Christ-centered ministries by promoting and building healthy pastors and healthy churches to bring the whole gospel to the whole world."

Connected through Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Wiles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles
Executive Minister