

REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE MINISTER

- ~ Sharing coffee with a pastor colleague and hearing them speak of their joys and challenges,
- ~ Worshiping on a Sunday morning with our congregations,
- ~ Joining in pastoral and congregational celebrations of heritage and ministry,
- ~ Participating in hands-on missional activity that supports or sponsors shared ministries,
- ~ Thinking together around biblical texts and theological ideas,
- ~ Working with local church leaders as they plan for challenging futures,
- ~ Sharing times of prayer with pastors and church leaders. . .

It is in times like these that I am thankful and proud to be a part of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.

As Region staff we recognize that we do not always have the answer to every question or the funds for every initiative, but, when we are at our best, we are always present. It is in that shared presence, one with another, where we often discover the transforming power of God's presence in our midst. It is in that shared presence where we begin to imagine new ways of being the church, new avenues for serving our communities, and new opportunities to grow in grace and discipleship.

Incarnational ministry means bringing all of ourselves to one another. Our Regional ministries are more than programs, more than physical or financial resources, more than organizational structures and systems. The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island is essentially relationships; relationships between churches, certainly, but also between each of us and all of us.

Many of you invited me to be with you and your churches in 2017 and at each moment your hospitality was a gift. Throughout this year I was privileged to preach 37 times in 20 of our churches. In addition, I shared 27 additional worship experiences with another 14 congregations. Each of these worship opportunities reminded me of the remarkable variety of gifts you bring to God's Mission.

Our shared mission statement speaks of "healthy churches and healthy pastors." As encouraging as it always is to be engaged with our churches, it is equally rewarding to spend time with the individual pastors who serve us. More than 50 times this year it was my joy to sit one-on-one with our pastors as they shared their vision for ministry, their love for their churches, the hopes for the future, and their prayers for us all. These women and men are exceptionally gifted and remarkably committed. I thank our God for them every day.

Our mission statement also speaks of "sharing the whole gospel with the whole world" and you demonstrated your love of God and your hope for the whole gospel this year as you abundantly shared in your mission giving. Although we did not achieve our giving goal in our basic mission giving through United Mission this year as we experienced a decline from \$140,187 in 2016 to \$121,901 in 2017, we also saw significant growth in our giving through One Great Hour of Sharing. As we saw the immediate needs of people struggling in the aftermath of hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes around our world, our giving to assist in alleviating immediate needs grew from \$20,615 in 2016 to \$52,343 in 2017. A remarkable growth of 154%! It is clear that the American

Baptist Churches in Rhode Island have a deep and growing passion for sharing the “whole gospel with the whole world.”

As you read through the various entries in this 2017 Book of Reports, I know you will be encouraged as you are reminded of the variety of relationships and ministries that have been shaped by our shared journey in 2017. Thankfully, we have much more to do and multiple opportunities to join our hands, hearts, and prayers together as we united to live out our Mission statement to “resource our people and to engage in Christ-centered ministries by promoting and building healthy pastors and healthy churches to bring the whole gospel to the whole world” in 2018 and beyond.

Thankfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Wiles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "S".

Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles
Executive Minister