



Art by the Rev. Lisa Gustafson

The Staff of

The American Baptist Churches of Connecticut

wishes you all God's blessings during this holy season:

Judy Allbee, Joe Delahunt, Sonia Gonzalez, Tom Hall,

Wilhelmina Lanz, Mary Williams and Mike Wu



The first line in “O Holy Night” talks about how the “stars are brightly shining.” Those stars were a sign of hope and joy in the coming of the Christ Child. As I reflect over the past year there have been times when the light of hope and joy has shone brightly here within our American Baptist Churches of Connecticut.

We have Tom Hall, our minister of camping and conferences completing his first full year in this position. Tom has done a great job making important and necessary changes to help move our camp into the 21st century.

For that matter, all of our staff work very hard to share God’s ministry in their sphere and I am so proud to call them colleagues in this journey. If you have an opportunity, please write them a word of appreciation. Joe Delahunt, Sonia Gonzalez, Tom Hall, Mary Williams and Billie Lanz do everything they can to strengthen and assist in your ministry endeavors.

There have been some new programs this year that have brought joy and light. As of this date we have had two brand new Senior Adult Days which were very well received and appreciated. It is something we will continue. There have been new summer programs at camp as well that the kids just loved.

We have a new department of ministry (Christian Service and Witness) getting off the ground and beginning to explore ways that they can provide ministry resources for our ABCCONN congregations and individuals.

Our Lay Ministry Institute is in its second year and it has another dozen students diligently studying with their great teacher, the Rev. Dr. William Sutton III. We have one more year of grant money to run this program and then we will assess its future.

Now, here is a piece of news that, at first glance, does not appear to provide light, hope or joy. In

October the results of a new Pew Research survey made the national news. The report showed that at this point in our history almost 20% of Americans claim to have no religious affiliation. This is a 5% increase in the last five years. These numbers include about 13 million atheists and agnostics and another 46 million who are the “nones”; they are the ones who check off “none” for religious affiliation.

These same “nones” claim to be spiritual or religious in some way. They believe in God. They think of themselves as spiritual, but not religious, and about 20% claim to pray daily.

Many say that the reason they are not involved in religious organizations, aka churches, is because they say these organizations are too focused on rules, money, power and politics.

Now while you may say this is not good news, I would say that our ABCCONN churches stand in a moment in time when we can make a difference by showing these people what it means to be part of the body of Christ.

For this to happen we need to open our doors and actually, genuinely and graciously invite people to join us in worship or Bible study or prayer meeting. When they come, we need to offer radical hospitality while sharing the good news of the gospel message. And not only that, we want to invite them to be a part of our great faith community, not because we want their money or warm bodies on committees, but because we so love the Lord that we want others to experience that same love. We realize that we are made more complete, more whole persons of God when we come together. We need each other. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, a solitary spiritual person. It is a shared experience.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that the first thing you do after you say “yes” to Christ and surrender your

The American Baptist Churches of Connecticut (ABCCONN) are:

Churches in Partnership, Sharing Resources, Inviting and Equipping Disciples

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life to Him is join with likeminded believers. In that community of faith one grows in discipleship and maturity; it is the place where we are cared for, taught, and encouraged to deepen our faith journey.

Leave the rules and regulations behind and allow people to grow in their love of Christ and the ministry of your church. You can change the world. Truly you can.

By the time you read this I will be on a one-month sabbatical. I appreciate the willingness of the personnel committee to work through how to do this for short periods of time rather than a three-month departure. During the month my plan is to do some Bible study and exegetical work (something that I am unable to do on a regular basis), and then try to catch up on some much-needed reading. I am very confident that our capable ABCCONN staff can fill in the gaps, should there be any, while I am away. If you have needs please call our office, and based on your needs, you will be directed to the person who can assist you.

May the peace, light, hope and joy of Christ attend your way in this Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas season.



Judy



Partnership with Caribbean Baptist Fellowship

American Baptist International Ministries (IM) entered into a covenant of partnership with the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) at the end of this past summer. This new partnership paves the way for churches in the US to partner with sister churches in the Caribbean. "It is our hope and prayer that through this covenant, we will be closer than ever before to our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean and serve with them as the hands and arms of Jesus Christ." explained Eleazar Zihherambere, IM's director of African American Mission.

While IM has a long history of serving Christ with people in the Caribbean, what is new is that the covenant is with **all** the CBF member bodies:

- *English speaking:* Antigua, Barbados (2 groups), Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, The Bahamas, Trinidad (3 groups), St Lucia, St Vincent, Turks & Caicos Islands, US Virgin Islands.
- *French & Creole speaking:* Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, St. Martin (French)
- *Spanish speaking:* Cuba (2 groups), Dominican Republic

The covenant includes 22 nations with 25 individual conventions/unions. The Caribbean Baptist Fellowship has both large and small member bodies but they share a zeal to see that the Gospel is preached to all their communities.

In this partnership short and long-term missionaries will be needed, especially in education and training, evangelism, church growth, social work and Christian unity.

The covenant continues IM's history of working with partners in over 70 countries around the world, in ministries that meet human need. IM's goal is to help people **come** to faith in Jesus, **grow** in their relationship with God, and **change** their worlds through the power of the Spirit.

SAVE THE DATE

NOVEMBER

- 22-23 ABCCONN Offices will be closed in observance of Thanksgiving

DECEMBER

- 10 - November mission giving is due in Valley Forge
24 - 31 ABCCONN Offices will be closed in observance of Christmas
31 - 1 Camp Echo at Camp Wightman

JANUARY

- 11 - Deadline for submission of materials for ABCCONN newsletter
13 - 15 Ministers' Council Retreat, Camp Wightman
14 - December mission giving is due in Valley Forge
29 - Executive Committee meeting, Connecticut Baptist Homes

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Judy Sutterlin Shares Passion for her Mission Work in China

by Robin Lee Michel, First Baptist, Southington

During her three-day visit to Connecticut in September, Judy Sutterlin was able to stop by First Baptist Church of Southington to share stories of her mission work in China. Sutterlin, who was born



During the Sept. 11 program at First Baptist Church of Southington, Judy Sutterlin holds aloft a Chinese shirt that she wore as a child. She was born in China but moved back to the United States with her parents after her mother took ill. She brought the shirt and a display of memorabilia to the program.

in China and moved with her parents to the United States while she was still a child, returned there more than 20 years ago to work in Nanjing, a city of more than 7 million people.

Sutterlin, who serves with American Baptist International Ministries, teaches General, Biblical and Theological English at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. She is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, which has enabled her to help faculty and students acquire proficiency in the English language. Thus equipped they can lead outreach ministries in some of the city's churches and serve where God calls them. She also assists Amity Foundation's English teachers, projects and programs, including the school sponsorship of more than 100 orphans in the Henan Province.

At the end of July, she returned to the U.S. to visit family, and after vacation she traveled to lecture about her ministry and the love she holds for her work, her students, and China.

Her visit to FBC/Southington on Sept. 11 was sponsored by church's Outreach and Women's Fellowship. The Rev. Jerrie S. Matney, interim pastor, welcomed Sutterlin, a friend whom she hadn't seen in more than 10 years; they first met in the 1980s in upstate New York State.

Sutterlin began the program by holding up a child's kimono-style orange shirt, which she wore when she was a child. She recounted how China later was closed to the West and how it has progressed through the decades, specifically in the establishment of Christian churches. The largest printer of Bibles in the world is in Nanjing and this fall it will reach the milestone of printing its 100 millionth Bible, she noted. Photos and videos of various sites and college activities were shown to illustrate her lecture. It was interesting to hear theological students sing American hymns in Chinese.

She also had a display table of various items including American hymnals with the Chinese characters and pronunciation, currency and gifts she had been given. She concluded her program with a question and answer period, and prayed the Lord's Prayer in Chinese. "I'm pleased you have a heart for mission. Thank you for your prayers for me and International Ministries," she said.



Judy Sutterlin, left, holds a map of China with The Rev. Jerrie S. Matney, interim pastor of First Baptist/Southington.