

# THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter  
August 2024

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Greetings Church!

The news changes so swiftly these days; it can be overwhelming at times. As people of faith, how are we to respond to the deluge of violence and upheaval? In Luke's gospel, Jesus told the disciples a parable on the necessity of praying always, and not losing heart. We recognize that prayer takes many forms: words, silence, song, breath, action, and stillness. In these times, let the example of Jesus be your consolation and guide.

*Do not pray for easy lives;*

*pray to be a stronger person.*

*Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers,*

*but for powers equal to your tasks.*

*Then, the doing of your work will be no miracle –*

*you will be the miracle.*

*Every day you will wonder at yourself and the richness of life*

*which comes to you by the grace of God.*

May God continue to bless you in your living into your faith.

Peace,

Pastor Jamie

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## ABCORI

### Board of Ministries Makes Decision About ABCORI Property

Making a difficult decision that will have significant impact is never to be taken lightly nor approached casually. ABCORI Board of Ministries devoted several years to serious discussion, prayerful reflection, and careful review of extensive financial data, two special task force reports, related information from a variety of other sources, and ABCORI's challenging insurance situation before making a decision about the future of ABCORI's property.

On July 9, the Board of Ministries voted unanimously to begin the process of selling ABCORI's Canonicus Camp and Conference Center in its entirety.

The sale of the property will generate funds to expand the ministries and programs ABCORI provides for its member churches and their pastors, as well as to develop new ministry opportunities.

The details of the sale are yet to be determined. Possibilities include seeking a buyer(s) who would develop all or portions of the property for new uses and/or selling some or all of the property for conservation.

The board's Executive Committee is to gather specific information about those possibilities. The full board then will discuss and vote on the specifics of the sale once that information is available.

### Sharing Sessions

Recognizing that people within ABCORI churches will have questions about the board's decision and the impact it may have on future ABCORI ministries and programs, the Board of Ministries has planned two sessions during which background information leading to the board's decision will be shared and ideas solicited for ways to move forward.

#### These sharing sessions are scheduled for:

- Saturday, August 24, 10-11:30 a.m. at Oak Lawn Community Baptist Church in Cranston (several steps are required to enter the building).
- Tuesday, August 27, 7-8:30 p.m. at Wakefield Baptist Church in Wakefield (a ramp is available to enter the building).

Individuals affiliated with an ABCORI church may register for a sharing session online at <https://forms.office.com/r/ugx48jB7Cq>.

Registration also may be made by sending the following information to [info@abcori.org](mailto:info@abcori.org): name, ABCORI church affiliation, telephone number, and email address.

To register via telephone, please call (401) 294-6318 and provide that same information.

**The deadline for all registrations is August 21.**

#### Background Information

While information will be shared during the two sharing sessions, the background information on page 3 may provide a helpful context for understanding the ABCORI Board of Ministries' decision.

## ABCORI

### Background Information

As was reported during the past two ABCORI annual business meetings, decades of deficit budgeting and drawing too heavily on unrestricted endowment funds have resulted in ABCORI's being at a critical financial crossroads. Two unplanned infusions of revenue—a major bequest and a portion of the sale of a church property—enabled ABCORI to fund its operating costs during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 fiscal years.

At the request of the Board of Ministries' Executive Committee, ABCORI Interim Executive Minister Doug Harris analyzed ABCORI's financial situation. In his written report presented during ABCORI's 2022 annual business meeting, he noted:

In my final report to the Board of Ministries on January 31, 2022, I shared my analysis of the financial condition of the region. The fact is that there has been a deficit averaging \$100,000 per year for many years. My deeper research has shown that the deficit is created primarily by owning and operating the Canonicus Camp and Conference Center. This is not unique to Rhode Island American Baptists. Most regions in the country have had to face this reality over the past twenty years or so. The old models for programming and financing of church camp properties are no longer viable. There are a variety of ways to deal with this. I have shared some of them with ABCORI leadership. The primary concern is that the unrestricted investment funds used to cover the deficit each year are likely to last only for the next three to five years. Analyzing this financial situation was an important part of what I was asked to do as your interim executive. As I conclude my time with you, I turn this challenge over to the leadership of ABCORI who now have the information they need to address the situation creatively and intentionally.

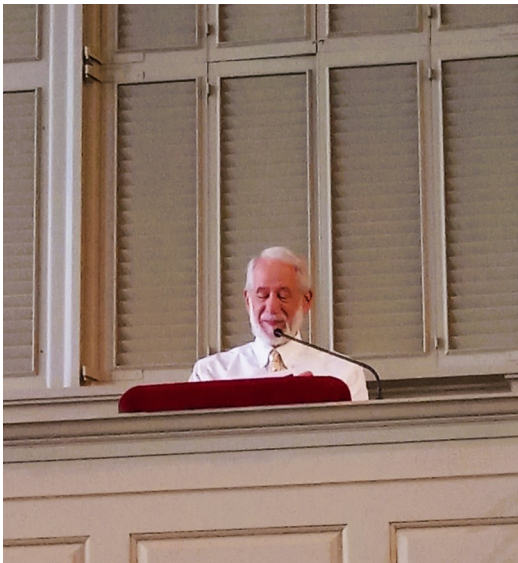
Since the receipt of Rev. Harris' final report, the Board of Ministries, Finance Committee, and ABCORI staff have done extensive analysis of the finances related to owning and operating ABCORI's Canonicus Camp and Conference Center. This analysis included a careful review of the profitability of the camping and conferencing programs over the past four decades.

In early 2022, a task force appointed by then ABCORI President Beth Berry explored possibilities for ABCORI ministries at Canonicus Camp and Conference Center. Task force members conducted telephone interviews of individuals with experience throughout Canonicus' history, including four former camp directors; developed a survey about congregational use of the property and received responses from 33 ABCORI churches; held a virtual gathering for anyone interested in the future of ministries on the property and four related focus groups; and researched other church camps, both American Baptist and from other denominations.

In January 2023, the Board of Ministries approved the creation of a task force to explore financially responsible options for stewardship of the Canonicus property. In the course of their work, the task force members reviewed historical and current ABCORI budget data; contacted other American Baptist regions to learn how they had handled similar situations with camp property; interviewed several appraisal firms and retained one; hired an engineering firm to prepare a hypothetical subdivision of the property for use by the appraiser; and met with representatives from the Department of Environmental Management. The task force presented its report to the board in June 2024.

During the renewal period for ABCORI's insurance policies, its longtime carrier declined to renew ABCORI's policies for 2024-2025. In the search for new insurance, ABCORI was confronted with the current challenges in the insurance market. After an exhaustive search, ABCORI was able to obtain a new liability insurance policy but at a significantly higher cost and with significantly more exclusions than its previous policy. Among the exclusions are coverage for waterfront activities, the ropes course, and volunteers. These exclusions necessitated changes in ABCORI's operations, and the higher premium placed further strain on ABCORI's financial situation. ABCORI has been unable to obtain a new property insurance policy, which means that losses resulting from a fire, flooding, or major storm would not be covered and could have a devastating impact for ABCORI.

Pastor Jamie delivered an impassioned message on separation of church and state and the threat of Christian nationalism to religious freedom. Christian nationalism is a political movement, cloaked in religion, which contradicts the very principles upon which Roger Williams gathered this church 386 years ago.

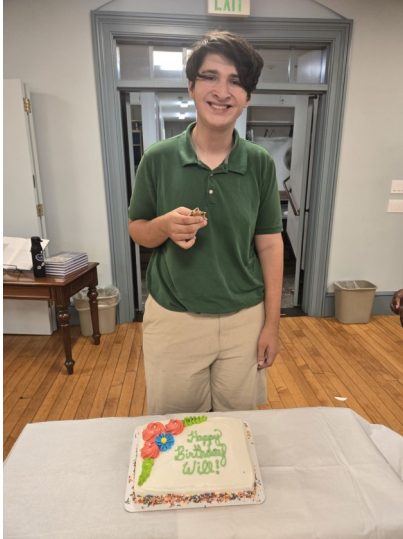


Rabbi Howard Voss-Altman of Temple Habonim in Barrington was the guest preacher on July 14. He argued that the antidote to religious extremism are the words "doubt" and "maybe."

Members of the Tillinghast family joined with the church at the outdoor service on the back lawn on July 21 and then came inside the Meeting House for a tour after the worship service. Their ancestor, Pardon Tillinghast, was the 6th pastor of this church, serving from 1681 to 1718. He also built the first meetinghouse for the church in 1700 on his own property up North Main Street near the intersection of Smith Street.

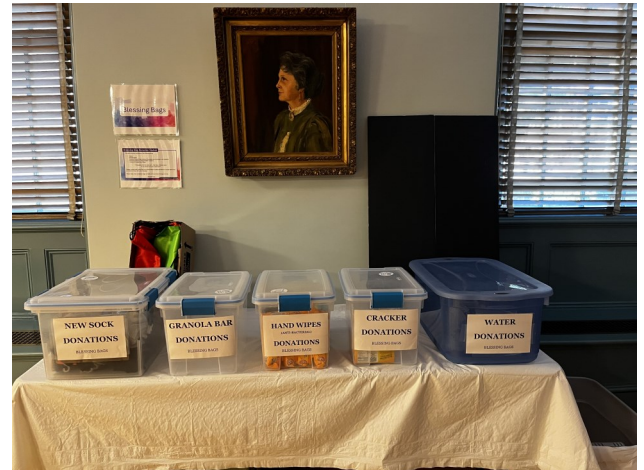






On July 14th Will Shealy turned 16 years old. Where did the time go! His Mom, Betsy, our resident cake maker, brought a cake for all to celebrate his special day.

The Blessing Bag Station is up in the Fellowship Hall, ready for ongoing donations and distribution.



## Missions Committee – August

### Summer Camp Donations

We have 9 children attending Camp Wightman the week of August 11. Some of the campers need supplies to ensure that they have a great experience, and we are asking for donations to help cover the costs. If you are interested in assisting, please be sure to indicate “Camp” on your check or in the notes of your online donation.

### Roger Williams Attic is Back!

### Sale Items, Baked Good and Volunteers Needed!

Our Roger Williams Attic sale is scheduled for Saturday, September 14 and Sunday, September 15 (following church services). The proceeds will support the Mission trip to La Romana. We will happily receive your donations of gently-used items such as dishes, linens, books, CDs, DVDs, toys, furniture, and holiday decorations, beginning August 25. We will not be accepting clothing. You can also help by volunteering to bring baked goods, organize and price items during the week and work the sale on Saturday and Sunday. We will need help Tuesday, September 11th through Thursday, September 13th from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM; and the days of the Yard Sale we will need eight people on Saturday, September 14 from 7:00 to 11:00 AM and 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM and Sunday, September 15 after worship from 12:00 to 4:00 PM. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall, or call Holly in the church office to sign up or send an email to Pauline Ashworth at [pashworth8@gmail.com](mailto:pashworth8@gmail.com)

A Time for Members & Friends  
of ABCORI Churches to Gather  
for Fun, Music & Fellowship

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# ABCORI SUMMER GATHERING

AT CANONICUS CAMP & CONFERENCE CENTER

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 4

Bring your lawn chair or blanket, and join us for:

- 2:00 p.m. Lawn games, snacks & crafts
- 3:00 p.m. Music by Matt & Judy Bolles  
acclaimed RI musicians & members  
of Central Baptist Church, Jamestown
- 3:30 p.m. Hymn sing
- 4:00 p.m. Walks, games, snacks & crafts

Visiting with old friends &  
making new ones all afternoon

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF RHODE ISLAND  
54 Exeter Road, Exeter, RI 02822  
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Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam, Pastor  
Stephen Martorella, Minister of Music  
Holly Edwards, Administrative Assistant  
Anne Gagan, Bookkeeper  
Tony Zambarano, Sexton  
Ary Peralta, Sunday Sexton  
Victoria Pfanstiehl, ASL Interpreter

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### Statement of Welcome

*Roger Williams gathered the First Baptist Church in America in 1638 on the bedrock of religious liberty, with its principles of soul freedom and the separation of church and state. Together, we continue our ministry of welcome and liberation.*

*This congregation honors its Baptist heritage. Many of our members are lifelong Baptists and others come from varied denominational and religious backgrounds. We welcome all people of every age, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cultural background, socio-economic status, mental or physical ability, marital status, and any other distinctions of society. We are diverse people united in Christ. We remain a safe harbor.*

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### Missions Committee – Continued

[Better Lives RI](#) has added tents to our Amazon Wishlist.

In inclement weather, tents can flood or be swept away by harsh winds, leaving our most vulnerable people without a place to sleep or protection from the sun.

We also continue to collect water, paper towels, dry goods, and more so that as many people as possible have the resources they need to survive.

Our wishlist is available at <https://buff.ly/3WmoZOr>.

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### Board of Christian Education – August

The Christian Ed Committee would like to announce the hire of our new Nursery Assistant, Ashley Muchiri, who started this month. Ashley makes her home in Riverside, and has just finished her first year at Rhode Island College. Please join us in welcoming her to the FBCIA family!

We would also like to take this opportunity to encourage your participation in our Nursery, and upcoming youth programs in the fall, as volunteer support. Our policy as a church is to always have two people present when working with children. If you would like to be part of our volunteer rotation, we can help with securing your background check. Holly can help facilitate the background check process. Please see Karen or Ruth if you are interested. Thank you for considering.