



# The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

A Newsletter of the American Baptist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Region

## Who Is My Neighbor?

Many of us have been wonderfully generous in responding to the crying needs splashed on our television sets after disasters like the tsunami in Asia, the earthquake in Pakistan/Kashmir, and the hurricanes on the Gulf Coast. American Baptists gave more than \$6.4 million to these disaster appeals. We gave eagerly to those urgent needs.

In terms of major, headline-grabbing disasters, 2006 was a quiet year. It's good to catch our breath and let the world concentrate on other things. Not that there haven't been significant disasters—just that they've been quieter, more hidden: the disasters of extreme poverty and chronic hunger, of terminally unclean water and no sanitation, of terrorizing war and devastating loss. We see these images from time to time, and our hearts go out to those people. But that's different, right? After all, we can't be there for everyone.

Jesus might not agree. A young lawyer talked with Jesus about the command to "love your neighbor as yourself," asking, "Who is my neighbor?" In response, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan — a man who freely gave time, energy, and money to help a stranger whom he didn't know and

might never see again. According to Jesus, we are all neighbors to one another.

Since 1949 churches across North America have been giving to the annual *One Great Hour of Sharing* offering, expressing God's love to our neighbors far and wide — not just after the major disasters that saturate the media, but also to people affected by chronic disasters that repeat themselves each and every day. Gifts to *One Great Hour of Sharing*

- rebuild communities ravaged by natural disasters,
- create sustainable sources of food and water for rural villages,
- provide micro-credit so women can start their own small businesses and support their families,
- provide job skills training,
- provide the medical care necessary for children to have a chance to survive past the age of five and attend school,
- and so much more.

Jesus' response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" set a standard that isn't easy to meet. By participating in *One Great Hour of Sharing*, we join together to make a world of difference in the lives of our neighbors.

### AB Church Building in Greensburg Destroyed

The building that housed the congregation of First Baptist Church, Greensburg, KS, was destroyed by the massive tornado that leveled 95 percent of the town of Greensburg on May 4. The church's parsonage, although left standing, also sustained serious damage.

The church's pastor, Marvin George, is praising God for bringing him, his family, and his congregation safely through the violent storm. George was able to locate almost all of his church family. All were safe and unharmed and had places to stay with family and friends. He urged American Baptists to be in prayer for all those affected by this disaster.

National Ministries is responding to this calamity with *One Great Hour of Sharing* undesignated disaster funds. Additional gifts to help the Greensburg congregation members and community should be designated "*One Great Hour of Sharing-Central tornadoes*" and sent through normal mission-giving channels. Gifts may also be made through the "Give Now" feature at <http://www.abc-usa.org>.

## New Pastor Called to First Baptist Church of Cortez

Victor Powell has been called to be the new pastor at the First Baptist Church of Cortez. Victor and his wife Stacey moved to Cortez in early May. He began preaching on May 6.

Victor felt the call to ministry when he was 18 years old. He received scholarships to go to Ottawa University where he earned a B.A. in Psychology in 1995. He continued his education at the Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and in 1999 he received his Master of Divinity degree. Victor was ordained by the American Baptist Convention in 2003.

Victor's ministry experience has led him to serve as youth pastor in Paola, KS and Louisburg, KS. He then served as the interim pastor for New Hope Baptist Church in Wellsville, KS, where he was called to be the full-time pastor a few months later. In 2002 Victor received a call from the congregation at First Baptist Church of Columbus, KS. He served in Columbus until March of 2006 when he became very ill with Lyme disease. During the time of his recovery he served as a part-time interim pastor at Emporia, KS.



Victor and Stacey are excited to be moving to Cortez and into a new Baptist family.

The ABCRM, along with First Baptist Church of Cortez, welcome the Powells. Please keep this new relationship in your prayers.

*Compiled by Jessica Fischer from information in FBC/Cortez's newsletter*

RMAB 5/15/07

## ABCRM Training Academy's Old Testament Course Was a Reality Connection



On May 4-6, seven students, a professor, and a Region staff person gathered in the conference room of the ABCRM office for an intense weekend experience focusing on the Old Testament. Judith Todd traveled from Albuquerque, NM

to teach the class. Judy Chaffin, Gina Gibson, and Jason King attended from Wyoming. Ken Pettis made the trek over the mountains from the Western Slope. Jody James, Lee Sadler, and Anna Witstrom were from the nearby cities of Boulder and Metro Denver. Wayne Dvirnak represented the ABCRM staff and the Ministerial Leadership Committee, which sponsors the Training Academy.

God's Word was heard in abundance throughout the weekend. As Professor Todd led the group through the intense study, she asked students to read various texts aloud from the Bible. The participants engaged in hearty discussion that often resulted in heartfelt personal sharing. Indeed, the Bible and life came together in the classroom; the course was a reality connection.



Ken Pettis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Austin, CO, notes, "The Old Testament course was really great! Judith Todd did a wonderful job."

Gina Gibson, licensed minister at First Baptist Church in Cheyenne, WY, echoed Ken's observation by saying, "She [Professor Todd] brought the Old Testament to life for me. I am very excited to return home to use the new tools that I acquired here."

Jason King, youth minister, also at First Baptist Church in Cheyenne, WY exclaimed, "Wow! I have never been through the Old Testament like this before. Professor Todd really helped to bring it to life. Thanks for the journey!"

While Professor Todd closed the course with a time of contemplative worship on Sunday morning, the group agreed that they "had church" all weekend long.

The MLC is making plans to offer an online course as well as another face-to-face educational opportunity in September on ethics. These offerings are open to everyone. Watch for details!

*Ingrid Dvirnak, ABCRM Newsletter Editor*

## ABW Ministries of Wyoming Summer Conference Slated for June 8-9 in Lander

AB Women from across Wyoming will meet at the First Baptist Church of Lander, 339 Sweetwater, on June 8-9. They will worship together, study together, pray together, eat together, and will be inspired by each other to continue doing God's work. The theme is *Born to Be Wild about Jesus*. The conference will begin at 1:00 p.m. with registration.

Kris Guterrez (*pictured below, far right*), American Baptist missionary in Nicaragua, will be the guest speaker on Friday evening and on Saturday. The scriptural basis for the event is Romans 10:14-15, 17.



Kristina Gutierrez works in a variety of ways to encourage and equip those God is calling into leadership in Nicaragua. Her primary assignment is to work with the Baptist university in Managua, the Universidad Politecnica de Nicaragua (UPOLI). Kris also assists in the training efforts of CEPAD

([www.cepad.org.ni](http://www.cepad.org.ni)) and the Baptist Theological Seminary.

Kristina's work with the UPOLI has included both training nursing students and starting a chaplaincy program at the Baptist Hospital of Managua. The chaplaincy program is unique in Latin America and has begun sending trained chaplains to accompany patients and family members in different public hospitals in Nicaragua. She has also been training women at the UPOLI's urban public health center to be Promoters Against Family Violence in their community.

Workshops and Bible studies will be available at 2:00 p.m. on Friday and 1:00 p.m. on Saturday. Plans are also underway to offer two crafts, free time for shopping, and a sightseeing tour of Sinks Canyon.

### Registration, Food, and Lodging

Registration is \$7. All three meals cost \$18 (and they may be ordered separately when you pre-register). The conference planners are requesting registrations forms be sent in by May 23rd.

A block of rooms is available at the Lander Inn (307-332-2847). Please make your own reservations at least two weeks in advance and mention that you are with the ABWM Conference. The cost is \$81.95 for one or two people per room.

To download the registration form and to access additional conference information, see the Spring issue of Baptistar at [http://www.abcrm.org/news\\_archives/2007/Baptistarspring07.pdf](http://www.abcrm.org/news_archives/2007/Baptistarspring07.pdf). If you have questions, please contact Bonnie Willhelm at 307-332-2092 or Linda Roller at 307-349-0128.

*Submitted by Linda Roller*

## Fred Ansell Receives Honorary Degree from Bacone College

On May 5, 2007, Fred Ansell received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Bacone College. Ansell served on the American Baptist Central Region staff from August 1972, when he became Campus Minister for Fort Hays State College, Hays, KS, and Regional Resource Minister. He became Executive Minister in June 1996, after serving as Southeast Area Minister and Associate Executive Minister. He retired from the Central Region earlier this year.

As Executive Minister, Fred was responsible for the timely implementation of ministry in the Region and the preparation and presentation of the Region budget. He was the Region's representative on the Regional Executive Ministers Council, as well as numerous other boards, councils, and commissions of the American Baptist Churches USA, plus Central Baptist Seminary, Ottawa University, Bethel Neighborhood Center, and Kansas Ecumenical Ministries.

Fred and his wife, Ann Marie (Trena) live in Topeka, KS. Trena, also retired, was a speech pathologist. They have two adult children, Jennifer and Aaron. The Ansell family are members of West Side Baptist Church in Topeka.

Fred is a graduate of Eastern College (B.A.) and the American Baptist Seminary of the West (M.Div. and D.Min.). He enjoys gardening, walking, reading, traveling, and photography.

*Bacone College Press Release*

## Kerry Hassler: IM Volunteer in Thailand

After working for a large hi-tech telecommunications corporation for 31 years, I decided this past December it was time for me to use the technical skills I'd acquired throughout my career to help American Baptist missionaries enhance their ministries. I had thought about helping them develop websites, implement call center systems, apply distance learning tools, and add other high-tech solutions to enhance their ministries. In early January I decided to make "a leap of faith" by telling my manager I was leaving the company at the end of the month, believing that God would show me the path to follow.

When I called IM/ABC Volunteer Coordinator Angela Sudermann the next day, I asked her if there were any missionary projects where I could use my technical skills. She told me about an IM opportunity to which no one had responded. It involved the development of a website to help tribal people in Northern Thailand. The request had been originated the previous year by AB missionaries, Chuck and Ruth Fox. I immediately felt that this was the path God wanted me to follow, and I told Angela I'd like to do it!

Over the next few weeks, I exchanged a number of emails with Chuck and Ruth Fox to get more details about their website request. I learned that the purpose of the website would be to help the Akha people market hand-stitched craft items. Ruth also requested my help in getting IM/ABC STEP program support for Chiang Rai student scholarships. I was energized by all that I learned.



After being commissioned by Pastor Nancy and the congregation of FBC/Boulder on January 28 with ABCRM staff members, Wayne and Ingrid Dvirnak in attendance, I worked my last three long days in the corporate world, wrapping up several projects I'd been working on during the last year. After my last day on the job, I boarded a United Airlines flight from Denver at 6:30 a.m. heading toward northern Thailand. During that flight, I began to wonder about many things I'd not had time to think about until then. What would the city of Chiang Rai be like since it's very close to the Laos and Myanmar borders? What would the Akha people be like? How would it work out to stay with Fox family in Chiang Rai?

After a layover in Singapore, I arrived in Chiang Rai on Sunday, February 4. I quickly realized that Chiang Rai was not really that much different than a comparable U.S. city of 80,000-90,000 people. Aside from street signs and billboards being in Thai and the Thai language I heard being spoken, the shopping areas, cars, and people talking on cellphones were familiar sights.

Having dinner with Chuck and Ruth on Sunday evening at a Chiang Rai restaurant (*see photo below*), I learned that we share a lot of common interests. Ruth used to live in Japan and likes Japanese food; Chuck likes sports; they both are "New Testament thinkers," and we share common interests in other areas as well. Fantastic!



I thoroughly enjoyed every day of my Chiang Rai visit. I worked with Ruth to develop the website which would show and sell the Akha crafts. I traveled with Chuck (*see photo below*) on his weekend visits to Akha tribal villages in the mountains surrounding Chiang Rai as part of his on-going preaching ministry with them.



I became a "virtual member" of the Fox family by going to their kids' school events at the Chiang Rai Family Learning Center where Ruth is the principal. In addition to the 35 or more hours every week spent on

developing the Akha Crafts Center website, it was great to be a part of the Fox family activities. I thanked God every day for leading me to this assignment.

Many Akha people in northern Thailand are struggling to provide food and other essential items to their families since the wages for doing field labor (such as picking strawberries) are very low. Selling Akha Crafts Center items through the website I'm developing will help the families of the Akha women who make these items. Although not yet fully completed, you can visit the Akha Crafts Center website at <http://crafts.akhahilltribe.org/>. I've also developed the Fox's MPT website that describes their ministries at <http://foxthailand.akhahilltribe.org/>



Also during my February stay in Thailand, I visited Chiang Mai for three days to meet with AB missionaries Mike and Becky Mann (*see photo above*). I'd met Becky when she visited Boulder in May, 2004 on a trip sponsored by IM. Seeing this growing city of 1 million residents about 160 miles southwest of Chiang Rai and spending time with the Manns was another wonderful experience. Mike showed me the "Lanna Café Coffee" roasting/drying operation which he

and Becky started in order to support local hilltribe farmers. Because it's more profitable for these farmers, they've replaced their previous opium crops with growing coffee. As a result of my visit with the Manns, I'm also now enhancing their Lanna Café Coffee website to sell this coffee over the Internet. The funds from these website sales will go directly to the northern Thailand coffee farmers as well as the Lanna Café Coffee Cooperative that the Manns started. You can read about the Manns' IM coffee ministry at <http://www.tropical-living.com/06-12dec/12.htm> and see the Lanna Café Coffee website I'm enhancing at <http://www.lannacafe.org/index.html>.



For the last three days of my Thailand trip, I stayed with Bangkok AB missionaries Jeff and Annie Dieselberg (*see photo above*) whom I'd met in June 2005 when they came to Colorado for a mission conference. While there, I was able to see their "NightLight" ministry that provides a path for women in prostitution to make alternate income by making jewelry sold via the website at <http://www.nightlightbangkok.com/>. During my stay, Jeff and Annie asked me if I could develop an MPT website for them. This site (although

still under development) may be seen at <http://www.anniejeffbangkok.org/>

What was the most memorable part of my February trip to Thailand as an IM Volunteer? Because Chuck Fox is fluent in the Akha language and a good friend to many Akhas, the opportunity to meet and get to know Akha people by being in their villages is something that I will never forget. Chuck introduced me to Akha Pastor Pedru who's the regional pastor for ten Akha villages in the mountain areas surrounding Chiang Rai. He and I became friends, and he told me he thinks of me as an Akha. He also told me I'd be returning to Chiang Rai and will visit his Akha home village again. I hope and pray this will happen!

*Kerry Hassler  
layman, member of  
FBC/Boulder  
and Global  
Technology Consultant  
for American Baptist  
Missionaries*



Kerry Hassler (r) with Pastor Pedru

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## American Baptist Church of Fort Collins Plans Installation of Bill Prather

On Sunday June 3, American Baptist Church of Fort Collins will be installing their new pastor. Bill Prather began his ministry at the church on Feb. 25. The Search Committee is sending invitations to all of the churches in the Region, knowing full well that many will not be attending. However, it is our way of sharing our excitement with you. Any messages of greeting can be sent to Fran Lambert, 6512 Fossil Crest Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80525 or e-mailed to [office@abcfortcollins.org](mailto:office@abcfortcollins.org). The Installation Service will be held at the church at 3:00 p.m. on June 3. Jim McCrossen, one of Bill's mentors, will be coming from Kansas City for this special time. A reception will follow the service. *Submitted by Fran Lambert  
Chair, Search Committee*

## Annual Reports Are Due!

Thanks to the following churches for completing their 2006 Annual Reports:

- Crossroads American Baptist Church
- Evangel Baptist Church
- First Baptist Church, Boulder
- First Baptist Church, Center
- First Baptist Church, Cortez
- First Baptist Church, Grand Junction
- First Baptist Church, Greeley
- First Baptist Church, Lander
- First Baptist Church, Loveland
- First Baptist Church, Lusk
- First Baptist Church, Pueblo
- First Baptist Church, Torrington
- Mesa Memorial Baptist Church
- Sombra Del Monte Christian Church

We encourage you to go online to complete your report. You may go to <http://annualreport.abcis.org>. Please be sure to print the online instructions before completing your report.

Don't miss your chance to be entered in our drawing to win a dinner for two at a nice restaurant (\$50.00 value). You have until May 30, 2007. If you have any questions, please call our office at 303-988-3900. *Karen Van*

*Region Administrator*

RMAB 5/15/07

## Aurora Hills Baptist Church: Debt Free?

The members and friends of Aurora Hills Baptist Church just passed a milestone in April, 2007. We paid off our mortgage! Being free of a mortgage is a dream of many churches; it sure has been a dream of the faithful at Aurora Hills. So, when American Baptist Extension Corporation (ABEC) offered a special deal to pay off our mortgage (with a 15% discount on the remaining balance), there was serious discussion about accomplishing that goal.

The trick was that it had to be "paid in full" by April 1, 2007. That gave the congregation about two months to make this dream come true. At first it seemed almost impossible. Then a member shared this message with the deacons: "I have heard from a friend that they will match each gift, dollar-for-dollar, so that the church's mortgage will be paid off." To say the least, that was a message of encouragement! That meant the congregation only had to come with half the amount left on the mortgage.

Even with the generosity of this gift, it seemed way beyond our capability. We only had two weeks to accomplish this task, and it seemed like an impossible challenge. But that didn't stop us. We believed that if God wanted this to happen, then the Holy Spirit would touch the hearts (and pocketbooks) of the people. On the first Sunday of this short campaign, over half of the needed funds were collected. By the second week, we far surpassed what was needed. We do serve a mighty God!

Larry Graves (from ABEC) reported to me that 20 churches in the ABC were offered the opportunity to pay off their mortgage. Eighteen of those churches took advantage of this offer and are now mortgage free.

But are we debt free? Not according to Romans 13:8, "*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*" Being free of a mortgage does not free us of the debt we owe one another, love in Christ! That debt is never paid. As churches we are called to

- give God praise (worship),
- teach the principles and values of our Lord (discipleship),
- care for one another (ministry),
- reach out to those who don't know the Lord (evangelism), and
- help those in need (service).



Larry Andrews, Moderator, and Helen Suggs, Deacon of Inreach, cut "Paid in Full" Cake.

All of those things take investments of time, talent, and money. I guess that is why I believe the next challenge for our congregation is to willingly put ourselves "in debt" so that we can continue doing ministry in our day. It took a huge amount of money to build our building and about 42 years to pay that bill. Are we willing to make that same kind of commitment to the next two or three generations by investing a large sum of money for personnel and programs that will show future generations that we know we have a "debt of love" that's still outstanding?

*Jim Simon, Pastor  
Aurora Hills Baptist Church,  
Aurora, CO*

## Come As You Are. . .Grow In Grace



Our journey began on April 22, 2006, not as Grace Gathering, but as a group of people believing in God's call to a vision of a new church in the Grand Valley. It was decided that the group would meet on Saturday nights in back yards for a time of worship and fellowship, praying for healing and direction. On June 3, 2006 my husband Bryan and I joined the group, and I was invited to be the lead pastor.

Organization and structure began to happen, and the name Grace Gathering was chosen. The incorporation process was started, and our vision and mission statements were defined.

*Grace Gathering deeply desires and exists to be living proof of a loving God to a watching world in order that as many as possible might be saved by grace.* In living out this vision, we seek to be involved in mission projects in our community. We enjoy planning activities that will acquaint people with who we are so we can intro-

duce them to Jesus Christ in an environment outside the traditional church. A couple of the acquaintance-making events have been breakfast in the park (*pictured lower right*) and a bunco night. The people of Grace Gathering desire to live out a vision that takes us outside of ourselves to where people are.

Grace Gathering exists to impact our world by

*Living* according to God's biblical principles; *Leaning* on the Holy Spirit for guidance; *Loving* the Lord, one another and the world around us; *Learning* together to follow Jesus and encourage each other; *Leaving* our comfort to serve others. This Mission Statement serves to direct how we relate to one another and our community, giving us guidelines as we organize and plan ahead.

As the summer of 2006 came to a close, we knew we had to find a place to gather. We investigated several churches and rental sites, but nothing was "right." As we continue to experience, God had the perfect place already chosen; we began meeting at the Cornerstone Christian School on Saturday nights at 5:00 pm in September 2006.

In March of 2007 we felt led to seek affiliation with the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky

Mountains as a covenanting church. One year from our beginning date, April 22, 2007, the Region Board of the ABCRM voted to invite us into the fellowship.

From the beginning, relationship with God has been our primary focus, rather than trying to figure out what to "do." God has graciously revealed to us along the way, and we are experiencing the freedom and joy of "being" God's church. The group study of the book *Grace Walk* was the catalyst for much of who we are becoming. Grace Gathering is determined to abide and wait, allowing God to reveal to us God's plan along the way.



Consider this an open invitation to stop by on a Saturday night to worship. Our services are informal and relaxed, so come as you are and grow in grace.

*Submitted by Janice Newman  
Pastor, Grace Gathering  
Grand Junction, CO*

**We celebrate and welcome  
Grace Gathering  
as our newest ABCRM  
congregation!**

## Leadership Changes

(since 2/28/07)



**Jay Shannon**, resigned as pastor, Ecumenical Church, Pueblo West, CO  
**Frank Proffer**, began as pastor, First Baptist Church, Pueblo, CO (4/8/07)  
**Scott Thomson**, resigned as interim minister, First Baptist Church, Lamar, CO  
**Victor Powell**, began as pastor, First Baptist Church, Cortez, CO (5/1/07)

## In Memorium

**Clinton Lewis**, Associate Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Cheyenne, WY  
**Ben Dickerson**, Associate Pastor, Highland Park Baptist Church, Colorado Springs, CO



*On May 6 Romelia Aguirre and Katie Sue McCabe  
were baptized by Pastor Jim Simon  
at Aurora Hills Baptist Church, Aurora, CO.  
We celebrate this profession of life in Christ!*

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*Reprint permission is granted to  
ABCRM churches.*

*Discover your  
PASSION!*

*Realize your  
MISSION!*