

Important information you need for ministries with women and girls.

## Winter 2024

## Thank you, Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain!

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American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM) thanks Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain for her service as Executive Director 2018-2024. During her tenure, she has been instrumental in developing professional development opportunities for staff, building relationships with boards, and elevating ABWM's profile within the denomination and with ecumenical and not-for-profit partners. [Click here to read the press release](#) congratulating Rev. Dr. Jacobs-Strain on her historical election as General Secretary of American Baptist Churches.



Rev. Jacobs-Strain began her role as the General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) on February 1, 2024.



Support our ministry with women and girls!

## Welcome, Rev. LaThelma Yenn-Batah!

The American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM) executive committee called Rev. LaThelma Yenn-Batah to Interim Executive Director, beginning March 1, 2024.



An ordained American Baptist minister, Rev. Yenn-Batah made history as the first African American pastor of Flemington Baptist Church in Flemington, NJ. Prior to this groundbreaking role, she served as the Associate Executive Director of American Baptist Women's Ministries. Rev. Yenn-Batah is a graduate cum laude from Scripps College. She holds a Master of Divinity and Master of Christian Education from Princeton Theological Seminary, where she earned accolades in Urban Ministry and Sacred Music. [Click here to read the press release](#) announcing Rev. Yenn-Batah as our Interim Executive Director.

## Helpful Links

[2023-2025 Ministry Focus: Be Strong, Be Courageous](#)

[2024 Mission Focus: Welcoming the Stranger](#)

[Webinar Recordings](#)

[Shine the Light Award](#)

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## Articles from Officers

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### Strength in Unity

By Rev. Dr. Christine Smith,  
national president

Greetings ABWM Sisters! Behold, how good and pleasant it is for “Sisteren” to dwell together in unity! What a blessing that we share in this American Baptist

Women’s Ministries sisterhood, lifting each other through prayer, encouragement, acts of kindness, service, and love. Thanks to everyone who took the time to email, call, or text words of encouragement to me as I took time off to attend to some matters. A special word of thanks to Sister Lovena Van Haaften, the ABWM Executive Committee, and the ABWM staff for “keeping the ball rolling” and stepping up in even greater ways while I was briefly away from my presidential responsibilities. To God be the glory, I resumed those duties on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

It is with great joy that I thank all ABWM sisters who support, encourage, and advance the mission, vision, purpose, and core values of American Baptist Women’s Ministries. Below is an overview of who we are and what we believe...

**Mission:** American Baptist Women’s Ministries is a Christ-centered ministry with a commitment to encourage and empower women and girls to serve God.

**Vision:** Every American Baptist church shall have a vital women’s ministry program that empowers women and girls to become and develop as God’s people, build God’s faith community, and serve God’s world.

**Purpose:** As servant leaders, we serve American Baptist churches by encouraging existing vital ministries with women and girls and empowering churches to build such ministries.

**Core Values:** Our ministry is based on certain non-negotiable values that form a foundation and criteria for all that we do.

- We provide Christ-centered ministries.
- We strive for excellence in all we do.
- We practice faithful stewardship.
- We are relevant for women today.
- We assure that our diversity (clergy/lay, age, geographic, and racial/ethnic representation) as a denomination is represented in our ministries.

- We affirm and encourage the use of spiritual gifts.
- We recognize the worth of all women and girls.
- We value our American Baptist family relationships.
- We work to provide solutions for the social justice challenges and opportunities facing women and girls.

Our Bylaws remind us that we are “a diverse community of American Baptist women and girls serving in ministry in Christ’s name in the US, including Puerto Rico. With local, area, region/state, and national levels of ministry, American Baptist Women’s Ministries create and sustain communities of passionately faithful, mission-minded women and girls engaged in worship, service, and friendship.”

How BLESSED we are, ABWM Sisters, to have such a rich history of lifting, encouraging, supporting, and empowering women and girls across the United States, including Puerto Rico. When we align our work with our historical mission, vision, purpose, and core values, we create even greater opportunities to accomplish our goals.

As we embrace this year’s 2024 Mission Focus, “Welcoming the Stranger,” may we make ourselves a committee of one to identify the “strangers” in our own backyard. Let us look for ways to help someone in our neighborhood or broader community. On the national level, may we determine to support American Baptist Women’s Ministries. Encourage your church, your region, your state, and other individuals to give liberally to this organization.

Sisters, you play an important role in helping to encourage current ABWM region/state presidents and regions to learn about, embrace, and promote ABWM. Your prayers, enthusiasm, and witness can help our leaders lean into our work as a domestic ministry. As with any endeavor, together, we can accomplish much.

Boats with oars rowing in the same direction reach their destination with greater strength, less frustration, and increased empowerment as the current produced by their unified movements propel them forward! May our proverbial “oars” work together to propel ABWM forward for the upbuilding of God’s Kingdom and the blessing of women and girls across the U.S. and Puerto Rico!

Thank you for all that you do! May we be “Strong and Courageous!”



## The Bible Tells Me So

By Crystal Newton, coordinator of the western section

The first five books of the Law presented the idea of “Welcoming the Stranger” no less than 36 times to remind the Children of Israel that they were once “Strangers in a strange land.” When we are strangers in a strange land (like going to a woman’s retreat for the first time), we learn empathy, resilience, and the shared human experience of displacement.

Currently, I am in an awesome Bible study of Moses Law, or the Torah, led by Rev. Dr. Marilyn Bennett. We have studied Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and are almost finished with Deuteronomy. I have learned so much from this study—it makes you think.

When we studied Leviticus and its many laws, I jokingly asked Pastor Marilyn if I would be required to memorize all 613. She said I only need to remember the two that Jesus quotes from the Old Testament: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Mark 12:30-31

Remembering to welcome the stranger is a way of keeping Jesus’ command to show God’s love. Who is the stranger in your life right now, and how can you welcome her?



## IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH

By LaRose Karr, coordinator of mission with women and girls

Hello Sisters in Ministry! Women’s History Month begins each year on March 1st and ends March 31st. Visit [www.womenshistorymonth.gov](http://www.womenshistorymonth.gov) to read about phenomenal women. Our former ABWM Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain, said that we are currently making history with events that occurred at the end of 2023. Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain was voted unanimously as General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA. She is the first woman to hold this position and the first person of color. Yes, indeed, it is historic!

Our Christ-centered mission and ministry is to empower women and girls to serve God. How do we do this?

If we are to lead in our groups and churches with women and girls, we must keep balance. Consider these topics – Emotional, Mental, Physical, Practical, Social, and Spiritual. One way to work on these topics is journaling.

This year began with changes for ABWM! Praise God! He gets all the glory! He loves us just the same today as in Biblical times. The Lord treasures women.

The book of Zephaniah wonderfully illustrates this. It thrills my spirit to think God is rejoicing over me with singing! [Zephaniah 3:17](#)

*His plans are unfolding with ABWM! Let us live each day knowing the Lord places us where he wants. Grow in his plans and wisdom!*

Let’s make history with Him!



## Welcome the Stranger

Lovena Van Haften, coordinator of the midwestern section

There is much discussion regarding allowing immigrants, refugees, and migrants into the

United States at our borders. These individuals have traveled over a thousand miles, being on the road for months, fleeing from poverty and persecution, and looking for a better life for themselves and their families. Those who enter illegally get caught by the immigration authorities and frequently get sent back home. There, they may face persecution, execution, and more poverty, along with a lack of jobs to feed their families.

Hebrews 13:1, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (NRSV). The Bible tells us to welcome a stranger. The stranger may look different, speak a different language, and dress differently. How does that make us feel? Let us examine our own feelings regarding welcoming that stranger.

When a new neighbor moves in next door, welcome them to the neighborhood. Find opportunities to get to know them. Just as the immigrants, refugees, and migrants seek a new home and new beginnings, be welcoming.

Prayer. *Lord, help me to open myself to strangers. To look past the diversity, the racism, and the fear of the unknown and allow inclusiveness. Thank you, Lord, for helping me be strong and courageous. Amen.*



## Planning Aligned Events

By Dawn Doerr-Johnson,  
coordinator of events

American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM), is a vibrant and purpose-driven organization that empowers women to serve

Christ, advocate for justice, and transform communities. When planning events for ABWM, it is essential to align them with the organization's mission and ministries.

1. **Understand the ABWM Mission:** To plan events in line with ABWM's mission and ministries, it is crucial to familiarize yourself with our core beliefs and objectives. Explore the website, review the mission statement, and understand our focus areas, such as leadership development, discipleship, advocacy, and missions. This knowledge will guide your event planning process and ensure alignment with ABWM's vision.
2. **Identify Target Audience and Goals:** Clearly define the event's purpose and identify the target audience within ABWM. Determine whether the event is centered around leadership development, spiritual growth, social justice, or missions. Understanding the event's goals and target audience will help you curate relevant content and activities.
3. **Collaborate with ABWM Leadership:** Engage in open communication with ABWM leadership, including national officers and staff. Discuss your event concept and seek their insights and suggestions. Their experience and expertise will enhance the event's alignment with ABWM's mission and ministries. Collaborative planning ensures that the final event reflects the collective vision and goals of the organization.

Planning events in line with the mission and ministries of American Baptist Women's Ministries requires careful consideration, collaboration, and alignment with ABWM's core values. You can plan events that empower women, foster personal growth, and fulfill ABWM's call for justice, missions, and community transformation.

## What's Happening in your ABWM Region?

### WESTERN SECTION

By Crystal Newton, coordinator

- ABWM of the West is excited to host its first weekend retreat in many years. May 31-June 2 at Redwood Glen. The theme will be Welcoming the Stranger.
- Pacific Northwest has a couple of fun activities, including a Bingo night and a Quilt Retreat. Plus their annual conference is in June.
- The Idaho board had its first-ever Zoom meeting. Their one-day retreat focusing on courage and strength will be on June 15, 2024, with the theme of Walk with Jesus.

### MIDWESTERN SECTION

By Lovena Van Haaften, coordinator

- Central Region's annual event will be held June 7-8, 2024, with the theme "Crazy, Courageous...."
- Great Rivers Region will have their conference in July.
- Mid-America's annual event will be June 8, 2024, at Westover Baptist Church in Des Moines.
- Iowa East will hold a Spring event on April 13, 2024, at Fairfield First Baptist Church.
- Michigan's annual event will be held June 7-9, 2024 at the St. Francis Retreat Center in DeWitt, Michigan. You are invited to join them for food, fun, friendship, and fellowship.
- Nebraska's conference will be held in June at Camp Cameca in Central Nebraska. The theme will be "A God-Fashioned Woman."
- Ohio's annual conference will be held in June. A two-day Spiritual Growth Retreat is being planned for the Fall.

### EASTERN SECTION

- Rhode Island is hosting a Spiritual Retreat on Spiritual Gifts in March. Their annual conference will be held in June.
- New York State's convection will be on April 26-28, 2024. The theme is "Rejuvenate, Be Strong, Be Courageous." There will be a 65+ year celebration, Bible study, workshops, and more. The event is intergenerational and promises to Rejuvenate and provide relaxation.
- Region of the South will host their convention on April 29-May 3 in Richmond, Virginia

# Events for Women and Girls

**Women's History Month**

During Women's History Month, ABWM curates a brief virtual gathering every Monday at 12:00pm ET during March 2024.

 Rev. Dr. Cheryl Price  
 Publisher, Judson Press  
 Rev. Kathryn Choy-Wong  
 Author  
 Rev. Sandra Dorsainvil  
 Author  
 Heidi Unruh  
 Author  
 Joy Skjogstad  
 Author

[www.abwomensministries.org/events](http://www.abwomensministries.org/events)  
 American Baptist Women's Ministries

## Women's History Month Gatherings 2024

During Women's History Month, ABWM curates a gathering every Monday in March. We hope you'll join us in celebrating Women's History Month!

- Monday, March 4, 2024, at 12:00 PM ET
- Monday, March 11, 2024, at 12:00 PM ET
- Monday, March 18, 2024, at 12:00 PM ET
- Monday, March 25, 2024, at 12:00 PM ET

Visit [www.abwomensministries.org](http://www.abwomensministries.org) to register.

AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN'S MINISTRIES' EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IS HOSTING

**United in Faith 2024 telethon**

Saturday, March 23, 2024, 5:00-8:00 PM EDT

Get ready for the "United in Faith 2024 Telethon," a one-day event streaming live on Zoom, designed to unite women from across the nation in a shared mission of faith, empowerment, and service.

[www.abwomensministries.org/united](http://www.abwomensministries.org/united)  
 American Baptist Women's Ministries

## United in Faith 2024 Telethon

**Saturday, March 23, 2024,  
5:00-8:00 PM EDT**

Get ready for the "United in Faith Telethon," a one-day event designed to unite women nationwide in a shared mission of faith, empowerment, and service. Visit [www.abwomensministries.org/united](http://www.abwomensministries.org/united) to learn more.

**What's Up ABWM?**

*Sectional Meetings*

Midwestern: Thursday, February 29, 2024  
 Eastern: Thursday, April 18, 2024  
 Western: Thursday, May 9, 2024

Free & All women are welcome

**REGISTER NOW!**

[abwomensministries.org/events](http://abwomensministries.org/events)

## 2024 Sectional Meetings: What's Up ABWM?

Join other American Baptist Women as we hear from our national board, national staff, association leaders, and AB Women on what's happening in American Baptist Women's Ministries.

- Midwestern Section: Thursday, February 29, 2024
- Western Section: Thursday, May 9, 2024
- Eastern Section: Thursday, April 18, 2024

Learn more at

[www.abwomensministries.org/events](http://www.abwomensministries.org/events).

**WOMEN AND GIRLS' Conference**

Thursday-Sunday  
**JULY 18-21, 2024**

Roanoke College  
221 College Lane  
Salem, VA 24153

 Rev. Joy Martinez-Marshall  
 First Baptist Church Lincoln Pastor  
 Ms. Jasmine Turner  
 NBC12 News Anchor  
 Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain  
 General Secretary  
 ABC-USA  
 Rev. Barbara Florvil Laravin  
 Writer & Poet

[www.abwomensministries.org/events](http://www.abwomensministries.org/events)

## 2024 Women and Girls Conference

**July 18-21, 2024**

Salem, Virginia

Girls and women of all ages from across the US, including Puerto Rico, will gather for ABWM's Women and Girls Conference. The conference, based on our two-year 2023-2025 Ministry Focus, "Be Strong, Be Courageous," the conference will create opportunities to study God's word and explore leadership. Register by April 1st for the best rates! Visit

[www.abwomensministries.org/events](http://www.abwomensministries.org/events) to register.

## Support ABWM.

Make a gift to American Baptist Women's Ministries today! Gifts allow ABWM to continue providing free webinars, scholarships for events, programs, resources, and leadership training for ministries with women and girls in your church, area, and region.

- Give by Venmo: @abwomensministries
- Give by text: Text ABWM to 44321
- Give online by credit card: Give online at <http://www.abwomensministries.org/give>
- Give by check: Mail a check payable to "ABWM" to American Baptist Women's, 1075 First Ave STE C-210, King of Prussia, PA 19406



**Become a Vital Partner to support the vision for the future of American Baptist Women's Ministries.** Vital Partners regularly gives \$228 or more a year to support our work with women, young adult women, and girls. Vital Partners give monthly, quarterly, or annually, and they may also set up automated giving by direct withdrawal from their bank account or credit card. Become a Vital Partner today at [www.abwomensministries.org/VitalPartners](http://www.abwomensministries.org/VitalPartners).

## Find Us On Social Media

Do you ever feel like you find out about American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM) events after they've taken place? Do you need more info about ABWM? Do you want to feel part of a community of like-minded women who enjoy helping others and rejoicing in God's Word? Then, follow American Baptist Women's Ministries on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Be a part of this dynamic Christ-centered organization and stay informed.

- [www.facebook.com/abwomensministries](http://www.facebook.com/abwomensministries)
- [www.instagram.com/abwomen/](http://www.instagram.com/abwomen/)
- [www.twitter.com/abwomen](http://www.twitter.com/abwomen)



## Be Part of the Leader's Reader Conversation!

Send us "ideas that worked for me" in women's and girls' ministries, women or girls you'd like to thank or honor, theme-related devotionals, or other materials you think would be helpful to women and girls in our congregations! Please send contributions to [info@abwomensministries.org](mailto:info@abwomensministries.org).

## Subscribe Here

*Leader's Reader* is your source for current events in American Baptist Women's Ministries, leadership helps, and news. The ABWM national office distributes it. You can **subscribe** at <http://www.abwomensministries.org/subscribe>.