

The Friendly Communicator

February 2026

A Word from the Pastor

If you've ever planted a garden, you know that seeds don't look like much at first. They're small, ordinary, and easy to overlook—but when they're placed in good soil and tended with care, something beautiful can grow. That image stayed with me after **our January 18th Annual Meeting and potluck meal**. As we shared food and conversation, we were invited to reflect on a simple but powerful question: *What seed—value, hope, or small action—should our church plant in the coming year?* The thoughtful responses and holy imagination in the room were a gift. The nature card each of you received was meant to be a reminder that God often works through small beginnings, growing them into blessings for the sake of the world.

I also want to share my deep gratitude for **my installation service** on January 24th. It was a holy and humbling day for me, and a meaningful moment in the life of our church. Together we listened to scripture that reminded us who we are called to be: a place of tenderness—a spiritual family where people are known, loved, forgiven, and supported. And at the same time, a public witness—a community that insists love must shape not only our personal lives, but also our shared life, our policies, and our social systems. Thank you for the trust you have placed in me and for the grace with which you continue to welcome me into this ministry among you.

In January, the Board of Christian Education began a thoughtful two-part series on **Our Baptist Identity**, focusing on the “Four Freedoms” of our faith. Last month we explored Bible Freedom and Soul Freedom, grounding ourselves in the conviction that scripture must be freely interpreted and that every person stands in direct relationship with God. On February 1st, the conversation will continue with Church Freedom and Religious Freedom—freedoms that shape how we organize ourselves and how we relate to those of other faiths, or no faith at all. I encourage you to participate and bring your questions and curiosity.

The hope is that these conversations regarding our Baptist identity will open the door to future learning about the dangers of Christian Nationalism and the responsibility we have as Baptists to promote and protect freedom of religion in society. Listen for more information in the coming weeks about how you can learn more and get involved. In the meantime, I commend to you the work of [The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#) and their “*Christians Against Christian Nationalism*” educational materials. May we continue planting seeds of faith, freedom, and love—trusting God to bring the growth

With gratitude,

Pastor Stephen

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December 2025 Financial Income Report

General Receipts

Envelopes	\$25,144.71
Loose Offerings	63.00
Church School	58.00
Tithely	100.00
Thanksgiving	20.00
Christmas	721.00
Total	\$26,106.71

Miscellaneous Receipts

Pow wow	50.00
MMCC	400.00
Capital Fund	3,000.00
Music Fund – Library Sq.	40.00
Initial Offer	5.00
ABF-Qtr. Dividends	729.01
Total	\$4,224.01

Communion Offering

RMMO	325.00
Total	\$325.00

Memorial Fund

	0.00
Total	\$0.00

Mission Offering

RMMO	950.00
One Great Hour Sharing	5.00
Grand Avenue Club	200.00
Milwaukee Community Crossroads	150.00
Total	\$1,305.00

Deposited Total \$31,960.72

Suggested items for the third Sunday (Feb. 15th) food and hygiene collection for the Milwaukee Community Crossroads are **rice & body wash**. Please place your donations in the bins inside the office door entrance.

February Birthdays

- 2 Sue Simons
- 4 Sarah Holl
- 4 Owen Koss
- 4 Ethan Koss
- 5 Maggie Ley
- 7 Tami Keinert
- 7 Tom Borger
- 10 Deb Russell
- 13 Sheila Beutin
- 14 Anne Wyszowski
- 15 Pearlina Ortiz
- 20 Linda Boardman
- 25 Christine Hauski
- 28 Klaus Zunker

If we have inadvertently missed your special day, please accept our apologies, and let the office know so we can change our records.

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Golden Guys and Gals

The 3Gs (Golden Guys and Gals) will meet in the church sanctuary at 11:00 a.m., Thursday, February 12, to enjoy an organ concert performed by Mary Schecher. The theme of the concert is *LOVE*. Lunch will follow. Please sign up in the foyer of the Education Wing.

Remember, everyone who is 50 or older is automatically a member of the Golden Guys and Gals. But we don't check ID's, so feel free to sneak in, even if you're not quite at the golden age.

Annual dues for 2026 remain a bargain at \$5.00 per person. Our treasurer, Kathy McDonald, will be happy to accept and record your payment.



SOUPER BOWL LUNCH - All are invited to the 2026 Souper Bowl lunch on Sunday, February 8th following the worship service. Try a variety of soups & enjoy the camaraderie! Donations to St. Ben's Meal Program and Milwaukee Crossroads Community Emergency Food Pantry will be collected. If you're interested in providing a soup, please let Becky know.



A number of years ago, I wrote the following:

“The New Testament refers to singing as a **corporate activity**, and explains that singing in a congregational setting is a ministry where worshippers not only praise God but address each other in song and is an "avenue for Christian love." When we sing together, we are singing to God, expressing our thanks and praise as well as assisting the other worshippers in praising God.”

This is still true – singing in worship is a powerful activity that not only accomplishes the goals of worship – praise, prayer, and proclamation – but unites people as the body of Christ.

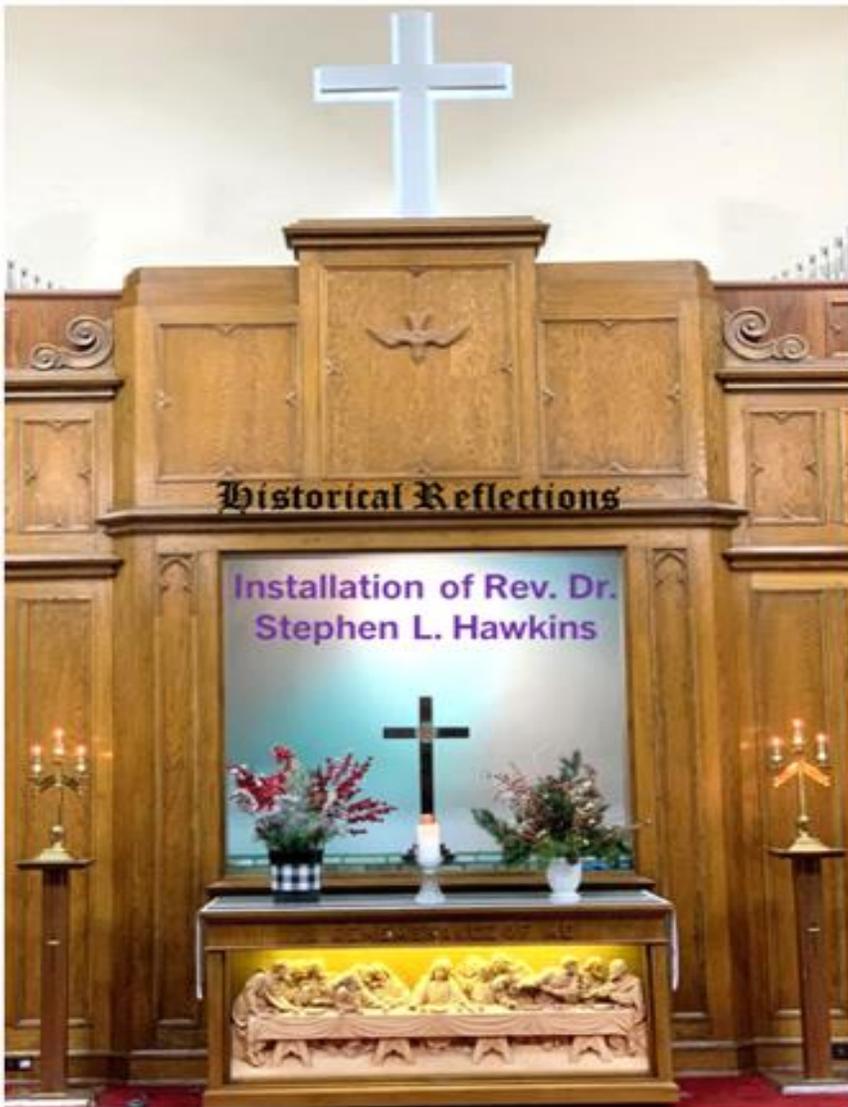
Recently, in an article about singing, the author talked about how that initial breath that we all take to begin singing is one of the only times when we are all in sync. So much of what we hear and see today tries to divide us. Singing is an activity that unites us with one purpose.

Scripture calls us to sing a new song to the Lord (Ps. 96:1, Eph. 5:9, Ps. 100:2). Scripture calls us to sing together – as the body of Christ. It is one of the most important, unifying, and powerful things we can do. So, join in the song!

Mary Schecher

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We gathered together on Saturday, January 24, 2026, for the installation service of our "new" Pastor, Stephen Hawkins.

Moderator Sue Moreno welcomed us. Barb Winski, Trustee, led us in the Call to Worship.

The pastors or representatives from several local churches welcomed our Pastor. This included: Rev. Josh Graber, Pastor of First Lutheran Church of West Allis; Tom Bolton, lay leader from First United Methodist Church of West Allis; Linda Hoon, Clerk of Session at Apostle Presbyterian Church; and Father Gerardo Carcar, St. Barnaba Catholic Church.

Karl Byleen, Personnel Chair, reflected on how Pastor Stephen came to us. The choir sang and Becky Holl, past Moderator, led us in prayer. Catherine Wood, Christian Education Chair and Minister Byron Johnson, Assistant Minister for Regional Ministries at ABCWI, read scripture.



Rev. Dr. Chuck Graves, retired ABCWI minister and church member, gave the sermon. Rev. Dr. John Jones IV, Associate Regional Minister (education)



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Karl Byleen, Personnel Chair, reflected on how Pastor Stephen came to us. The choir sang and Becky Holl, past Moderator, led us in prayer. Catherine Wood, Christian Education Chair and Minister Byron Johnson, Assistant Minister for Regional Ministries at ABCWI, read scripture.



Rev. Dr. Chuck Graves, retired ABCWI minister and church member, gave the sermon. Rev. Dr. John Jones IV, Associate Regional Minister (education) of ABCWI and a church member, gave the **Charge to**



the Congregation. Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, Regional Executive Minister of ABCWI gave the **Charge of the Minister and the Installation of the Minister to the Office of Pastor.**

The Laying on of Hands was done, and Pastor Stephen responded to the activities.



A gift was presented on behalf of the Church to the new pastor.

After the benediction, together we broke bread (and ate spaghetti, salad and deserts).

This is the 105th of periodic historical articles.

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Kim's Mission Trip to Tijuana

Last year the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin sent out a request for volunteers for a mission trip to Tijuana, Mexico, to connect with Deborah's House, a secure shelter for women and children who were victims of domestic abuse and violence. In November FBCWA's own Rev. Kim Drost joined a group consisting of ABCW Executive Minister, Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, and two others who left to spend a week south of the border. In spite of the government shutdown, they were able to travel safely into Mexico (and get back home!).

At Deborah's House, the group was able to share the nativity story with families that had never heard it before. They also learned of a mom of five who is a witness against the cartels that used to abuse her. She still bears tattoos marking her as a drug mule for two cartels.



Kim's Mission Journey



The Children Learn the Nativity Story / View of Tijuana

The group then visited Camino de Salvación, a church that converted its sanctuary into a migrant shelter. The pastor there has a vision of helping to educate the community as well as the migrants who have come to the city. Next stop was Jesucristo, a Baptist church that is giving their old church building to become a Haitian migrant shelter. Haitians are an ethnic minority in Tijuana. The building is in very poor condition now, but the hope is to rebuild it into a community center with space for the church and a shelter.

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“A Life with Purpose: Why Am I Here on Earth?”

U.S. Deported Veterans Center

Another day brought them to the Deported Veterans’ Resource Center where U.S. military personnel who have been deported can find help as they acclimate to Tijuana. From there they went to the Haitian Consulate. When our Global Servant Moise Joseph arrived in Tijuana, he wondered what God was thinking because he did not speak Spanish and there were no Haitians in the city. But now there are 45,000 Haitians in Tijuana! The group learned how the Haitian government was convinced to establish a consulate and to work with the churches to help Haitians in the city, both in integrating into Mexico and also in retaining their culture and heritage.

Not all went as planned, however. The next day, Saturday, there was rain and the roads flooded. So, unable to get out due to impassable roads, they stayed at Deborah’s House rather than go on their anticipated sightseeing trip. Instead they did crafts with the children, played board games with the women, and had a wonderful time connecting further with the residents. God does indeed work in mysterious ways! We all now know the word for “cheater!” in English and Spanish.



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Rainy Days and Saturdays Don't Always Get Us Down!

On Sunday, the group worshipped at the Community Baptist Church, a Haitian Baptist church that meets at a Haitian community shelter. Rev. Mindi gave the morning sermon, which was translated into Creole. Then they were off to the Border Church, an ecumenical church that meets on both sides of the San Diego-Tijuana international border. Rev. Mindi preached again (with a translation into Spanish) and Rev. Kim gave the benediction in both English and Spanish.

Of course along the way the group had many opportunities to sample delicious Mexican and Haitian food as they learned how God was working through His ministry to the people of Tijuana. Norma and her crew are fabulous cooks!



Sunday Service Led by the Mission Team



Kim Wraps Up Her Journey!

A goodwill offering was taken at the conclusion of Kim's presentation to our congregation. We raised \$197 toward the removal of the tattoos marking the woman at Deborah's House as a cartel mule. So, how can *you* help these worthwhile mission projects? I'm glad you asked! You can support them by giving to ABCW through First Baptist Church of West Allis's United Missions:

Deborah's House (goes directly to Deborah's House)

Moise Carrion-Joseph – Haitian Ministry (will go to support Community Baptist Church and the community center at Jesucristo)

Deliris Carrion-Joseph – Camino de Salvación (will go directly to Camino church and shelter ministry)

Deported Veterans Resource Center – you can give directly <https://www.uusdepvets.org/>.

By the way: fun fact to know and tell: It is *not* pronounced "Ti-A-juana," just Ti-juana, as there are only 2 "a"s, not three, in the name.

(Photos courtesy of Kim Drost and Mary Schecher)