

News & Notes

SUMMER 2024

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“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.”

—Audrey Hepburn

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— Colleen McSpirit-Brush, Editor

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475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1700

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Editor: Colleen McSpirit-Brush

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Spotlight on Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula

Regional Executive Minister
American Baptist Church (ABC) USA, Nebraska



Rev. Mamula and why building community is the foundation for better relationships in and out of church

Bringing people together and building communities is a lifestyle for Regional Executive Minister of Nebraska, Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula.

Last November after serving as Transitional Executive Minister, Rev. Mamula was called to fill the role permanently. One of his goals in the new position is to strengthen relationships between the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) across Nebraska. “Many churches don’t interact with each other any more like they did in the 1900s,” explained Mamula. “Churches helping churches’ is the ABCUSA of Nebraska motto. We are stronger together and poorer when divided.”

As the son of a father in the military, Rev. Mamula grew up all over the country and attended chapels on the base, giving him an ecumenical experience. His mother grew up Baptist and the family attended a small Southern Baptist church in Arkansas. When Greg was a sophomore and junior in high school, he attended his first ABCUSA church in Western Massachusetts. It was there he realized you could think deeply about your faith and felt the calling to serve God.

Rev. Mamula is passionate about the health of rural pastors even though the size of the state can be a challenge to the community building mission. Nebraska is 450 miles long and 250 miles wide, he commented, noting that 89% of Nebraska’s cities have less than 3,000

people and hundreds have less than 1,000. Most Nebraskans live on the Eastern side of the state, with 1 in 3 living in Omaha or Lincoln. To give a sense of the vast territory Pastor Greg explained that Cherry County, the largest of the state’s 93 counties, is bigger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined.

“There needs to be a balance between autonomy and interdependences that strengthens autonomy by finding ways of sharing expertise in the ABCUSA way,” said Greg. “These ways can foster a sense of connection and support to prevent isolation and its many ill effects.”

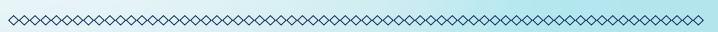
On the western side of the state churches are one to two hours apart. For example, in one county, the Arthur Baptist Church, located in the middle of Arthur County, is the county’s only ABCUSA church. To reach people spread out among the county’s 718 square miles Pastor Blake Wilkes’s sermons are both live on YouTube and Facebook then later posted on Apple podcasts.

Using the Internet in creative ways can foster community inclusion, pointed out Pastor Greg, who also has a podcast, Mission in Five. The podcast is Nebraska centered but is still a worthwhile listen for anyone outside the region. Earlier this year, the podcast featured a Lenten series called Facing Jerusalem, which highlighted a scripture reading followed by a panel discussion.

“There needs to be a balance between online and in person,” he noted. Some in person activities he encourages are pulpit swaps, where pastors exchange preaching at each other’s services, and doing the same Lenten series. He emphasized that he is always trying to find new ways of bringing the gospel to life.



“Gathering together won’t solve the systemic issues facing our nation, but building community and coming together with trust and not fear makes us able to partner together and achieve great things.”



Rev. Greg’s commitment to building up communities started when he first came to Nebraska and served as the associate pastor of Family and Youth at First Baptist Church, North Platte. He and his family sat on plastic chairs in their driveway and said hello to those who walked past. They were also hosting dinners with people from the church. Greg described the dinners as

“just life food, nothing fancy. Even with pizza and potlucks, the kids running in and out...these dinners were life giving affirmations.” When they left North Platte to serve the region, Rev. Mamula brought these practices with him.

Pastor Greg reported that the Nebraska region is more diverse than most people know. Nebraska is home to the third largest Karen population in the US. The Omaha Kanyaw Baptist Church has 500 members and three pastors. The region also serves African-nation, Burmese, African American, Chinese and Latino populations. “We are blessed with strong diversity,” said Greg, noting he would like to see members of each to participate at the 2025 Biennial Mission Summit. Since 2024 is an election year, it is even more important to reach across the table, said Greg, stressing how it is essential to accept each other’s differences and realize we are not as different as we may at first believe. “All four of the Nebraska region ABCUSA staff members are under the age of 45, making them the youngest ABCUSA team and brings another type of diversity to the region.” continued Greg.

“What can we do in the world that we might never see happen?” he asked. “Gathering together won’t solve the systemic issues facing our nation, but building community and coming together with trust and not fear makes us able to partner together and achieve great things.”

But first we have to learn to live in love and not fear.”

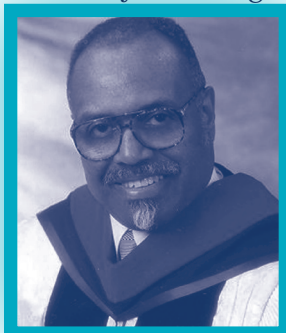
In 2007, he earned a master’s in divinity from Baylor University’s Truett Baptist Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas where he was again shown the ABCUSA way. After graduation he came to Nebraska to serve as the associate pastor of Family and Youth at First Baptist Church, North Platte. Pastor Greg refers to then senior pastor at First Baptist, the Rev. Dr. Tom Wiles, as a good mentor. In 2012, Greg took on the role of associate executive minister and region missionary for ABCUSA Nebraska. He is the author of *Table Life: An Invitation to Everyday Discipleship* published by Judson Press, and co-editor/co-author of *Conflict Management and the Apostle Paul* with Dr. Scot McKnight. He is also a contributing author to #InThisTogether Ministry in Times of Crises by Curtis Ramsey-Lucas. Rev. Mamula regularly publishes articles in *Word & Way* and *The Christian Citizen*. He is a faculty mentor to students at Kairos University in Sioux Falls, North Dakota.

Pastor Greg is looking forward to partnering with MMBB and is appreciative of the value MMBB offers to pastoral leaders in the region. He believes the partnership will also be a strategy to build new relationships.

In Memoriam

The Rev. Dr. Charles G. Adams, passed into the arms of his Savior the Lord Jesus Christ at age 86 on November 29, 2023.

Rev. Adams was born on December 13, 1936, in Detroit, Michigan. Adams earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan, where he was the first African



American member of the University’s Men’s Glee Club. He received a Master of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School. He was the recipient of a Rockefeller Fellowship at Harvard University, a Doctoral

Fellowship at Union Theological Seminary and the Merrill Theological Fellowship at Harvard University.

When he took a leave from Harvard Divinity School to care for his ailing grandparents in Atlanta, Georgia, he spent a year at Morehouse College, where he was asked to be a teaching assistant for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Adams first served as pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts before being called to the church he grew up in, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, in Detroit where he served from 1969 to 2019. Under his leadership the church moved into its current James Couzen facilities and has since become one of the largest congregations in the Detroit area. It is well known for its music ministry and magisterial pipe organ.

His vision of community outreach led to the establishment of the Agape House for charitable and community ministries, including programs for senior citizens, a

hunger task force, scholarship and college prep programs just to name a few. Rev. Adams led the way for the church to invest in commercial real estate to support and invest in the community. This venture yielded fast food restaurants, a Super Kmart and a Home Depot, which provided employment for the community and a tax base for the city. Other church properties housed a Head Start agency, a tutorial program, the Hartford Institute for Biblical Studies, a senior residential community to name a few. He served as president of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP in 1984 and was elected to its Executive Board in 1986, 1988 and 1990. He was involved in the global anti-Apartheid movement and participated in meetings with Archbishop Desmond TuTu, Rev. Allan Boesak and other leaders of the South African freedom struggle. In 1991, he was elected to the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches Central Committee in Canberra, Australia, where he promptly recommended the organization use its resources to combat racism in the US and around the world. Adams also served on the Governing Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

Twice, in 1984 and 1992, he was named to *Ebony* Magazine's list of the 100 Most Influential Black Americans. In 1993, Adams was named to *Ebony's* list of the 15 Greatest Black Preachers in America. The Harvard Divinity School awarded him with the coveted Rabbi Marvin Katzenstein Award, which is given to a Harvard graduate who exhibits "a passionate and helpful interest in the lives of other people, an informed and realistic faithfulness and an embodiment of the idea that love is not so much a way of feeling as a way of acting and has a reliable sense of humor."

Adams also established the Harvard University School of Divinity's Summer Leadership Institute, an intensive summer program for churches of all sizes to get training in community economic development.

He has received dozens of awards and accolades for his service as well as honorary degrees from Birmingham College (1975); Morris College (1980); Shaw College (1980); Morehouse College (1984) and an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the University of Michigan (1986).

A dynamic speaker and teacher, Rev. Adams lectured on homiletics and Black Church studies at Boston University,

Andover Newton School of Theology, Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City and Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. From 2007 to 2021, he served as the first Nickerson Professor of the Practice of Ethics and Ministry at Harvard Divinity. A prolific writer, he was published locally and nationally in scholarly journals and newspapers.

He is survived by his wife, Agnes Hadley; son, Rev. Charles Christian Adams (Nicole Hicks-Adams); daughter, Tara Adams Washington, MD (John Washington); sister Edith Adams Clifton; stepson Karlos James; stepdaughter Angela Henderson (Bertrick Henderson); grandsons David Washington, Nathan Washington and Charles E. Adams; granddaughters, Madison Adams and Ericka Allen (Monte Allen); and great-granddaughter, Noella Adams.

The Rev. Jimmie Treat

transitioned from life to eternal life on October 12, 2023, at his home in Lawrence, Kansas.

Born in Bloomfield, Illinois, to Coy and Ruby Treat in 1934, he had committed his life to



Christ in his early teens and realized later that the Lord was calling him to preach. He played oboe in many community orchestras throughout his life and he also taught oboe. Jimmie attended Wheaton College for two years. He took one year off to work as a Baptist Youth Fellowship intern for the American Baptist Convention then transferred to Ottawa University, in Ottawa, Kansas, where he spent summers working with the youth at First Baptist Church in Russell, Kansas. There he met his future wife, Marcia. They were married a year later after he graduated from Ottawa University. They moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he attended Eastern Baptist Seminary.

After seminary they moved to Anadarko, Oklahoma, where they served Native American churches for four years. Next, he pastored First Baptist Church in Horton and Hays, Kansas, then moved to First Baptist Church, in Rapid City, South Dakota. He later pastored First Baptist Church, Murphysboro, Illinois. He retired from that church, and the couple moved to Baldwin City, Kansas. Jimmie served as interim pastor in ten churches in Kansas

and Missouri for as long as he was physically able. Even in his last weeks of life he was praying with and for those who were caring for him.

Jimmie is preceded in death by his parents and youngest son, Jeremy. He is survived by his wife of sixty-seven years, Marcia, as well as two sons, James and John, his daughter, Julia, and four grandsons, Coy and Cooper Treat, and Nick and Jake Reber. He is also survived by his younger sister, Nancy Forbes, two nieces and two nephews.

Doris Louise Bevington (nee Hillwig), 86, of Springville, born July 9, 1937, to Kenneth and Claire Hillwig of Kaylor, Pennsylvania, passed away peacefully on December 2, 2023, surrounded by her family at home.

Doris was well known by friends, family, church members and others for her apple dumplings as well as her notes of encouragement and her kindness and generosity. Doris married Rev. David Y. Bevington, on July 29, 1961.

They met at Camp Corbly, a church camp operated by the American Baptist denomination in Mahaffey, Pennsylvania. Doris had bought a new car and was short on cash and David was laid off from his summer job, so both had extra time and ended up becoming camp counselors. Later they realized God brought them together.



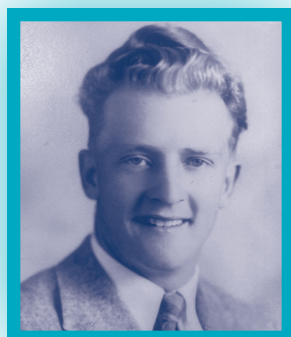
She is survived by her husband, David; son Douglas Alan and his wife Robin and family; daughter Donna Jean Benstead and family; her sisters Twila Williams, Anna Emmanuelson and Dixie Bryant; her brothers Darrell and Dean Hillwig and many nieces and nephews. To celebrate her life, a memorial service was held at the Springville First Presbyterian Church, New York.

Celebrations

Rev. Buhler celebrates his 100th birthday

The Rev. Richard C. Buhler celebrated his 100th birthday on February 3, 2024. Born to Mr. and Mrs. Abram Buhler, Rev. Buhler grew up on a farm in Manitoba, Canada. He comes from a large family and four other siblings became pastors, Christian workers and teachers.

He graduated from Prairie Bible College in Three Hills, Alberta, Canada. Immediately after, he went to his brother's church in Onoway, Alberta, Canada. Richard was later called to start a church in Wainswright, Alberta where he served for two and half years before returning



to school. He earned a bachelor's degree from Macalester College and a master's degree from the University of Minnesota. While attending university, he met his wife of 64 years, Janet Geske.

Rev. Buhler was next called to pastor First Baptist Church in Alliance, Nebraska, where he led the building of a new church and at one point held a baptism service for 29 candidates. He later served at First Baptist Church in Clarks Grove, Minnesota. He also became a trustee at the University of Sioux Falls and served as an executive member of the American Baptist Pastoral Committee.

Richard served as pastor for 12 years at the First Baptist Church of Pacifica, California. This is where he and Janet, who went home to the Lord in June 2020, raised their five children. He retired in 1986 but was quickly called back into service as an interim pastor for ten different California churches in Redwood City, San Jose, Sunnyvale, Napa, Sacramento, Carmichael and Reno.

Richard said he holds a significant and deep gratitude for all the great relationships he has had with all the leaders of the American Baptist Churches.

Rev. Dr. Dan and Sue MacDonald celebrate 50 years

The Rev. Dr. Dan and Sue MacDonald recently celebrated their golden wedding anniversary of 50 years. Their children held a surprise party on August 5, 2023,

at Tel Hai Retirement Community in Honey Brook, Pennsylvania, where they reside.

Family and friends gathered from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, Florida and California to celebrate. Dan's best friend, seminary classmate from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) and best man, the Rev. Dr.



Willis Lucas, flew in from California with his wife and son to add to the surprise.

Dan and Willie were in the NBTS graduating class of 1962. Dan has served churches in Wisconsin, Ohio, Delaware and Pennsylvania. Dan and Sue have three children, five grandchildren and a great-grandson.

Lifestyle

This summer feed your soul with a garden



Deep midwinter is often thought of as a time when the planning for summer gardens begins, but if you haven't started, it's still not too late to plant a garden. Young plants from a local nursery can be used to create a garden that is full of color or food, maybe even both.

An easy way to start is with potted plants on a deck or patio. Flowers are perfect for this, but vegetables like tomatoes, peppers and even strawberries will also thrive in planters. Many types of herbs can be easily grown in flower boxes or large barrels. Potted gardens can be as simple or as complex as you like. For instance, you can create more growing space with the use of a trellis or bamboo stakes, both are perfect for vining plants like morning glory or roses and vegetables such as peas, pole beans and cucumbers or you may choose to just have a couple of pots filled with flowers or an easy growing herb like mint.

A second option is to use raised beds which can elevate the garden for less bending. These types of beds can be

framed out directly on the ground or you can buy a premade bed to put on a patio. Raised beds are easily adaptable to any budget. They help cut down on the number of weeds and are perfect for most kinds of flowers and vegetables. Heights of premade beds can vary from ground level to waist high. The most important element with raised beds is to make sure you are using quality soil, and the plants get adequate water.

Gardens can also be started right in the ground. Clear a plot, test the soil, enhance the soil if needed and then start putting in the young plants. Planting directly into the ground gives more options to the variety of plants that can live in your garden.

After choosing the type of garden you want, the next discussion is whether you want a theme garden. Vegetable gardens can have many themes, some can be based on favorite foods such as salsa, pizza, lasagna, or three sisters (corn, beans and squash). Flower gardens can be single colored, or a single flower type. Plants can also be chosen to attract certain types of wildlife such as rabbits, birds or pollinators.

Whichever type of gardening you choose this summer, embrace it. Gardening can be a spiritual journey because it brings us closer to nature and connects us to the rhythms of life that offer a pathway to God. Gardens can be a sacred place to sit quietly and pray. They require the same traits as a formal spiritual practice: patience, attentiveness, diligence and self-control with components of mindfulness, creativity and curiosity.

For a successful garden season, do the best you can with the resources you have and leave the rest to God. Gardening is a lesson in humility. Your garden is at the mercy of nature. God provides the soil, sunlight, air and water. We enjoy the beauty and the bounty.