



# Merry Christmas and Happy and Blessed 2019

## **Make Room that God may Come**

Soren Kierkegaard has written, “My very humble work is to make people aware... to make room that God may come.” How quickly it happens, we become so busy and we crowd God out. Moving between two of the most popular holidays in our culture, Thanksgiving and Christmas, we recognize the importance of giving thanks in everything, and now turning our attention to the season of Advent and Christmas, we are often overshadowed by making preparation for everything else except making room for God to come.

I am excited about the work of our denomination, but I am more excited about the second advent of the Christ. We have before us an exceptional opportunity; an opportunity to be prepared by doing work we have been called to do. We can be a part of supporting ABC of the South, (ABCOTS), in missions, in office administration, and church development. We can be on the cutting edge of Christian ministry, transforming the world for Christ through the Church and our denomination. Make room to support the (ABCOTS) region offering in order to increase our ability to be present in our local churches, supporting, training, mediating, and helping. Make room to support the American Baptist UMB, (united missions basic). This enables us to be prepared to support communities experiencing disasters, missionaries on foreign and domestic soils, new church planting and a host of other ABC ministries. Will you consider during this season of preparation giving a special gift to our denomination and our Schools project supporting Virginia Union’s School of Theology, Shaw’s Divinity School and the Morehouse School of Religion, and make room that God may come?

The (ABCOTS) family of staff, volunteers, and workers pray earnestly that you and your family make room indeed for our God to come! Have a wonderful and blessed season of hope and help. Remember us as you make room.

In Christian Service

James M. Harrison, Executive Minister

**JESUS  
IS THE  
REASON  
FOR THE  
SEASON**

## 2018 IN REVIEW

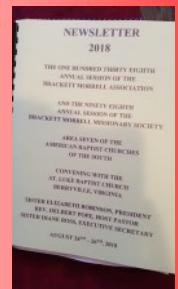
### Messages from the Executive Minister

**See It Through:** Last fall I was asked to speak at a fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration, giving words of encouragement to family members. The title, "See It Through," was given to me and the rest was up to me to develop in the way of discussion. Many of us ask the question, how did two people live together in matrimony for years? The discovery is that no relationship is absent of problems however, the secret is learning to find solutions to those problems. This works in the greater community as well, between countries, people of different races and cultures. So how do I see it through? My disclaimer however is that none are perfect. There are four components to adopting this attitude that have proved helpful to me. First, of course, **Seek Solutions**. When two persons or two entities are committed to co-existing in unity and harmony they will work together towards solving any problems that might plague that relationship. Secondly, learn to **Suffer in Silence**. Do not use every right you may have. How willing are we to make sacrifices for others, particularly creating opportunities for them to grow in relationship together? Thirdly, **Serve Needs**. Where others are deficient, you may be sufficient in ability, training, skills, or attitude. Never complain of carrying the heaviest part of the load, next time someone may need to carry the heaviest part on your behalf. Fourthly and finally, **Sponsor Selflessness**. Probably the most difficult to practice in any relationship. It is not-just-about-you! Sometimes it's not about you at all. We must be willing to commit ourselves to the self-fulfillment of others in relationship to us, Are you willing to give up something for others? Our mission and goal is not to see through it as in being able to see and predict the future, but rather to see it through. Today ABCOTS is bent towards **Seeing It Through**. See it through with us.

**CONGRATULATIONS** and **THANK YOU** to Dr. Hawk, Area III Friendship Baptist Church, Atlanta GA  
for 37 years of service with ABCOTS



### Scenes AREA Meetings



**ABCOTS 49th Annual Session**  
**April 29 - May 2, 2019**  
**Radisson Baltimore Inner Harbor**  
**Baltimore, MD**



# News and Updates from ABC USA

**A Reflection: Beginning of the Advent Season—***During the 2018 Advent season, weekly reflections will be posted from the Acting General Secretary and Associate General Secretaries of American Baptist Churches USA. Each reflection will be posted prior to the Sundays in Advent.*

Several years ago, I read the book entitled, *You Are Special* by Max Lucado. The book taught me a life lesson that I have attempted to keep in front of me ever since. The book tells the story of a community of puppets that receive stars for accomplishments and dots for failures. These stars are dots are worn for all to see. One day a puppet greets another puppet who has absolutely no stars and no dots. Over the years, Lucia had learned to put her trust in Punchinello, the one who had created her, rather than other people. Because of that, the stars and dots did not stick to her.

People typically enter the Advent season with a lot of stars and dots from previous years. Most persons carry a combination of happy and hurtful moments from the past, and some of these can become overwhelming at Christmas time. No matter what our past accomplishments or disappointments, the season of Advent can bring a fresh perspective into our lives by encouraging us to focus upon the powerful presence of Christ, who can transform any life and any memory. The greatest example of emptying oneself is Jesus who humbled himself to be born as a baby and take on human flesh (Philippians 2:6-7).

It is a good thing to celebrate achievements and to learn from our mistakes, but such reflections must not overwhelm us. Accomplishments can threaten us to rely upon ourselves more than God and disappointments can prevent us from remembering that we all are children of God. My prayer is that we can all enter into this Advent Season ready to experience God in a new and fresh way.

## Giving Thanks and a Call for Prayer for Persons Touched by California Wildfires

At this time of year, We give thanks for air to breathe, Food to eat, And shelter over our heads. We pray for those who have lost loved ones, are missing loved ones, and for those who have lost or are in fear of losing the basic necessities of life due to the recent California wildfires.

Three major wildfires in California have destroyed a record number of homes and buildings and destroyed over 250 acres of land. Over 1,000 people remain unaccounted for as a result of the fires.

As you worship this weekend, expressing gratitude and remembering those in need please especially remember those affected by the California wildfires.

And let us always remember to pray for those who have no daily expectation of food, shelter, clean air or water.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Colossians 4:2

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. C. Jeff Woods, Acting General Secretary



## UPDATES FROM HEADQUARTERS

Please send us your church's email address to be kept updated on the happenings in the region.

### A Note from the Accountant's Corner



Greetings from the Accountant's Corner. Here's wishing you a Merry Christmas & Prosperous New Year filled with blessings and proper tax planning/savings.

By now, I imagine that most of you are familiar with how the Tax Cuts & Jobs Act (TCJA) will impact you. If not, now is the time to contact your tax professional so that you're better prepared for tax season. In addition to the implementation of the TCJA, there are some other often-omitted year-end considerations to remind you of:

**Charitable Contributions** – Now is the time to make those final year-end gifts to your favorite charities. Not only is it better to give than to receive, but with your help, some hard-working organization can benefit from your generosity. Additionally, you may still benefit from a tax deduction for your efforts.



**Retirement Contributions** – This time of the year is also a good time to consider making a final lump-sum or catch-up contribution to your retirement plan. I believe that retirement savings should start early and often. And as the saying goes, "we're not getting younger." Take this time to evaluate your retirement position, and/or consider opening up that IRA or ROTH IRA for additional retirement benefits. Of course you always want to consult your financial & tax professional(s) to determine the best retirement vehicle for you. This retirement plan should take into consideration your current age, retirement goals, and investment objectives.

**Record-Keeping** – This is an often-neglected area of concern. I often remind my clients that disorganization can be costly. Disorganized people tend to pay more in taxes, tax preparation fees, and the like. Don't let this happen to you. Prepare yourself for what's to come. Need help? Request from your tax professional a checklist of items needed for tax-time. Get access to all those online records that we tend to allow to pile up in our email in-boxes. Make use of Excel and/or other software and phone applications to help spreadsheet and organize your finances. For those small business owners, ministry managers, and nonprofit organizers, you may want to consider a product like QuickBooks to help manage your income and expenses. Be sure to compile ALL of your income sources and properly document ALL of your expenses and deductions.



**Budget & Planning** – A final word centers on budgeting and planning. Whether you're managing the finances of your household, business, or church, we all need to operate off of a budget. A budget is an excellent tool for forecasting your 2019 financial goals and objectives. It forces us to think about money and its long-term implications. It helps us to identify areas of strength and weakness in our finances. Most importantly, it provides us with a basis for where we hope to land in our income and expense projections. Of course a budget alone is less beneficial unless we are actually comparing it to actual results. This is something that should be done periodically (perhaps monthly or quarterly). How does your actual income measure up to your budget? Have you been resolute to paying off debt? Are you on target with your monthly giving and expense goals? I challenge you to create a budget and use it. And when you start to see sizable results – celebrate your accomplishments!



For more information please visit our website at [www.abcots.org](http://www.abcots.org) or contact our office at 443.551.3045. Happy 2019!!!

