



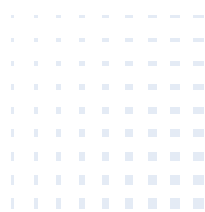
2025 Annual Summary

I planted the seed,
Apollos watered it,
but GOD has been
making it grow...

For we are
co-workers in
God's service;
You are God's field,
God's building.

1 Corinthians 3:6,9

Table of Contents

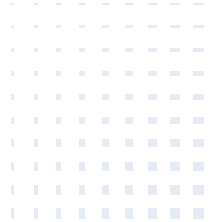


From the President	→	Page 03
From the Executive Minister	→	Page 04
Emerging Scholars	→	Page 05
Emerging Scholars Essay Highlights	→	Page 06
Embracing Community	→	Page 07
Supporting Pastoral Transitions	→	Page 09
Supporting Interim Ministers	→	Page 10
Together in God's Work	→	Page 11
Picture of Mission Giving 2024	→	Page 12
Top 20 Mission Giving Churches 2024	→	Page 13
Harnessing the Power of Story	→	Page 13
Camp Lebanon	→	Page 14
Strengthening the Faith of Parents	→	Page 15
Highlights – 2024 Annual Session	→	Page 17





From the President



In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul tells us that we are God's fellow workers, we are co-laborers to build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Kingdom work is not meant to be done alone, for we are called to work in community as the body of Christ. Community reminds us that we do not carry the load alone; we need to be dependent on one another, working together in unity, in faith, and in service.

Jethro advised Moses in the same way in Exodus 18:18: "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." Leadership and community are not done in isolation; instead, they are shared responsibilities. One person's strength does not sustain the church, for it is through our collective gifts, given through the Spirit, that we reflect Jesus Christ. Each one of us brings something unique, and together we reflect the fullness of Jesus Christ.

This year, the ABCNJ Council voted to welcome Encounter Christ Global Fellowship of Neptune into our fellowship, through the recommendation of the North Shore Association. Their presence reminds us that the work of the ministry is ever-expanding.

This aligns well with the question Reverend Miriam Méndez has been asking: "Who is ABCNJ"? Together, the Council has been working on the answer. WE. We are ABCNJ. As a community of faith, we embody the mission and ministry of the church. We serve together. We give together. Through our unique roles and responsibilities, we contribute to the work of the ministry. We build up the body instead of carrying the load alone.

We continue to work together in love, humility, and with a shared purpose. May we embrace a holy dependency upon God and one another to build His kingdom in Christian unity.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rev. Timothy D. Joyce".

Rev. Tim Joyce

President, ABCNJ Council

***“ Each one of us brings
something unique, and
together we reflect the fullness
of Jesus Christ. ”***





From the Executive Minister and Senior Regional Pastor

Beloved ABCNJ Family,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As I reflect on 2025, my heart is filled with gratitude for the many ways we have lived out our shared calling under this year's theme: Together in God's Work. The apostle Paul reminds us, "We are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). This past year has been a testimony of that truth, as our churches, pastors, leaders, and partners joined hands in service, worship, and mission.

In a world of challenges and uncertainties, ABCNJ has stood firm, empowering God's people with courage and hope. Since 2020, over 4,500 voices have gathered in monthly prayer, strengthening our unity and witness. Many of our churches also celebrated baptisms this year—joyful signs of new life in Christ and God's Spirit moving among us.

We continued to support pastors and congregations through transitions, equipping leaders for new seasons of ministry. Our Embracing Community initiative stood in solidarity with immigrant families, while the Flourishing in Exile project nurtured parents and caregivers to pass on a resilient faith. We also celebrated the witness of our Emerging Scholars and young leaders who are discerning God's call and courageously stepping into their vocation and mission. Camp Lebanon welcomed nearly 2,800 overnight guests, and we rejoice in the near completion of the Harker Retreat Center, which will soon become a vibrant new space for ministry.

We are also grateful for the first year of ministry celebrated at the ABCNJ Center, a new home for the Region and a hub for learning, worship, and community. We launched our new ABCNJ website, reflecting the work we do together as the body of Christ.

***"In a world of challenges
and uncertainties,
ABCNJ has stood firm,
empowering God's people
with courage and hope."***

We give thanks to the churches, individuals, and partners who generously supported the mission of ABCNJ, proving once again that we can accomplish far more together than we can alone.

We continue to plant, to water, and to join God in the growth, knowing that God is faithful to bring the harvest.

As we step into 2026, we look forward with anticipation—trusting that through storytelling, intercultural celebrations, prayer, and mission, God will continue to shape us into a people who walk faithfully, joyfully, and courageously together in God's work.

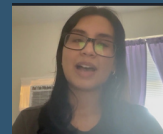
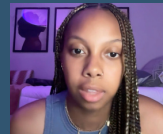
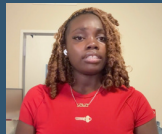
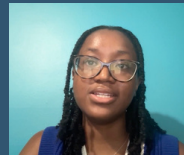
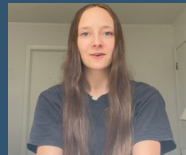
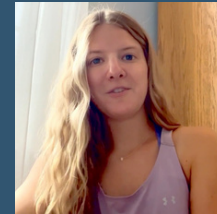
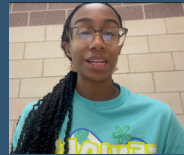
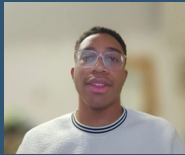
Thank you, beloved, for your partnership in ministry. May we remain steadfast in hope, bold in love, and committed to empowering the people of God for such a time as this.

Together in God's Work,

Rev. Miriam Méndez
Executive Minister and
Senior Regional Pastor



Meet the 2025-2026 Emerging Scholars Recipients



Hannah Acosta
Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church,
Fair Lawn
Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

Jadyn Beckett
Union Baptist Church, Montclair
Swarthmore College, Swarthmore,
Pennsylvania

Blythe Butler
Alpha Baptist Church, Willingboro
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

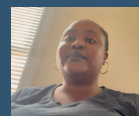
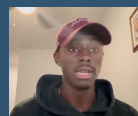
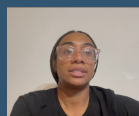
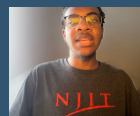
Sabra L. Butler
Alpha Baptist Church, Willingboro
Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ

Bryan Cali
Iglesia Bautista Familia de Dios, Parsippany
Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Caleb Chester
Cathedral International, Perth Amboy
New Jersey Institute of Technology

Berlando Drake
Community Baptist Church, Englewood
New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Victoria Guthrie
New Hope Baptist Church, Hackensack
Fordham University, New York, New York



Stacie Hueter
Iglesia Bautista Familia de Dios, Parsippany
Rider University, Lawrence, New Jersey

Kwesi Idun
Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church, Fair Lawn
Fordham University, New York, New York

Neo Lukoma
Cathedral International, Perth Amboy
Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Michelle Lynch
First Baptist Church, Hillside
New Brunswick Theological Seminary,

Leland Quaynor
Next Gen Church, West Windsor
Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, NJ

Zanang C. Samuel
Next Gen Church, West Windsor
William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ

Jahai Sims
Alpha Baptist Church, Willingboro
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Elijah Smiley
Alpha Baptist Church, Willingboro
Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia

Sophia Spriggs
Cape Island Baptist Church, Cape May
Sentara College of Health Science, Chesapeake, Virginia

Grace J. Suwala
First Baptist Church, Woodstown
James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Diego Vargas
Iglesia Bautista Familia de Dios, Parsippany
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey

Fernando Vargas
Iglesia Bautista Familia de Dios, Parsippany
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Jahn Whitworth
Union Baptist Church, Montclair
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ



Emerging Scholars Essay Highlights

Reflect on a moment when your current worldview was challenged. What prompted this change? Include an example of how you can listen to experiences and perspectives contrary to your own and how your faith impacts your pre-existing viewpoint.



Growing up, I was taught to follow a specific belief system without question. Constantly moving exposed me to different people, cultures, and worldviews. When you're young and still forming your identity, being told there's only one right way to believe starts to feel more like pressure than guidance. I accepted religion out of rebellion. I wanted to discover what faith meant, not just repeat what I was taught. Today, my relationship with faith is more personal and less structured. I still talk to God, especially when I need to release what I hold in. I am slowly rebuilding my faith, not because someone told me to, but because I want to. – **Hannah Acosta**



Growing up, I believed success depended solely on personal effort. This view changed during a summer internship, where I learned about systemic inequities affecting individuals from diverse backgrounds. Since then, I've made a conscious effort to be more aware of the circumstances and systems that affect people's lives. My faith encourages me to lead with compassion and an open heart. As a follower of Christ, I strive to treat others with dignity and understanding, even when their experiences challenge my own beliefs...living faithfully is being willing to listen, learn, and stand alongside others. – **Jakhai Sims**



This past year was my first time being eligible to vote in a U.S. presidential election in my lifetime. In the context of election night, much of our conversation at Bible Talk, a campus ministry, was about how we respond to hate, especially when the Bible is weaponized by Christians and others harm one another in the name of "politics." Moments where conversations felt dismissive of my complex feelings that lingered tempted me to approach other people in fight mode. However, I kept reminding myself of the kind of unconditional love that is expected of us in the Bible in return for the same love that is given to us by God, and used that mindset to shift from listening-to-attack to listening-to-understand. – **Jadyn Beckett**



One of the most pivotal moments in my life was a mission trip to Haiti. I always believed in helping those in need, just as Jesus has called us to do, but I never understood the depth of the broken world we live in. As our plane got closer to landing, I looked out the window, noticing the stark contrast between my life and the lives of those I was about to meet. Before this trip, I did not understand poverty. I assumed that if people made better choices or "tried harder," they could escape poverty. This all changed when I met the people in Haiti who worked tirelessly, but still struggled to meet their most basic needs. This experience has reshaped and deepened my faith. I had to challenge my misconceptions and recognize that poverty is not the result of individual choices, but of barriers and lack of opportunities. – **Sofia Spriggs**



Coming to the United States at the age of nine, I was faced with both an amazing opportunity and a great challenge. I learned that the cultural differences I encountered were not as great an impediment as my inability to speak the language, which presented a challenging obstacle to moving forward. However, I have learned that obstacles do not have the power to either paralyze or neutralize my way forward. Obstacles instill in me the responsibility of working to help others and impact future generations. I have learned to embrace the teachings of Jesus that help me stay focused every day on the things that truly matter. – **Bryan Cali**



I used to believe that mental health struggles were mostly a matter of mindset. That belief changed when my friend opened up to me about his battle with depression. Instead of assuming I knew the solution, I started learning more about depression and supporting him. This shift in perspective deepened my faith. I believe God calls us to care for others, and part of that means listening rather than offering quick fixes. I've learned that sometimes, the best thing you can do for someone isn't to give advice but to simply be there, reminding them they are not alone. My faith has taught me to see people the way God does - with compassion, humility and grace. – **David Vargas**



Embracing Community: Showing Love to Our immigrant Families

In 2024, the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) made significant progress in creating a welcoming and supportive environment for immigrant families, thanks to the "Embracing Community: Showing Love to Immigrant Families" grant awarded by ABHMS through a Palmer Grant. This initiative has enabled our churches to develop programs and build partnerships that address the unique challenges faced by immigrant families. Through various efforts, we have made a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.



Hope and Hospitality Webinar

One of the key initiatives supported by the grant was the "Hope and Hospitality: Listening to the Children of Immigrant Families" webinar. Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier discussed the challenges faced by immigrant children in the US, emphasizing the need for empathy, understanding, and advocacy. She highlighted the importance of churches providing emotional and spiritual support, creating safe environments, and advocating for policy changes to improve the treatment and protection of unaccompanied minors.

Embracing Community Website Hub

To better support our churches, we launched the Embracing Community website hub. This comprehensive online resource offers a directory of partners and organizations committed to providing advocacy and legal assistance to immigrants. By offering this centralized resource, our congregations can easily connect with experts and services that support immigrant families, ensuring they receive the help they need.



2024 Annual Clergy Retreat

Twenty-eight ABCNJ clergy gathered at Camp Lebanon for our annual retreat, featuring Rev. Ray Schellinger, Global Servant of International Ministries, with the theme "Embracing Community: Showing Love to Immigrant Families." The retreat included three segments: "Our Biblical Call," "The Immigrant Landscape Now," and "How Do We Respond?" These sessions provided clergy members with valuable insights and practical strategies for supporting immigrant families in their communities. The presentation provided depth and relevance, equipping our pastoral leaders with tools to make a difference.

"The presentation was profoundly informative and provided excellent resources for churches wishing to take action. Thank you to Ray and ABCNJ for courageously standing in the gap on behalf of the stranger."

– Rev. Dr. Brent Miller



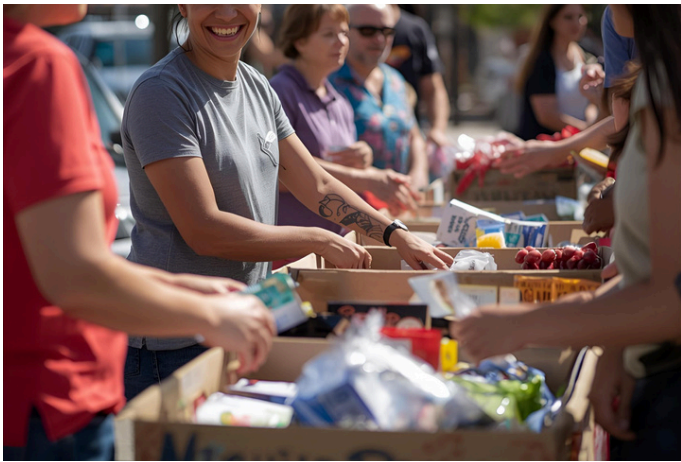
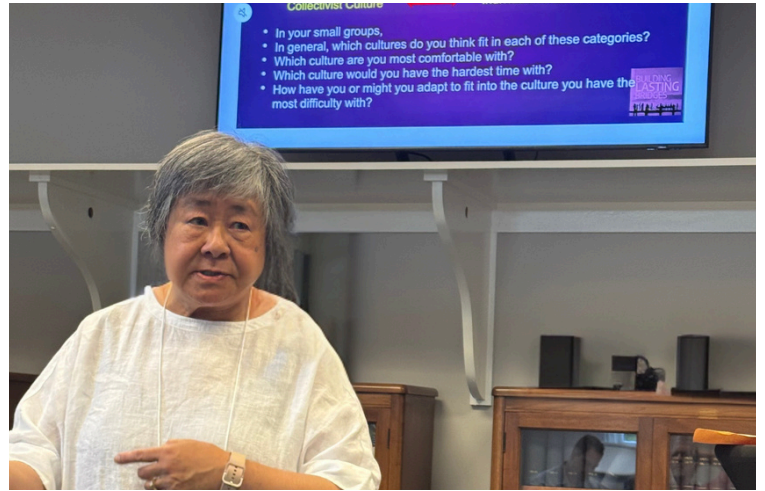


ABCNJ Council Engages in Meaningful Dialogue

Rev. Ray Schellinger facilitated the ABCNJ Council retreat, where discussions emphasized the significance of recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by immigrant families in our communities. Council members were encouraged to reflect on their roles in cultivating inclusive and supportive church environments. The conversation underscored a shared commitment to upholding the principles of justice, mercy, and humility in outreach efforts, ultimately aiming to foster a thriving community for immigrant families.

Building Bridges: Cultural Sensitivity Training

Additionally, we hosted "Building Bridges," a cultural sensitivity training for our staff and several pastors, led by Rev. Katy Choy-Wong. This training aimed to enhance understanding and communication among our staff and the diverse congregations we serve. The conversations encouraged us to develop cultural confidence and competence, enabling us to better serve this varied region. Three online sessions were held, concluding with an in-person session at the ABCNJ Center.



Communities in Action Grant

The "Embracing Community" grant supports the Communities in Action (CIA) initiative, now in its third year, providing seed funding for innovative solutions to local challenges. This year, it focuses on helping churches reach immigrant families by addressing their academic, physical, and emotional needs. A total of \$12,000 was awarded to four congregations: Oklyn Baptist Church, Fountain of Life Baptist Church, Haitian Baptist Church at the Crossroads, and Bethel Haitian Baptist Church.

In 2026, we will host an intercultural festival to celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of our congregations. This event aims to unite community members, fostering understanding and appreciation of different backgrounds and traditions. ABCNJ remains committed to embracing immigrant families and ensuring they feel welcomed. We anticipate that this initiative will have a positive impact on our church communities and beyond.

Supporting Pastoral Transitions and New Beginnings in ABCNJ

The journey of pastoral ministry is beautifully captured in Ecclesiastes 3:1, which reminds us that “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” This truth is embodied by both retired pastors and those newly called to serve as they navigate various stages of their spiritual leadership. Each season presents opportunities for growth and renewal—not just for the pastors, but also for the congregations they support. The ABCNJ staff works to guide and assist both congregations and pastors during these times of transition.

Retired Pastors

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our retired pastors for their dedication and contributions to our congregations. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, experience, and love. May you trust God for the next chapter on the journey.

- Rev. Jerome Aidee – Evangelical Baptist Church, Trenton
- Rev. Dr. Loreno Flemmings – First Baptist Church, Somerville
- Rev. Dr. Stacie Turk – First Baptist Community Church, Parsippany



New Pastors

We recognize that being called to a new church is a sacred journey. It requires dedication to both God and the individuals pastors are called to serve. We pray for our new pastors that God will give them fresh insights, renewed enthusiasm, and a commitment to love and lead with compassion and integrity.

- Rev. Samuel Aidee – Evangelical Baptist Church, Trenton
- Rev. James Elliot – First Baptist Church, Manasquan
- Rev. Jonathan Glass-Riley – First Baptist Church, Freehold
- Rev. Dr. George Hancock-Stefan – First Baptist Church of Mt. Holly
- Rev. Nicholas Johnson – First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church, Newark
- Rev. Michelle Jones – First Baptist Church, Salem
- Rev. David Lingham – Cohansey Baptist Church
- Rev. George Livingston – Berlin Baptist Church
- Pastor Erik Lydick – First Baptist Church, Hightstown
- Rev. Anthony Mark Miller, Jr. – Second Baptist Church, Rahway
- Pastor Ben Morris – Cape Island Baptist Church, Cape May
- Rev. Ivy Scudder – Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Westwood
- Pastor Tim Williams – First Baptist Church, Vincetown



Supporting Interim Ministers through the ABCNJ Transitional and Interim Ministries Cohort

A crucial resource for equipping Interim Ministers is the ABCNJ Transitional & Interim Ministries Cohort. Currently in its third successful session, this program creates a space for interim leaders to engage in comprehensive training, continuous education, and networking opportunities. The gatherings take place at the ABCNJ Center in Westfield, NJ, which offers a warm and resource-rich atmosphere that promotes learning and collaboration. Facilitated by Rev. Miriam Méndez and Rev. Dr. James Jackson, cohort meetings support interim leaders by providing a tailored curriculum that enhances skills and fosters connections among participants.



Every 4 months



Interim, Intentional Interim, and Transitional Pastors, along with retired pastors and seasoned ministers



These sessions provide opportunities for both professional and personal development.

A Vision for the Future

Through these support systems and learning opportunities, the ABCNJ Transitional Ministry program aims to prepare congregations for the new ministries God will bring. As we reflect on the significance of transitional times in Scripture, we recognize that these periods of change offer opportunities for renewal and growth. The work of Interim Ministers, supported by ongoing education and community-building, ensures that churches are ready for the exciting new things God is doing in their midst.

If you want to learn more about the ABCNJ Transitional Ministries, please contact Rev. Dr. James Jackson, Transitional Ministries Specialist at jdjackson@abcnj.net.



Together in God's Work



Through **United Mission**,
we unite **in purpose**

Your gift
strengthens
your church

The America for Christ Offering brings
compassion to life across the nation

We Can Accomplish More Together

Each member church strives to support ABCNJ by contributing to one or more of the offerings outlined below. With the support of our congregations, we can enhance our impact on the body of Christ. Your contributions go beyond donations; they represent meaningful investments in the well-being of our entire Region, reflecting the true spirit of fellowship and love. Thank you for your dedication to our shared mission.

United Mission

American Baptists combine their financial resources to enhance the positive impact we can achieve together.

- Healing a hurting world
- Promoting Christian unity and fostering collaborative ministry
- 65% of funds come back to ABCNJ

Region Offering

Supports the vital ministries of ABCNJ, ensuring that we continue to serve our churches, leaders, and communities with excellence.

- Pastoral/Congregational Support
- Education Opportunities
- Camp Lebanon
- 100% of funds remain with ABCNJ

America for Christ

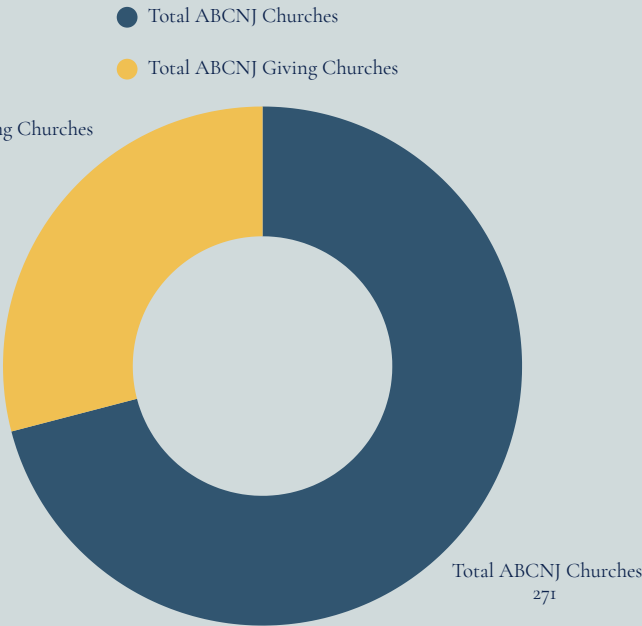
Your contribution impacts:

- Disaster Relief
- Children in Poverty
- A wide range of needs in communities across the country
- 33% of the funds return to ABCNJ to support local ministries and initiatives.



Picture of Mission Giving Churches 2024

Total ABCNJ Giving Churches
111

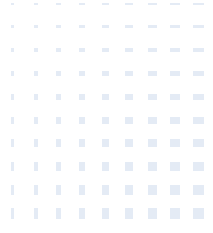


Allentown, First Baptist Church
Alloway , Alloway Baptist Church
Atlantic Highlands, Central Baptist Church
Avon Park, FL, Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de Avon Park, Inc.
Bayonne, Bergen Point Community Church
Beachwood, Living Word Baptist Church
Berlin, Berlin Baptist Church
Beverly, First Baptist Church
Bordentown, First Baptist Church
Brick, First Baptist Church - Laurelton
Brick, Osbornville Baptist Church
Bridgeton, Berean Baptist Temple
Bridgeton, Cohansey Baptist Church of Roadstown
Browns Mills, First Baptist Church
Camden, Hope Memorial Baptist Church
Cape May, Cape Island Baptist Church
Cherry Hill, Kings Community Baptist Church
Chesterfield, Chesterfield Baptist Church
Clifton, Calvary Baptist Church
Collingswood, First Baptist Church
Columbus, Columbus Baptist Church
Davenport, FL, Iglesia Bautista Fe Y Esperanza
Demarest, Demarest Baptist Church
East Orange, Bethel Haitian Baptist Church
East Orange, Christ Resurrection Missionary Baptist Church
East Orange, Imani Baptist Church of Christ
Eastampton, First Baptist Church of Mt. Holly
Elizabeth, Central Baptist Church
Elizabeth, First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth
Fair Lawn, Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church
Flemington, Cherryville Baptist Church
Flemington, Flemington Baptist Church
Freehold, First Baptist Church
Gloucester City, First Baptist Church
Hackensack, Calvary Baptist Church
Hackettstown, Mision Bautista de Hackettstown
Haddonfield, First Baptist Church
Hamburg, Hamburg Baptist Church
Hightstown, First Baptist Church
Hillside, First Baptist Church
Hopewell, Calvary Baptist Church
Irvington, Eglise Baptiste De La Nouvelle Jerusalem
Irvington, First Baptist Church
Jersey City, North Baptist Church
Kearny, First Baptist Church-Arlington
Kearny, Igreja Batista Jireh

Kissimmee, FL, Primera Iglesia Baustia Hispana De Kissimmee, Inc.
Lakewood, First Baptist Church
Lambertville, First Baptist Church
Ledgewood, Iglesia Latina Bautista de Ledgewood
Linwood, Seaview Baptist Church
Long Branch, First Baptist Church
Manasquan, First Baptist Church
Miami, FL, Iglesia Bautista de Westchester
Millville, Central Baptist Church of Millville-Vineland
Montclair, Union Baptist Church
Moorestown, Second Baptist Church
Morristown, First Baptist Church
New Brunswick, First Baptist Church
New Brunswick, Monmouth Korean Baptist Church
Newark, Berean Baptist Church
Newark, Bethany Baptist Church
Newark, First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church
Newark, Haitian Crossroads Baptist Church
Newark, Haitian Philadelphia Baptist Church
Newark, Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church
Newark, Smyrna Baptist Church
Newark, Temple Baptiste de Salem, Newark
North Brunswick, Georges Road Baptist Church
Oakland, Ramapo Valley Baptist Church
Oaklyn, Oaklyn Baptist Church
Ocean View, Calvary Baptist Church
Palmyra, Central Baptist Church
Parsippany, First Baptist Community Church
Paterson, Second Baptist Church
Pedricktown, First Baptist Church
Pennsauken, First Spanish Baptist Church
Piscataway, First Baptist Church-New Market
Piscataway, Fountain Of Life Ministries, Inc.

Pitman, First Baptist Church
Princeton, Princeton Baptist Church of Penns Neck
Red Bank, First Baptist Church
Red Bank, Pilgrim Baptist Church
Ridgewood, Emmanuel Baptist Church
Ridgewood, Mt. Bethel Baptist Church
Salem, First Baptist Church
Scotch Plains, Scotch Plains Baptist Church
Somerset, Community Baptist Church
Somerset, Maranatha Baptist Fellowship
South Orange, First Baptist Church
South Plainfield, First Baptist Church
Stockton, Sandy Ridge Community Church
Summit, Fountain Baptist Church
Sussex, First Baptist Church
Teaneck, Evergreen Baptist Church
Teaneck, First Baptist Church
Trenton, Eglise Evangelique Baptiste Du Christ
Trenton, First Baptist Church
Trenton, First International Baptist Church
Trenton, Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de Trenton
Union City, Second Spanish Baptist Church
Union City, Spanish American Baptist Church
Vincentown, First Baptist Church
West Windsor, Next Gen Church
Westfield, First Baptist Church
Wildwood, First Baptist Church
Willingboro, Alpha Baptist Church
Willingboro, Parkway Baptist Church
Woodbury, Central Baptist Church
Woodstown, First Baptist Church
Yardville, Memorial Baptist Church





Congratulations to the Top 20 Mission Giving Churches 2024

Bordentown, First Baptist Church
Chesterfield, Chesterfield Baptist Church
Eastampton, First Baptist Church of Mt. Holly
Fair Lawn, Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church
Flemington, Flemington Baptist Church
Flemington, Cherryville Baptist Church
Freehold, First Baptist Church
Haddonfield, First Baptist Church
Hopewell, Calvary Baptist Church
Linwood, Seaview Baptist Church

Long Branch, First Baptist Church
Newark, First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church
Oaklyn, Oaklyn Baptist Church
Pedricktown, First Baptist Church
Ridgewood, Emmanuel Baptist Church
Somerset, Community Baptist Church
Union City, Spanish American Baptist Church
Woodbury, Central Baptist Church
Woodstown, First Baptist Church
Yardville, Memorial Baptist Church

listed in alphabetical order by City
**Churches listed gave to United Mission, Region Offering and/or America for Christ*

Harnessing the Power of Story for Congregational Renewal

In late 2024, ABCNJ, in partnership with Sidebar Stories, was awarded a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to support church revitalization through narrative worship. This initiative is designed to equip 6–8 small and mid-sized congregations to discover and share their faith stories as a means of renewal. Led by Rev. Ron King and Rev. Tameka Gerow of Sidebar Stories, with support from Rev. Eric Hoheisel of ABCNJ, the project launched with a retreat in March 2025, where 15 participants from five churches were trained in narrative theology and the practice of gathering testimonies from their members.

Over the course of the year, participating churches are weaving these stories into three worship services that celebrate God's faithfulness and invite congregations to imagine new possibilities for their life together. A second retreat in Fall 2025 will provide an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, share insights, and explore how storytelling can serve as a catalyst for renewal across other churches in our region. It is our prayer that this initiative will not only strengthen participating congregations but also grow into shared resources to help more churches embrace the power of story in worship and mission.





Baptist Camp and Conference Center



Retreat Ministry

This past year, Camp Lebanon has continued to serve as a place of rest, renewal, and fellowship for churches, ministries, and community groups.

- 2,788 people stayed overnight for retreats.
- The property was in use for 265 days throughout the year.
- 43 weekends were filled with events.
- We hosted a total of 58 retreat groups.

This steady use of the camp reflects its ongoing role as a trusted space for spiritual growth, connection, and leadership development.

Camping and Tenting

Outdoor experiences remain central to Camp Lebanon's mission.

- 422 tent campers participated across 6 different groups.
- 7 ABCNJ groups used Camp Lebanon for retreats:
 - Next Gen
 - Spanish American Baptist Church
 - Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church
 - FBC of Morristown,
 - ABCNJ Pastors,
 - Union de Mujeres Baptista de NJ
 - Scotch Plains-School

Picnics and Day Rentals

Camp Lebanon's facilities continue to provide space for large community gatherings and day events.

- A total of 1,443 picnic guests enjoyed the grounds across 8 groups.
- Our largest event, the Latino Picnic, welcomed 575 participants in a single day.
- We also supported 5 day rentals throughout the year.

These activities remind us that the camp is more than a retreat center—it is also a hub for fellowship and celebration for the wider community.

Summer Camp

Our summer program remains a vital ministry for children and young people.

- 41 campers participated in our summer sessions.
- 30 volunteers gave their time and energy to support the camp experience.

Through worship, activities, and community, campers encountered God's love in a meaningful way. Volunteers played a crucial role in making this possible, serving as mentors and role models.

As we reflect on the past year, we celebrate how Camp Lebanon continues to fulfill its mission of providing a Christ-centered environment where

lives are transformed. With nearly 2,800 overnight guests, hundreds of campers and picnickers, and a steady stream of ministry groups, Camp Lebanon remains a vital part of our ABCNJ family. We give thanks for the dedication of churches, leaders, and volunteers who make this ministry possible. Together, we look forward with faith, trusting that God will continue to use Camp Lebanon to impact lives for Christ.

"The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." – Psalm 121:8



Strengthening the Faith of Parents

The American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) are pleased to highlight the significant progress made in our initiative, “Flourishing in Exile: Strengthening the Faith of Parents.” Thanks to the generous Palmer Grant awarded by the Multi-Regional Corporation, this multi-year project is dedicated to providing a wealth of resources and educational opportunities that aim to shape the spiritual landscape for the next generation.

The Launching

We hosted a webinar titled Strengthening the Faith of Parents, featuring co-authors of Growing Together: Insights and Practices for Raising Faithful Kids. The discussion highlighted the significance of personal faith practices, relationships, and community in fostering children's faith.

Key points included:

- Parents reflecting on and prioritizing their own spirituality.
- Integrating daily faith practices into family life.
- Addressing challenging questions and experiences with children.
- Modeling positive behaviors for kids.
- Differentiating between punishment and discipline in parenting.



Collaborative Effort Across Congregations

Our initiative has successfully engaged a cohort of 9 ABCNJ covenanting churches. These individuals—comprised of parents, grandparents, and caregiving adults—are instrumental in exploring and sharing effective ways to integrate faith formation into daily activities. Our objective extends beyond individual faith development; we aim to assist congregations in transitioning from traditional information-sharing instruction to implementing incarnational discipleship models.

"Faith is more caught than taught."

-Jenna Williams in
"Raising Faithful Kids"

A Three-Part Initiative

The “Strengthening the Faith of Parents” initiative is organized into three transformative parts:

- **Online Survey:** Participants completed a ten-question survey, providing valuable insights into what parents and caregivers find most beneficial and challenging about raising children in faith.
- **Zoom Listening Session:** Following the survey, participants engaged in a detailed Zoom Listening Session. This session served as a platform for sharing experiences and insights, fostering a supportive community of learning and discussion.





- **In-Person Workshop:** A one-day workshop at the ABCNJ Center was led by Dr. Jessica Brown, a licensed clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. This workshop offered strategies and practical assistance for parents and mentors, with a focus on the intersection of faith and mental health. Each participant also received a copy of the book “Raising Faithful Kids” (Judson Press).



Empowering Parents and Church Leaders

This initiative presents a unique opportunity for parents and church leaders to develop new skills for nurturing children’s faith. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their faith practices, prioritize their personal spiritual journey, and incorporate daily faith practices into their lives. The annual session webinar further emphasized the importance of personal faith practices, relationships, and community in fostering faith in children, encouraging parents to be intentional about their faith journey.

Join Us in This Journey

By working together, we can empower families to weave faith into the fabric of daily life, creating a foundation for a vibrant spiritual future. We are excited to witness the profound impact this initiative will have on parents and church leaders alike, as we collectively strengthen the faith of parents and, in turn, the next generation of believers. But wait, we’re not finished! Next steps:

- Develop resources on our website to strengthen our churches, leaders,
- Create Parent Booster Talks

Contact ABCNJ to join us as we continue to journey together, enhancing the spiritual well-being of our families and communities.



Highlights from the 2024 Annual Session

The 2024 Annual Session of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) was an energetic gathering brimming with hope and inspiration. It served as a wonderful event for members to listen, share, and celebrate the remarkable works God has done through the ABCNJ family.

Keynote Address by Rev. Dr. Gina Jacob Strain

Rev. Dr. Gina Jacob Strain, our newly appointed ABC-USA General Secretary, delivered an impactful keynote address titled “The Messiah is Among Us,” drawing from the moving scripture Romans 15:13. Her message encouraged attendees to embrace hope and faith in their pursuits.

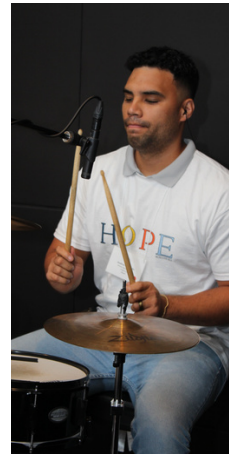
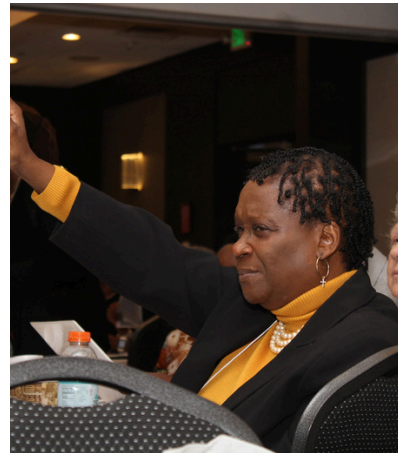
Rwanda Mission – Bishop Aphrodis Mutabaruka

Bishop Aphrodis Mutabaruka of Siera Community Church in Rwanda shared valuable insights into his church's mission and ministry. Established in 2012 with just 15 members, the church has seen extraordinary growth, now with approximately 5,000 adult members across 11 congregations. Bishop Mutabaruka spoke about ongoing efforts to build a church facility that meets Rwanda’s construction standards.

Celebration of New Church

We welcomed Igreja Bautista Jireh of Kearny, NJ, as a full member of ABCNJ. This annual session not only strengthened the connections within the ABCNJ community but also emphasized our collective commitment to nurturing faith and supporting both new and existing congregations in their spiritual journeys.





"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." – Matthew 28:19-28



American Baptist Churches of New Jersey
170 Elm Street, Westfield, NJ 07090
609-587-8700
www.abcnj.net