

connections

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The Alliance of Baptists is dedicated to the preservation of historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions, and to the expression of our ministry and mission through cooperative relationships with other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian community.

Mary Hammond finds a ministry — and a book — in working with **the dechurched**

Mary Tuomi Hammond has spent years in “recovery ministry” — helping people who have been wounded to reclaim a healthy sense of self. She has taken what she’s learned from that work and turned it into a new book, *The Church and the Dechurched: Mending a Damaged Faith*.

“It took many years to bring my understanding to the point where I could articulate the issues I lay out in the book,” she said. “Through my ministry, I have met so many people who have been wounded in the church, or who found that they had to leave the church to become healthy because the church settings they were in did not lead to healing and growth.”

Mary is co-pastor with her husband Steve of Alliance-affiliated Peace Community Church in Oberlin, OH. “As pastors who fit most comfortably on the fringes of

the institutional church rather than in the center, Steve and I realized that God had given us a real ministry to people with one foot in the church and the other out, as well as to people who had been away from the church for years,” she said. “Reflecting deeply on the needs of this population, learning from their stories and pains, led me to the writing of the book.”

“The church rarely distinguishes between people who have never really been exposed to the Gospel and people who have been wounded *in God’s name* and have either left the church and/or their faith,” Mary said. “Both populations may be ‘outside’ the church, yet these two populations are very different, and have incredibly different needs. Through this book, I hope to illuminate those issues and help churches think about ministry among the dechurched



in new ways.”

“I always try to learn from the dechurched how the church failed them, how the church can be more faithful to Christ, healthier, a safer place to find healing,” she said. “The transformation goes both ways, when the dechurched can mend a damaged faith and the church can become more like Jesus through facing the woundedness of the dechurched.”

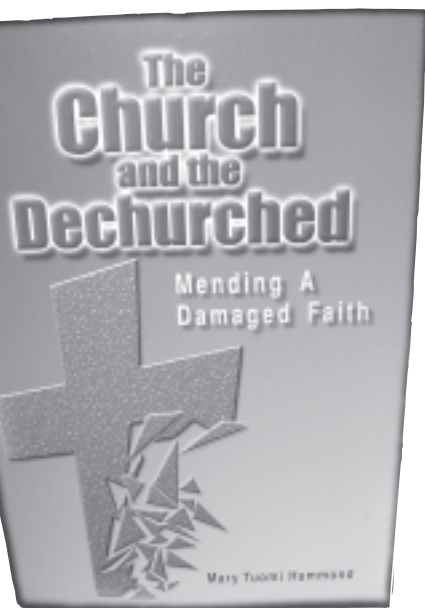
Mary and Steve have been in Oberlin for more than 20 years. They came to what was
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THE CHURCH AND THE DECHURCHED: MENDING A DAMAGED FAITH

This book by Alliance member Mary Hammond was released in July by Chalice Press. It seeks to explore the world of those who have left the church and/or lost their faith due to significant wounding in the church. It examines reasons why people are dechurched, stages of being dechurched, aspects of reconstructing a damaged faith, guidance for accompanying wounded friends and family members on the road toward healing, and ways a congregation can become “a church for the dechurched.” It offers a strong biblical case for the church’s involvement with and compassion for those wounded in the church and suggests that the dechurched may, in fact, become voices of transformation in the church of the 21st century.

Alliance member Ken Sehested, Executive Director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, comments on the book cover, “Mary Tuomi Hammond has coaxed the painful testimonies from many for whom church life has been deadly, sometimes ruthlessly so. But hers is not simply an exercise in exposé. For Christian leaders willing to listen, there is wise counsel in these pages on how to help mend damaged faith.”

Copies can be ordered from Cokesbury, Amazon.com, Chalice Press, or your local bookstore. The book retails at \$18.99.





ALLIANCE BOARD MEMBER RUTH CUÉLLAR ORDAINED

Alliance board member **Ruth Cuéllar**, pastor of an Hispanic congregation in Newnan, GA, was ordained to the gospel ministry Aug. 12 by that city's Central Baptist Church. In addition to her pastoral work, Ruth provides day-to-day assistance to Latin American immigrants through a wide variety of social services. Central Baptist's pastor, Joel Richardson, was the principal worship leader during the joyful celebration, assisted by the ordinand's parents, Ena García and Adalberto Cuéllar of Havana, Cuba; Francisco Rodés of Matanzas, Cuba; Freddy Ontibon of Rome, GA; and Alliance members Sara Jane Skinner of Newnan, Donna Goddard of Atlanta, and Stan Hastey of Washington. Special music during the service was provided by Ruth's son, Daniel Bustamante, and an aunt, Ruby Díaz.

Ruth Cuéllar, right, and her mother Ena García of Havana, Cuba.

Donna Goddard, pastor of the Alliance's only bilingual congregation, Kairos Baptist Church of Atlanta, will be ordained to the ministry Sept. 9. A former president of the Georgia Alliance, Donna serves a 5-year-old congregation comprised in part of immigrants from Cuba. Kairos Baptist currently meets at Central Congregational Church in Atlanta.

happenings

Charles Foster Johnson, for the past 12 years senior pastor of the Alliance-affiliated Second Baptist Church, Lubbock, TX, has accepted the call to become senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, San Antonio. A graduate of Mississippi College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Charlie is to begin his new pastorate the first Sunday of Advent.

Melanie Vaughn-West, a graduate of Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, has been called as pastor of the Alliance-affiliated Broadneck Baptist Church, Annapolis, MD, effective in October. She is currently interim preaching minister at Oakhurst Baptist Church, Decatur, GA, while its pastor, Lanny Peters, is on sabbatical leave.

Alliance member **Wallace W. Bubar**, also a recent Candler graduate and a member at Northside Drive Baptist Church, Atlanta, was ordained to the ministry Aug. 19 by his home congregation, North Shore Baptist Church, Chicago. On Aug. 12, he was called as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Iowa City, IA.

Alliance member **Gary West** has been called as pastor of Alliance-affiliated Grace Baptist Church, Statesville, NC. A bivocational minister, Gary also serves as executive director of Diakonos Inc./Fifth Street Ministries, a social service agency in Statesville. His degrees are from Howard Payne University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University.

Alliance director **Tim Dean**, another Brite Divinity School graduate, is the new youth minister at Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, effective Sept. 1. On the Alliance board, Tim is a member of the Peace and Justice Committee.

YOU'RE INVITED TO NOVA SCOTIA

Our Canadian partner, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, once again has invited Alliance people to participate in its Fall Assembly, to be held Oct. 12-13 at the First Baptist Church, Amherst, Nova Scotia, with the theme, "Joining Hands, Connecting Hearts, Overcoming the Racial Divide." Like Alliance convocations, ABF assemblies feature thematic addresses and inspirational worship, including the celebration of Holy Communion. For information on registration and reservations, call the Alliance office.



The Alliance of Baptists

1328 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

Executive Director: Stan Hastey
Associate Director: Jeanette Holt
(202) 745-7609

Fax: (202) 745-0023
AllianceofBaptists@cs.com
www.AllianceofBaptists.org

Newsletter Editor: Sue Harper Poss
P.O. Box 25461, Greenville, SC 29616
(864) 848-3346 Fax: (864) 848-5258
SuePoss@compuserve.com

Mary Hammond

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then called First Baptist Church of Oberlin in 1979, right after Steve graduated from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. The church had 12 members, 10 of whom were retired.

"After 15 years of part-time, retired pastors, the church made a deal with the Ohio Baptist Convention (OBC) to hire a

young pastor and seek to revitalize the congregation, receiving minimal financial support for the OBC for two years," Mary said. "If after two years, the church couldn't support itself, it would close and the building would be sold by the OBC. We've now been here for 22 years."

After arriving in Oberlin, Mary attended

The Alliance and the United Church of Christ

In last month's issue, this space was given over to a review and analysis of the Alliance's longstanding relationship with the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. Occasionally, aware of our ABC/USA connections from early on, some one will ask why the Alliance is engaged in a dialogue with the United Church of Christ. There are several reasons.

Perhaps of most importance is that from our beginnings, the Alliance has sought both to reaffirm our historic Baptist roots as well as to affirm our commitment to ecumenism. Our founders restated the historic commitment of true Baptists to individual, congregational and religious freedom, while at the same time declaring our commitment to "the larger body of Jesus Christ, expressed in various Christian traditions, and to a cooperation with believers everywhere in giving full expression to the Gospel" (*Covenant of the Alliance of Baptists*).

These are profound theological and ecclesiological commitments. Yet there are also practical reasons to seek points of connection with other Christian communions beyond the larger Baptist family to which we belong.

In localities here and there across the nation, progressive Baptists and members of the United Church of Christ are finding one another. Far from being contrived as ecumenical experiments, these are natural encounters. In some of them, UCC and Alliance people are starting new churches; in others, they are rebuilding existing churches. Not a one of these has been conjured up at UCC headquarters in Cleveland or at the Alliance office in Washington.

What these efforts represent are examples of what contemporary church historians and sociologists of religion in this country have been noting for some time — that denominational labels mean less and less at the local level and that like-minded people are crossing denominational lines in ways unthought of in earlier times.

Thus far, most of these Alliance-UCC encounters have happened in the South. In the UCC organizational structure, the phenomenon is being encouraged in the Southern and Southeast

Conferences, regions that comprise the heart of Alliance country — from the Carolinas south to Florida. Other such encounters are being seen in the South Central (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana) and Central Atlantic (Virginia, D.C., Maryland, New Jersey) Conferences of the UCC. Taken together, these UCC units are located in the parts of the country where upwards of 90 percent of Alliance members live.

Beyond such natural geographical connections, increasing numbers of Alliance clergy — particularly younger clergy — are attracted to the possibilities of ministry within the United Church of Christ. The simple truth is that the divinity schools and seminaries Alliance people are choosing to attend are producing more promising candidates for the pastorate than we have churches. So for years we have been witnessing what I believe to be one of the most significant yet under-reported phenomena of this period of fragmentation in Baptist life: Baptist clergy are leaving Baptist life in droves in

order to find places of service in other churches and denominations.

Although this flight of talented Baptist clergy can be seen in several of the mainline Protestant churches, nowhere is the transition from being a Baptist into becoming something else more frequent than it is with reference to the United Church of Christ.

Perhaps you read in August issue of *connections* that in the upcoming third phase of our conversations with the UCC, we have invited the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to participate, and this at the Disciples' initiative. This too is a welcomed development in that, as is true of the UCC, the Disciples' form of church government is congregational. What we can anticipate, I believe, is that the Disciples and the Alliance will work toward a similar relationship as that we hope to formalize with the UCC within the next two years.

From my perspective, these potential partnerships — along with our ongoing relationships with American Baptists and Progressive National Baptists and others within the Baptist family — are all reasons for thanksgiving as we continue to seek that place God would have the Alliance be.

perspectives



By Stan Hastey
Executive Director

Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, OH, and was ordained in 1988. "We have co-pastored the church since 1985, and truly find ourselves blessed by being able to work together," she said.

They are both bivocational. Steve is also Executive Director of Ohio Campus Ministries, the ecumenical organization that supports campus ministry at state-funded colleges and universities in Ohio. Mary is a

private piano teacher and writer. Their three daughters are ages 24, 22, and 19.

Mary earned bachelors and Master's degrees in piano performance, and taught piano at Judson College in Elgin, IL, while Steve was in seminary. The two had met in a Bible study group at DePauw University. He was a commuter student to Indiana State University, living with his grandmother in Greencastle, IN, while

looking for a Bible study group near home. Mary was an undergraduate student at DePauw.

"We co-led the Bible study group our last year of college, and it was through that co-leadership that we began to recognize how well we complemented each other and began to see how God could use our lives together," she said. "Twenty-six years later, God is still doing that!"

2001 Operating Budget

Through August 15

Needs: \$174,751
Receipts: \$163,622

2001 Mission Offering:

Goal: \$92,000
Receipts: \$51,008

September 2001

ALLIANCE ENDORSEMENT

The following people have been endorsed by the Alliance of Baptists:

Jill Spruce, from Austin, TX, serves as a chaplain at Seton Healthcare Network

Ann Charles-Craft, from Richmond, VA, where she serves as a chaplain at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College of Virginia Hospitals and Physicians

Link Elmore, from Richmond, VA, serves as a part-time chaplain at St. Mary's Hospital and Children's Hospital, both in Richmond.

James Allan Hicks II, from Kennesaw, GA, a chaplain resident at Northside Hospital in Atlanta, GA.

David Dinkins, from Ft. Worth, TX, a chaplain for the Texas National Guard.

Janet Elaine Clark, from Pittsboro, NC, chaplain for University of North Carolina Hospice.

Melissa Walker-Luckett, from Ferris, TX, chaplain and CPE Supervisor-in-Training at Baylor University Medical Center.

GOING WEST

For We Have Heard of Your Faith

Saturday, September 22

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church,
Oakland, CA

Sponsored by the Alliance of Baptists and American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Coast

ALLIANCE FUNDING MAKES ATTENDANCE AT AFRICA PEACE CONFERENCE POSSIBLE FOR ZIMBABWE BAPTISTS

Because of the surplus in the 2000 Alliance of Baptists Mission Offering, Baptists from Zimbabwe were able to join about 50 Baptists from 12 countries for a Peace and Development Conference in Cameroon recently. The conference was sponsored by the All-Africa Baptist Fellowship.

Bokundoa-bo-Likabe, AABF President from the Democratic Republic of Congo, sketched out the challenges before Baptists in Africa: "In the African context, the prophetic role of the church today requires us to make the necessary adjustments to commit ourselves with courage – as churches and individuals – to the building of civil peace, ethnic and racial integration, promoting self-help activities among the severely impoverished, sustaining the democratization process in political regimes in our countries, to rid our societies of certain customs and traditions which affect and in worse cases, dehumanize the human person." One leader from Sierra Leone simply pleaded, "We have seen war in our country. Do not encourage war."

Besides the many wars across the continent, the conference participants also discussed ways to counter poverty, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and tribalism. Ministries to counter these various problems were presented, and site visits were made to development and health ministries.

Prior to the conference Dan Buttry of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and Felicien Nemeyimana, Director of Peacebuilding, Healing and Reconciliation for MAP International in Kenya, co-facilitated a two-day intensive training for conference participants on conflict transformation, covering topics of conflict resolution, nonviolence, justice and reconciliation.

"The full harvest from the conference will be a while in coming, but the participants left with a strong sense of excitement, encouragement and hope about the work of peace and development amid some of the world's most dire situations," Buttry said.



The Alliance of Baptists allocated \$1000 from the 2000 Bridges of Hope Mission Offering to help Zimbabwean Baptists attend this conference.