

Executive Minister Report May 2026

Rev. Dr. Sandra Hasenauer

As you may recall, I began this program/fiscal year with a sabbatical taken so that I could pinch-hit at Cameron Community Ministries during the summer months while the board was in search of a new Executive Director. I won't spend time here on that situation as I've reported on that previously. I will provide an update that I stepped down from the Cameron board fully as of December 1, 2025. This was to allow the new Executive Director and the board to be able to move forward as they needed, without previous leadership sitting at the table. At that time, I was able to fully re-engage with ABCRGR and spent several weeks catching up and getting back on track. I do want to conclude this reference to Cameron by once again emphasizing how appreciative I am that the Executive Board and the Region body as a whole allowed me that time and space to focus in that way. I also want to give a shout-out to Region Administrator Tarra Hartmann and Associate Executive Minister Rev. Alicia Dixon-Garrard for carrying the load! I can only hope that I was able to help Cameron through a time of crisis and I continue to pray for the organization today.

This means that, to a large extent, this has felt like a short year for me region-wise. Although I was still engaged with region business even while on sabbatical, meeting with Rev. Alicia and Tarra on a weekly basis and staying in touch with search committees and the such, it felt like a luxury of time and attention when I was able to fully refocus *just* on ABCRGR after the holidays (and the remainder of my sabbatical which truly was rest and renewal).

And yes, I hit the ground running. We have had the **ongoing focus of the Lilly-funded Thriving Congregations grant initiative**. In January we began gearing up for Cohort 3 and, as of this writing, the deadline for grant applications is a mere few days away. I look forward to Cohort 3 forming and developing in the next weeks. Rev. Alicia has done a beautiful job with coordination of the grant initiative, and Tarra keeps us all on our toes with logistics. My engagement is largely in the "big picture" realm where I ensure we're still on target with grant goals and region vision, plus popping in on particular tasks where needed.

Rev. Jason Alspaugh, Region President, and I have spent a lot of time working on **structure, organization, and decision-making in our Region**. We will be voting on the bylaws revisions at our annual meeting this weekend to adjust our annual meeting schedule and terms of office for board members. We continue to explore consensus decision-making as a more faithful way to do our Region work together. I appreciate Rev. Jason's vision, openness, and faithful commitment to his role as President—he has been a joy to serve in ministry with.

Region Treasurer Beverly Murrell-Frasier and I have been working closely with the Finance and Investment Committee, our bookkeeping service, Bookstime, and our CPA firm, Heveron CPA, to ensure that **our record-keeping is in good order** and that our internal systems are appropriate for tracking, especially regarding the Lilly grant. You will note some adjustments on the financial reports accordingly.

Most notably, I have been **resourcing the Ordination Review Committee** as they attend to the processes of twelve people, and I have been resourcing what has now reached **11 churches already in the search process** for senior, solo, or associate pastors, or shortly about to begin a search in the next few weeks. Our region has reached a point of significant transition, as that represents approximately 25% of our region family.

These pastoral transitions occur at a time when candidates for the ministry are few and far between, regardless of what our twelve people in the ordination/recognition process might indicate. Many people going through seminary now are focused on nonprofit and advocacy work rather than pastoral ministry. Additionally, as “Boomers” continue to retire, and Gen X is such a small population, we notice more pointedly the lack of Millennials and Gen Z interested in serving in the traditional institutional church. There is no one to blame for this or, perhaps, everyone and everything is to blame. I have been reading *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle, in which she theorizes that every 500 years or so, inherited church structures get reshaped into new forms of faith and practice. We are clearly in a time when the church is being reshaped into new forms; I have witnessed and been part of that prickly feeling that something needs to give during my own nearly 40 years of vocational ministry. I am still processing and praying about what my role can be in that, and I look forward to future conversations as we all explore this call from God to transformation together.

And so, now I come to another transition. **I am formally announcing my plans to retire** on August 31, 2027, approximately 15 months from now. I have already spoken to the Executive Board and Finance and Investment Committee as we needed to plan ahead in our budgeting and the Executive Board needed to start working with the ABCUSA Associate General Secretary for Regional Ministries, Rev. Dr. C. Jeff Woods, in preparation. You will be hearing more from our Region President, Rev. Jason Alspaugh, on this matter. I am not involved with the search process; my job is to continue to be Executive Minister and, at the same time, make sure everything is in good order for someone new to be able to step into the role as easily as possible.

My retirement date has been chosen in concert with my husband's; we have plans for travel, creative pursuits, dogs to walk, and a stack of books we're anxious to get to. Although we will be maintaining our membership at Lake Avenue Baptist Church, I will be taking a step back from involvement for a full year, both to give myself a “gap

year” for figuring out God’s next steps and to give the new Executive Minister time to be able to establish themselves without me kicking around underfoot, so to speak.

Forasmuch as I’m looking forward to retirement, with a different pace and a different focus, I am already feeling the pangs of departure from this role. ABCRGR is truly a special region. I consider it a great gift that God has given me in allowing me to serve in this role. I grew up in ABCRGR, I have served pastorates in ABCRGR, I have served in small volunteer and paid roles in ABCRGR, I follow in my grandfather’s footsteps in ABCRGR, and I have valued each and every minute I’ve had as Executive Minister. Yes, I still have 15 months of valuable minutes left; but I know that will be gone in the blink of an eye, especially with the Biennial Mission Summit and 200th anniversary planning underway! So, pardon me for a few minutes while I already begin to miss serving you in this way.

Here’s to a fantastic 2026-2027 year ahead and all that summer of 2027 is bringing us. I look forward to your partnership as we show ABCUSA what a warm, hospitable, and truly fun place Rochester is to gather, and to celebrating 200 years together!

In Christ’s peace,

Sandy