



AGAPE

A Gateway to Advocacy, Perseverance and Education

NEWS

A Message

From President Patrick Patton

Greetings all,

It's November, the season for gratitude and lots of turkey! On a serious note, we are approaching the end of the year. Let's reflect on what we've accomplished this year and what we're looking forward to next year. I want to wish everyone and their families a happy, prosperous and safe holiday season.

AGAPE is assisting its members by providing funding for a thanksgiving dinner. Several members were nominated to receive gift cards to purchase Thanksgiving items.

We are partnering with a food pantry to bring some much-needed items to some very deserving families. We will be distributing food items the first Saturday of each month at the Missouri Council of the Blind (MCB) building. If you are interested in working with us, please contact us by e-mail at Agapecouncil@gmail.com.

We are proud to announce our one-year anniversary of publishing a newsletter. The newsletter was just an idea last November. We've made one solid year of bringing information to our members and others. The newsletter keeps our members informed. The Featured Member section provides a way to get to know members better. Our Calendar of Events keeps us up-to-date on things that are happening that our visually impaired community may enjoy.

Last year we started a peer support group. It meets twice a month, second and fourth Wednesday of each month. It brings our members together, where we discuss topics related to vision impairment, along with important and timely information. It's been a great way to share our common challenges, and accomplishments. On the fourth Wednesday, we have a guest speaker who shares an uplifting story, vision, journey, or a beneficial service. This has been a great way to unite our organization.

This year, we had phenomenal success through our various fundraisers. In March, we kicked off the year with the Ida Mae Sparkman Chili Supper Fundraiser, which supports our scholarship program. We organized a Mother's Day Basket Raffle in May. The basket had a fair market value (FMV) of over \$250 featuring enticing items any mother would love to have. In



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August, we hosted our first annual Ice Cream Social at Concordia Lutheran Church. For our second year in a row, we sold delicious popcorn through Double Good Popcorn. We've added an additional fundraiser and sold great tasting pizzas through the popular TJ's Pizza.

As part of our community outreach, we proudly sponsored the Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) Braille Challenge Luncheon. We also collaborated with the Missouri History Museum (MHM) by sponsoring the Disability Pride Luncheon held at the MHM.

Our commitment to advocacy expanded with a trip to Jefferson City, Missouri, on legislation day. We joined forces with MCB to provide support for two bills benefiting the visually impaired community.

AGAPE takes great pride in two of its signature events: the Black History Program in February and the long-awaited return of the Gospel Fest Program in September, which was a source of immense joy after a two-year hiatus.

While we willingly embraced challenging events and fundraisers, our primary objective remains uniting our members and servicing the blind community. Undoubtedly, we encountered significant hurdles along the way. Looking ahead to 2024, we invite you to join us on this continuing journey.

We extend a warm welcome to our new members: Ronda and Marvin Taylor! Happy Birthday Wishes to our November birthdays! AGAPE's next meeting is scheduled for Saturday, November 4, 2023, at 11am. This meeting will be held in-person at the MCB Building and virtually on the AGAPE conference line. December's meeting will be held on Saturday, December 2nd, in person and virtually. Stay tuned for updates and exciting developments on the horizon. As the holiday season approaches, we wish you a wonderful time and we will reconnect with you in the new year.

Accessibility & Awareness

Did You Know...?

With the winter months being near, here are a few choices to help you conserve energy as well as warm your home.



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4 Best Smart Thermostats For Visually Impaired

1. Ecobee Smart Thermostat Premium (Best Overall)

Description: Ecobee's top-tier model outperformed all other thermostats, and it comes with the best remote sensor we've tested. It has an air-quality monitor, as well as a built-in microphone, speaker, and Alexa for voice control, but it also works with most smart-home platforms.

2. Google Nest Learning Thermostat (Runner-Up)

Description: Nest's most-advanced smart thermostat features a larger, crisper, and more useful display than its predecessors, as well as wide compatibility with HVAC systems.

3. Amazon Smart Thermostat (Budget Pick)

Description: Though Amazon's Smart Thermostat isn't as sophisticated as other picks, it works well, is widely compatible with HVAC systems, and is simply inexpensive.

4. Mysa Smart Thermostat (New York Times Best Pick)

Description: A pricey but practically perfect option for adding smart controls to electric baseboard heaters. The Mysa Smart Thermostat uses scheduling, geofencing, and a smart eco mode to save you money while imperceptibly using less energy.

For more information visit: <https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/the-best-thermostat>

Be My A.I.

Using Be My AI in your everyday life is quick and simple. Once you have access, open the Be My Eyes app, click on the 'Be My AI' tab, and take a picture. Be My AI will give you a detailed description about it, and you can chat and ask Be My AI further questions to get more information. If you like what Be My AI described, you can send its response and photo to others, or use its description in social media.

For more information, visit: <https://www.bemyeyes.com/blog/announcing-be-my-ai>



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Missouri Council of the Blind (MCB) & American Council of the Blind News (ACB) State & National Happenings

The MCB Convention held in Springfield, Missouri in October was hosted by AGAPE. The convention went well and included guest speakers, an election, awards, and the highlight of all - dinner and dancing at both the Hospitality Dinner and the Banquet. The convention was hybrid, held both virtually and in-person, but only members present in-person were able to vote in the election. Chip Haley, current MCB President, is serving out the remaining term for the previous president until 2024. A new Vice President, Linda Gerken, a new Treasurer, William Hawkins, and a new Secretary, Tracy Anderson, were elected at this year 's convention. Congratulations to AGAPE's Tracy Anderson, for being elected MCB's State Secretary.

MCB's Member of the Year Award went to AGAPE's own, Etefia Umana. Etefia, who is also an Editor for this newsletter, has been a great asset to AGAPE and we congratulate him on being selected Member of the Year!

MCB is hosting a 50/50 raffle in which the 1st prize is \$10,000 and the 2nd prize is \$5,000. To purchase a ticket by mail, please contact Jeff Creech via email at jeff.creech1002@gmail.com or via telephone at 636-385-2085. You can also contact the MCB office to purchase tickets via telephone at 314-832-7172.

There have been many issues with transportation in the St. Louis area in the recent months. Please see in our resource page with a listing of transportation options for alternatives to our public service. Per the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Metro Call-A-Ride suffered from multiple cyber-attacks in October, leading to prolonged service interruptions and cancellations. Metro's IT team was forced to suspend services leaving passengers stranded. The cancellations renewed long standing criticisms of Call-A-Ride services from disability rights advocates, who questioned why Metro didn't have a backup plan to contact customers or offer alternative transport. To read the full article, please visit: https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/call-a-ride-canceled-for-the-weekend-after-metro-transit-cyberattack-stranding-riders/article_cff8636e-651f-11ee-9cfd-632635f1e6ec.html

If you have been affected by these cancellations or service disruptions, please join our St. Louis Metro Alliance for Reliable Transit (S.M.A.R.T.) advocacy group, and let your voice be heard. The group meets weekly on Thursdays at 6pm via zoom. For information on how to join the group, please contact Etefia Umana at etefia@gmail.com.



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Membership Updates

Stay Up-to-Date on Community News

We would like to wish a belated birthday to our newest members, Ronda and Marvin Taylor, who celebrated birthdays in September and October, along with Elizabeth Brown and Wilma Chestnut who had birthdays during the month of October. We would also like to wish a happy birthday to our November birthdays: Treva Patton, Patrick Patton, and Tracy Anderson.

We are happy to report that our members who have been under the weather are recovering from surgeries and are doing better. We would like to send a speedy recovery wish to those members who may still be under the weather.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to last month's Gospel Fest with generous donations and time. We greatly appreciate your support. Congratulations to Pastor Gina Kelley & Kyle Kelley on being the recipients of the AGAPE Council of the Blind Excellence Award!

Featured AGAPE Member of the Month

Our featured AGAPE member of the month is Treva Patton. Here are a few words from Treva:

Thank you for this opportunity to be the featured member. I have been a member of AGAPE for six years. I originally joined to assist Patrick who, at that time, was the AGAPE treasurer. I didn't really have a passion for the organization at that time but always have had a passion to help God's people in any way that I could. So, I assisted in many of the events collecting money for ticket sales, food, etc. I held no position in AGAPE until November of 2021 when I was elected as treasurer. It has been a great experience in getting to know the members, the vision of the organization, along with the "parent" companies – Missouri Council of the Blind and American Council of the Blind. I am thankful to have been the financial keeper and able to assist in increasing our financial abilities from \$229 at the start of my term to over \$5000 at the end of my first term via various fundraising ventures. I am most proud of being a mother of three beautiful daughters, a wife, and having the opportunity to receive a



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bachelor's degree from Fontbonne University and a master's degree from Webster University in Business Administration and Accounting. These degrees were mainly accomplished while raising my children. These were difficult times when assisting your children with growing pains, their homework, being a wife, and an active church member. I often wondered when there would be time for me. But time does fly and now I am enjoying one grandchild and living my best life with Mr. Patton! If we make a plan, pray to God, and keep our focus, we can achieve almost anything.

Wellness Corner

Amid all the superfoods and fad diets, one style of eating consistently comes out on top as the best: the Mediterranean diet. In 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, it was ranked as the best diet to try by [U.S. News & World Report](#). It earns first-place rights for its impressive roster of health benefits, including heart protection, weight regulation and cancer reduction.

The [typical Mediterranean diet foods](#)—fish, nuts, plant oils, fruits and vegetables—help lower inflammation in your body, improve blood vessel function and reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome and diabetes. All of these benefits serve to keep your ticker ticking and your mind sharp. Decades of research bears this out, too.

The Mediterranean diet places an emphasis on fresh, colorful eating and shuns heavily processed ingredients. Trust us, your plate will never be boring. Even better news: though "diet" is in the name, this plan is more of a holistic approach to eating that relies on real foods. You won't be counting calories or macronutrients like you would with a typical "diet."

For more information, please read the article by clicking here:

<https://www.eatingwell.com/article/290484/why-the-mediterranean-diet-is-so-healthy/>

Entertainment Spotlight



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Streaming Services for the Visually Impaired

Netflix: This paid streaming service has audio descriptions available for nearly all originals and newly released comedy specials.

Amazon Prime Video: The paid subscription streaming service, Amazon Prime Video, has titles that can be rented or purchased with audio description.

Disney Plus: This paid streaming service has audio descriptions available for all titles produced after 2020.

Apple TV Plus: This paid streaming service takes the cake as all titles have audio descriptions available.

Hulu: This paid streaming service offers audio descriptions for Hulu originals and third-party content.

Tubi: This is a streaming service that offers free content with audio descriptions.

IMDb TV/Freevee: This is another streaming service that offers free content with audio descriptions.

Calendar of Events **Activities for the Month**

Saturday, November 4th: AGAPE monthly meeting, 11 AM at the MCB building and virtually available via the AGAPE conference phone line.

Tuesday, November 7: Election Day.

Wednesday, November 8th: AGAPE Peer Support Group at 10 AM on the AGAPE conference phone line.

Thursday, November 23rd: Thanksgiving.

Tuesday, November 28th: Giving Tuesday.



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Saturday, December 2nd: AGAPE monthly meeting and End of the Year Celebration, 11am at the MCB building and virtually available via the AGAPE conference phone line.

Thursday, December 7th: End of Medicare Open Enrollment.

Wednesday, December 13th: AGAPE Peer Support Group at 10am on the AGAPE conference phone line.

Monday, December 25th: Christmas Holiday

On-Going Activities

We Keep It Moving

Every Tuesday & Thursday: Prayer Line from 8:30am-9 AM on AGAPE Conference Line

Every Tuesday: \$2 Tuesday Bowling at Olivette Lanes from Noon to 3 PM

Every Thursday: Chair Exercises with Wilma, Conference Line 2

Upcoming Events

A Look to the Future

January

Saturday, January 6th, 2024: AGAPE Monthly Meeting

MLK Program: Date and time: To be determined



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Resources

Need to Know Info

For an up-to-date list of all resources, contact a member of The Communications Team.

American Council of the Blind

The American Council of the Blind is a nationwide organization in the United States. It is an organization mainly made up of blind and visually impaired people who want to achieve independence and equality.

<https://www.acb.org>

Alexandria, VA

202-467-5081 / 800-424-8666

Missouri Council of the Blind (MCB)

To give every blind Missourian an opportunity to contribute socially and economically to society with the same expectations for success as all other Missourians.

<https://www.moblind.org>

5453 Chippewa St, St. Louis, MO 63109

314-832-7172

AGAPE Council of the Blind

AGAPE Council of the Blind, a local affiliate of MCB. We are here to promote the overall well-being of all legally blind individuals, and provide a positive influence throughout the community.

<https://agapecouncil.org>

4446A Floriss Place, St. Louis, MO 63115

314-780-3332

Saint Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired

SLSBVI provides a variety of services and programs, and holds space for others to offer services and programs, to help people with sight impairment to have full lives.

<https://slsbvi.org>

8770 Manchester Rd, St. Louis, MO 63144

314-968-9000



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Saint Louis County Older Residents Program

The County Older Resident Programs (CORP) provides a variety of services to St. Louis County residents age 60 and over.

<https://stlouiscountymo.gov/st-louis-county-departments/human-services/county-older-resident-programs>

St. Louis, MO

314-615-4516

Visiting Nurse Association of St. Louis - Visit-A-Bit Program

Visit-A-Bit is designed to directly address senior adult loneliness in the Greater St. Louis area. It's a weekly socialization program that connects volunteers with seniors that may be living alone or in a senior community, together to develop meaningful relationships. This program also services those with disabilities or visual impairments.

<https://www.vnastl.com/visit-a-bit>

314-918-7171

TRANSPORTATION

Metro Call-A-Ride

Metro Call-A-Ride service is available, with advance reservations, to individuals with disabilities that prevent them from using the accessible, fixed-route transit services (Metrolink and Metrobus). You'll share your ride with other passengers in modern, wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

<https://www.metrostlouis.org/metro-call-a-ride>

For reservations call 314-652-3617 to schedule a ride between 7:30am-4:30pm

Call-A-Ride Customer Assistance Line: 314-289-5230

Call-A-Ride ADA Services: 314-982-1510

Via Toll-free number to schedule a rideshare using the via app: 817-784-7382

Uber

Toll-free number to schedule an uber: 1-833-873-8237

PHONE APPLICATIONS

VoiceOver - VoiceOver is a screen reader that's integrated into iPhones that, as its name indicates, enunciates emails or other textual messages aloud. It's up to the user to choose the speaking rate and the volume.

TalkBack - TalkBack follows the same guideline as for iPhones: reading textual elements aloud, exploring the screen, using braille with BrailleBack... Everything is set for an optimal and smooth navigation!



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Siri - Siri is an easy-to-use vocal assistant. For blind or visually impaired people, for whom finding and clicking on the right button can be difficult, using a voice control enables them to save time!

Google Assistant - Google Assistant has the same functionality as Siri. The user totally controls their smartphone according to their needs: sending an email, setting up an alarm, managing their schedule. Available on both Android and iOS.

Google Maps - It's one of the most popular GPS navigation apps. Google Maps enables users to have access to all the real-time traffic information which is ideal when choosing the right means of public transportation! The app even provides a new feature called "Accessible Places" that enables users to even more apprehend their environment thanks to information concerning the seating plan of a restaurant, the exact location of a building entrance.

Moovit - For those who are used to taking public transportation, this app lists all the possible means of transportation, their itineraries, their timetables and other information on real-time traffic. The app even indicates the users the names of stops while on the bus, the tram or the subway.

Evelity - This app is the first indoor wayfinding solution for people with a visual impairment to navigate in complex venues such as museums or universities! Evelity works like a GPS. Compatible with VoiceOver and TalkBack, the app provides audio instructions to blind and visually impaired people to guide them step by step. People with disabilities can easily find the reception desk or the classroom without needing to know the premises in advance.

MyMoveo - This app enables blind or visually impaired users to activate connected Accessible Pedestrian Signals a Beacon to know when the pedestrian signal is green and thus safely cross the street.

Be My Eyes - An app with which users can ask the help of sighted users in order to match their clothes or to know the expiry date of a product. Thanks to an audio-video connection, users can easily get in touch.

Aira - Aira works in the same way as Be My Eyes since it connects non sighted people with sighted ones to help them in various tasks such as finding the gate of an airport. What sets this app apart is that the sighted users, called agents, are specifically trained to assist blind or visually impaired users referred to as Explorers.

Seeing AI - A multipurpose app that permits to read and describe all types of documents placed under the smartphone camera such as banknotes or product barcodes. Seeing AI even recognizes images, colors and faces and thus gives details on people's emotions.



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Lookout - Lookout is the equivalent app of Seeing AI on Android. The user just has to activate their smartphone camera so that Lookout can identify banknotes, objects.

Additional Helpful Resources:

- Hadley: (800)-423-4238
- Gateway for the Blind: 636-364-3064
- Mind's Eye: (618)-394-6444
- Society for the Blind: (314)-968-9000
- Service Club for the Blind: (314)-833-3552
- Lighthouse for the Blind: (314)-923-4338
- Rehabilitation Services for the Blind: (314)-933-7371
- Urban League: (314)-625-3640
- United Way: 211
- Blind Pension: (573)-571-6963

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