



THE CHRISTIAN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

A Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) In Alabama-Northwest Florida Publication

Volume 111

April 2013

No. 2

861 Hwy 52, Helena, AL 35080 * 205-425-5245 * 205-425-5246 (FAX)
www.alnwfdisciples.org

REGIONAL STAFF

Regional Minister
John P. Mobley
205-425-5245
jpmobley2@aol.com

Associate Regional Minister
Dale C. Braxton
334-227-0011* 334-412-4057
braxtondale@hotmail.com

Youth Ministries
Nisha Warbington
205-454-2054
nisha7@aol.com

**Administrative Assistant
& Office Manager**
Susan Henderson
alnwf1@aol.com

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

APRIL

- 3 - 6 Team Leadership Conference - Indianapolis, IN
- 6 - 9 General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) - Indianapolis, IN
- 10 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 12 - 13 Anti-Racism Training for Clergy/Regional Board - First Christian Church, Montgomery

MAY

- 4 Program Committee on the Regional Assembly (10:00 a.m.) - Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Ft. Walton Beach
- 7 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
- 11 Disciples Men's Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 12 - 19 Pentecost Offering (for new congregation establishment)
- 13 Project Advisory Team (6:30 p.m.) - Westwood Christian Church, Pensacola
- 17 Regional Staff Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 18 Women's Spring Event (9:15 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.) - First Christian, Montgomery
- 19 Pentecost Sunday

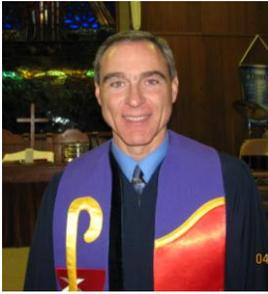
JUNE

- 9 - 14 Beach Camp ("The Lighthouse" Retreat Center at Romar Beach Baptist Church) - Orange Beach, AL
- 21 - 23 Regional Convocation Assembly - Sellers Memorial Christian Church, White Hall, AL
- 22 - 24 Discovery Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler (near Wetumpka, AL)
- 24 - 28 Junior Camp, Chi Rho Camp, and CYF Conference - YMCA-Camp Chandler

"We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."

- 2007 Disciples Identity Statement

REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGIONAL MINISTER



Are we comfortable with diversity in the church? Does it impact our spiritual lives to worship, work, and fellowship with Christians who do not share our political, theological, or moral views? I wonder if God is comfortable with the diversity of attitudes and viewpoints that are present in the church that seeks to represent God to the world. It is an interesting thought when one considers that the God who created us and loves us may have known all along that those who seek to live in faithfulness to God will have many different thoughts and beliefs about how to serve God.

Some would say, “that’s why we have the Bible – to correct false teaching and make sure that God’s followers are remaining true to God’s will.” But the Bible is a complex book. It is easy to observe that people who claim that the Bible is authoritative for their lives understand it in different ways. Scholars of the Bible, who give much of their lives to studying it, find that there is much room for debate regarding the original meaning of scripture texts and how those ancient texts should be understood today. There is great divergence of scholarly thought about correct translations of the Greek and Hebrew texts and the correct meaning of certain words in those texts. Even though we have the Bible, a sacred book that informs us as we seek to be faithful to God, it does not result in a less diverse church. In fact, the Bible may serve to make us even more diverse – politically, theologically, and morally – as we struggle to interpret it.

In some traditions, there have been attempts to deal with theological diversity by establishing creeds. These statements of belief are intended to help the church guard against heresy. The problem, however, is that creeds are man-made. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is part of a movement that has resisted man-made statements of faith from its very beginning. We confess the Lordship of Christ as our unifying confession, yet allow for great diversity as individual Christians determine what Christ’s Lordship means for them. No person or group can dictate to another person or group how they MUST believe in order to be a part of the Christian community. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) obviously believes that God must be quite comfortable with the diversity of the church because we have always allowed ample space for diversity in our common life as Disciples.

So what about General Assembly resolutions – don’t those resolutions settle the matter when diverse Disciples are dealing with a controversial issue? The answer is simple - NO !! General Assembly resolutions do not make the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) any less diverse than we were before. They do not serve as creeds. They do not require any individual, group, or congregation to change their political, moral, or theological views. Even when a General Assembly resolution passes overwhelmingly, there remains ample space within the fellowship of Disciples for dissenting viewpoints. The Lord’s Table, around which we gather to find our common identity as a Church, remains a place of wholeness where all members of the family are included by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why then do we even have General Assembly resolutions – what good are they? A sense-of-the-assembly resolution is an effort by a particular gathered body in a particular place at a particular time to record its stance on a particular matter. When a sense-of-the-assembly resolution is adopted, it gives a sense of validity to a certain viewpoint, even though the viewpoint was already a legitimate viewpoint within our diverse church. The adoption of a resolution often provides a word to the rest of the church that the viewpoint expressed in the resolution needs to be taken seriously, even if there is not consensus about the issue. A General Assembly resolution does not speak FOR the whole church; rather, a General Assembly resolution speaks TO the whole church. The viewpoint expressed by the resolution needs to be taken seriously.

My purpose in this reflection is to help Disciples in Alabama-Northwest Florida prepare for the General Assembly resolutions that will be published and sent out in upcoming days. Most of all, I want to remind you that we have always been diverse, and I believe that is by God’s design. And I want to assure you that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continues to resist man-made creeds. Although we need to take seriously the sincerely-held views of our fellow Christians, we are not required to accept those views. In like manner, our brothers and sisters must take seriously our sincerely-held views, yet they remain within our fellowship even if they do not accept our views. Thank God for the diversity of God’s church, where we may not always agree and yet where we are inextricably bound together in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your Partner in Ministry,

John P. Mobley
Regional Minister

REGIONAL BOARD RECOGNIZES NEW CONGREGATION

At its meeting on February 23, 2013, the Regional Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida voted to give full recognition to New Salem Christian Church, Hayneville, AL, as the newest congregation in the Region. A certificate was presented to the congregation on March 24, 2013. The congregation had been in a process of affiliation with the Region since the spring of 2011. Rev. Willie Smith, a commissioned Disciples of Christ minister, serves as the pastor of this congregation.

REGIONAL BOARD AUTHORIZES ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW CONGREGATION IN PENSACOLA

At its meeting on February 23, 2013, the Regional Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida voted to allocate funds for the establishment of a new congregation in west Pensacola. The congregation will give particular emphasis to the Spanish-speaking population in that area. A Project Advisory Team, which will give oversight to the effort, has formed and includes the following persons: Diane Stephenson (chair), Rick Malugani, Wanda Zimmerman, Larry Chambers, Leta Perkins, Ana Diaz, and Jose Diaz.

A couple from Florida will be interviewed by the Project Advisory Team in May. They have experience in planting new congregations and a commitment to leading this ministry if called. The official launch of the project is envisioned for early summer.



PENTECOST OFFERING SUPPORTS NEW CONGREGATIONS

One of the sources of funding for new congregation establishment in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the annual Pentecost Offering. This offering will be collected in most congregations on May 12 and May 19. One-half of the offering given by Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations will remain in Alabama-Northwest Florida to support the ministry of new congregation establishment. The new congregation that will be started in Pensacola has received an allocation of \$60,000 for the first three years of its life with the expectation that it will be self-sustaining after that time. Such an allocation would not be possible if it were not for the support of Disciples through the Pentecost Offering and other gifts.

Leaders are asked to give a strong promotion to the Pentecost Offering in 2013, highlighting how the money is being used in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. It is also important to emphasize that the other half of the Pentecost Offering goes to the general church through the New Church Ministry office, which provides oversight, support, and valuable leadership training for new church pastors. New Church Ministry is accountable to the whole church through Hope Partnership, a general ministry of the Church.

Shelia P. Spencer is a published author, poet, spoken word artist, speaker and writer. She is the editor and creator of Sistahfriend - a newsletter dedicated to the encouragement of women. She has published a collection of poetry and recorded a spoken word CD - "He Is: A Lyrical Miracle". Her poems have also been featured in "Chicken Soup for the African American Woman's Soul" Writing is a gift, a passion and her ministry. She has shared her poetry and has conducted workshops all over the country. She believes each of us is given something to do that shows who God is - and that poetry is one of the gifts she has been given to do that.

Sheila P. Spencer is a native of Los Angeles where she was an educator, coordinator, trainer, mentor and literacy coach for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Her undergraduate degree is from the University of Southern California and her Masters Degree in Education is from California State University Dominguez Hills. Leadership development has always been one of her passions and specialties. Teaching was a ministry that gave her the opportunity to reach out to the students, parents and community.

CWF/DISCIPLES WOMEN'S SPRING EVENT

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida

Saturday, May 18, 2013

First Christian Church
1705 Taylor Road
Montgomery, AL 36117

"Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Generation to Generation"

Registration is at 9:30
The event will begin at 9:50 a.m. and end by 2:30 p.m.
Lunch will be provided.

Our keynote speaker Shelia Spencer will help us to connect across the generations.

In April 2008, Sheila took a leap of faith and answered a call to move to Indianapolis, Indiana. She joined the staff of Disciples Women's Ministries as the Program Director/Merger Staff. Her ministry includes being a resource, leading workshops, writing, planning and implementation of leadership/ministry events for congregations and women's groups across the country. She has led missionary journeys to Colombia, Venezuela, The Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sheila also provides leadership and training for the Leader Apprentice Program (formerly Enablers): a leadership development ministry for women of color. She is the point person for the magazine *Just Women: Embracing Life*. This resource/Bible study was created to meet the emerging and diverse needs of the Disciples women all over the country.



REGIONAL CONVOCATION PLANS WEEKEND ASSEMBLY - JUNE 21-23, 2013

The Convocation of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is sponsoring a weekend Assembly on June 21 - 23, 2013, at Sellers Memorial Christian Church in White Hall, Alabama. The theme of the Convocation Assembly is "Lord, Teach Us To Pray." Special guests include Rev. Sheila Spencer, Program Director with Disciples Women, Rev. R. Wayne Calhoun, Sr., Minister of Evangelism, Disciples Home Missions, and Rev. LaMarco Cable, Associate, Bread for the World. There will be activities for children and teens. All Disciples in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region are invited to participate in this Assembly.

Prior to May 21, the registration fee for adults is \$20 and for youth is \$15. After May 21 the fee increases to \$25/adult and remains \$15 for youth. Included with the registration fee is lunch and dinner on Saturday and dinner on Sunday. Mail registration forms and payments to Maldonia Jackson, 191 Jackson Road, Hayneville, AL 36040.

NEWS OF THE CLERGY

Diane Stephenson has been called to serve at Westwood Christian Church in a consultant role for a new ministry of the congregation to children and youth. Diane will serve in this position on a contract basis for the next three months. **Phillip Gilbert** ended his ministry as pastor with First Christian Church, Athens, near the end of February. **C. J. Cobb** has been called to serve at First Christian Church, Athens, as interim minister.

Frank Rittenberry was formally installed as pastor with First Christian Church of River View in Valley, Alabama, on Sunday, March 10.

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING A MINISTER

Athens, First (C.J. Cobb is Interim)
Birmingham, First (Jane Hull is Interim)
Florence, First (Tim Murtaugh is Interim)



Frank Rittenberry was installed as pastor with First Christian Church of River View, Valley, AL, on Sunday, March 10. Pictured here (l to r) is Margie Rittenberry (spouse), Donald Bledsoe (Board Chairperson), Frank Rittenberry and Regional Minister John Mobley.



New Salem Christian Church, Hayneville, AL, received a certificate recognizing its full affiliation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida on March 24th. Pictured here receiving the certificate on behalf of the congregation is Rev. Willie Smith with Associate Regional Minister Dale Braxton and Regional Minister John Mobley.

Congregations that have formally committed to expressing “true community” through intentional efforts to work against racism and toward reconciliation.

First Christian Church, Anniston
Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Anniston
Village Christian Church, Auburn
First Christian Church, Birmingham
Valley Christian Church, Birmingham
First Christian Church, Dothan
Snow Hill Christian Church, Ft. Deposit
First Christian Church, Ft. Walton Beach
Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Fort Walton Beach
First Christian Church, Huntsville
Grateful Life Community Church, Huntsville
Mt. Pleasant Christian Church, Mathews
First Christian Church, Pensacola
Mt. Calvary Missionary Christian Church, Tuskegee
Union Christian Church, Tuskegee
First Christian Church of River View, Valley

STATEMENT AFFIRMING AN ANTI-RACIST IDENTITY

Recognizing the division that exists within the human family due to the sin of racism, the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region confirms its commitment to the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ to be an ambassador of unity and reconciliation. The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region confesses its own participation in the sin of racism and is committed to the dismantling of racism wherever it exists in its own institutional life and in the life and witness of its congregations.

Therefore, the Regional Board, on February 23, 2002, affirms all current and future efforts within the Alabama-Northwest Region to become an Anti-Racist manifestation of the Body of Christ. This affirmation will be demonstrated through prayer, allocation of resources, and organized efforts to challenge racism wherever it exists within the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

OUTREACH GIVING UPDATE

The year-to-date giving in 2013 by congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida to the Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings (Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas) has increased by 39.02% over the amount given year-to-date in 2012. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings are showing a 10.88% increase over the amount given through February, 2012. Week of Compassion giving in Alabama-Northwest Florida is showing a 37.8% increase from the amount given through February, 2012.

Disciples outreach ministries are carried out in partnership between general ministries, ministries of higher education, Regions, congregations, and other related ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The financial support given by your congregation enables this partnership to be effective in carrying out the ministry of Jesus Christ. Your commitment to our shared ministries is greatly appreciated.

UPDATE ON THE REGION'S HONDURAS PARTNERSHIPS



The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has been fortunate to have one of its own ministers in Honduras this winter. Rev. **Rebecca Frankford**, a retired Disciples minister and a member of First Christian Church, Athens, served in Honduras as a short-term mission volunteer through Global Ministries from January through March. Rev. Frankford worked with our two partners, the Christian Commission for Development and the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Honduras. With her help we will determine, in conjunction with our partners, how the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region can contribute to life-transforming ministries in Honduras.

A 10-member delegation from Alabama-Northwest Florida traveled to Honduras in March to meet with Rev. Frankford and our partners in Honduras. The delegation members included: **Dale Braxton, Ana Diaz, Jose Diaz, Sue Goebel (not pictured), Tom Goebel, Jeremy Harbin, Kenny Hays, Laura Hutchinson, Jan Pooley, and Maria Zamarripa.**

You will be hearing more in the days ahead about ways that we can demonstrate our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Honduras. Please pray that God will work in the lives of Disciples in Alabama-Northwest Florida so that we may be God's agents of care in Honduras.



The 2013 Men's Retreat was held at YMCA-Hargis on March 8-9. The theme of the retreat was, "When Men Pray...." The resource leader was the Rev. Dr. Rick Lowery (pictured front row, 3rd from right).