



THE CHRISTIAN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

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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
alnwfl@aol.com

The mission of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is to encourage and equip its congregations and pastors for the ministry of Jesus Christ in local communities and throughout the world, while seeking to nurture them into deeper relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole Church.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

APRIL

- 9 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 13 - 20 Easter Offering (for general ministries of the church)
- 20 Easter Sunday
- 24 Miracle Day Planning Committee (6:00 p.m.) - First Christian, Tuscaloosa
- 25 - 27 Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Assembly - Ft. Walton Beach, FL

MAY

- 6 Commissioning & Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
- 10 Biennial Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 14 Committee on the Ministry (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 16 - 18 Second Experience Weekend for "The Journey" - St. Bernard Retreat, Cullman, AL
- 19 Miracle Day Planning Committee (6:00 p.m.) - First Christian, Tuscaloosa
- 20 Regional Staff Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
- 25 - June 1 Pentecost Offering (for new congregation establishment)

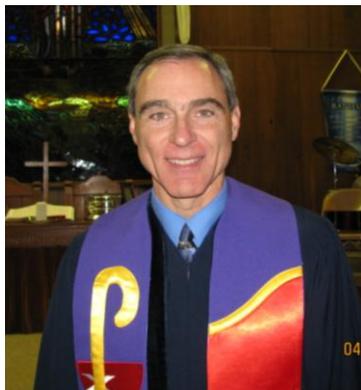
JUNE

- 1 Pentecost Sunday
- 7 Miracle Day - First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa
- 8 - 13 Beach Camp - ("The Lighthouse" Retreat Center at Romar Beach Baptist Church) - Orange Beach, AL
- 21 - 23 Genesis Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler
- 21 - 23 Discovery Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler
- 21 Regional Convocation One-Day Workshop - Edward Point Christian, Century, FL
- 23 - 27 Junior Camp, Chi Rho Camp, and CYF Conference - YMCA-Camp Chandler
- 25 - 29 ICWF Quadrennial Assembly - Atlanta, GA

"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



The Regional Assembly theme is in two languages, English and Spanish: “Love One Another – Amemonos Unos A Otros,” This theme, taken from words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John, sounds so basic and simple. But “loving one another” is not always so simple. I invite you to think with me about what it would mean if we truly loved one another.

First of all, we would treat others the way we want to be treated. As we desire that people would be kind to us, we would also be kind to others. If we desire that people would be respectful, hospitable, and sensitive to our needs, then we would extend the same to others. If we find ourselves in difficulty or trouble, we would hope for compassion from others; therefore, we would offer the same – if we took seriously the command to “love one another.”

We would also be accepting of persons who are different – either by race, ethnicity, language or culture. We would understand that their worth as children of God is equal to our own worth and we would treat them accordingly – if we took seriously the command to “love one another.”

We would seek justice for all who are powerless to reach their potential due to the systems of oppression that exist in our world. We would work to provide bread for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, and assistance for all who lack the basic necessities of life – if we took seriously the command to “love one another.”

We would respect that each Christian we encounter is on his or her own journey of understanding of what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ. We would accept each person where they are. We would seek to affirm that he or she is our brother or sister, and we would work to preserve the unity of Christ’s diverse body – if we took seriously the command to “love one another.”

We would understand that each human being falls short of the glory of God and commits numerous acts of self-centeredness, sin, and violations of his or her fellow human beings. And yet we know that it is such persons, including us, that Christ came to earth to redeem. We, therefore, would live in a posture of forgiveness and mercy, not judgment, in hopes that broken relationships could be healed – if we took seriously the command to “love one another.”

Maybe our 2014 Regional Assembly theme is not so simplistic after all. And yet it provides us with our marching orders as we follow our Lord Jesus Christ. May we take this theme very seriously, and may we allow it to rule our hearts – “Love One Another – Amemonos Unos A Otros,”

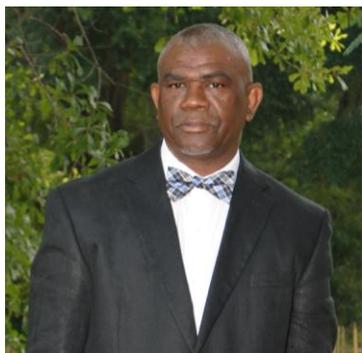
Your Partner in Ministry,
John P. Mobley

NEWS OF THE CLERGY

Paul Ingram concluded his ministry with Azalea Hills Christian Church, Mobile, on Sunday, March 9, 2014, having made the decision to retire. Paul was presented with an Honored Minister Pin on that day. The installation service at First Christian Church, Florence, for its new pastor, **Jim Storie**, took place on Sunday, March 30, 2014. **Clint Coffey** has been called as pastor at First Christian Church, Athens. His new ministry will begin June 1, 2014.

FROM THE DESK OF THE ASSOCIATE REGIONAL MINISTER

Easter Offering - Why should I give?



On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is one of the most well-attended Sunday services of the year for Christian Churches. Christians believe, according to scripture, that Jesus came back to life, or was raised from the dead, three days after his death on the cross. As a part of the Easter season, the death of Jesus Christ' crucifixion is commemorated on Good Friday, always the Friday just before Easter. Through his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

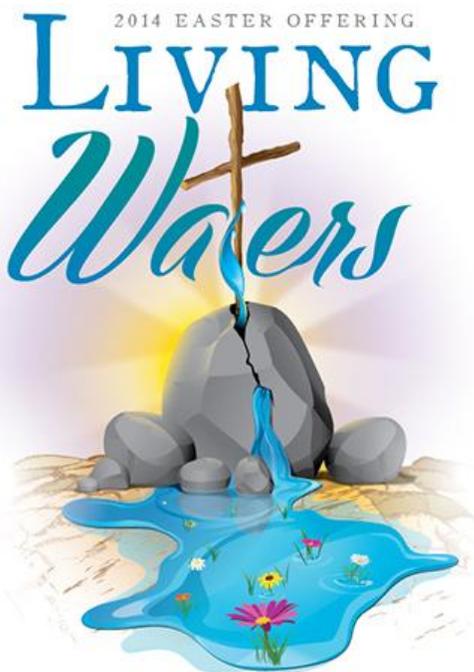
In western Christianity, Easter marks the end of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting, repentance, moderation in spiritual discipline in preparation for Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday.

In J. Ellsworth Kalas book, "Easter From The Back Side" Easter is a love story. The chapter examines the love and faith of Mary Magdalene and the disciple John on the first Easter morning. Mary Magdalene, the one from whom Jesus cast out demons, goes to the tomb while it is still dark to prepare Jesus body, but she found the tomb empty. She ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the "one whom Jesus loved," and told them what she had found, a tomb from which someone (she thought) had stolen the body (John 20:2). So Peter and "the

other disciple" – almost universally believed to be John-went running to the tomb. John outran Peter and got to the tomb first, but didn't go in. Peter went in, did a quick survey, and revealed the linen wrapping and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head carefully laid in place. John also went in, and he saw and believed.

The author states that on the morning of Easter, two people out of all those possible candidates experienced Easter in the fullness: Mary Magdalene, in her face to face encounter with the risen Christ, and the apostle John, who stepped into the empty tomb and believed. Why John and Mary Magdalene, out of several hundred who might have been first? The author states that it was because of their love—love that made Mary come early and stay late, and love that made John run to the tomb then step back in reverence. The heart of the Easter story and Easter experience is to have faith, hope and love. Easter is a love story.

The 2014 Easter Offering supports the general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This offering will be taken up in most congregations on April 13 & April 20, 2014.



CONGREGATIONS SEEKING A MINISTER

Mobile, Azalea Hills

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGIONAL BOARD MEETING - FEBRUARY 22, 2014

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Board met on Saturday, February 22, 2014, at First Christian Church, Birmingham. Stuart Price, Moderator, led the Board in a very productive meeting. Highlights from the meeting include:

A unanimous approval of a resolution to receive First Christian Church, Meridian, MS, into the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Rev. Tom Sikes and Rev. Lea McCracken from FCC, Meridian, attended the Regional Board meeting and shared that the congregation had voted unanimously to request affiliation with the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. The resolution will be voted on by the Great River Regional Board later in the year and the final action regarding the resolution will be taken by the 2015 General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio.

A decision to allocate funds and empower a Project Advisory Team to provide oversight for a new church start in Birmingham targeting, in particular, the Spanish-speaking population. The effort to launch this new ministry will begin immediately with early tasks including the formation of a Project Advisory Team and the calling of a Church Planter to lead the effort.

Financial reports, including the 2013 Audit were received and approval was given for the 2014 Regional Budget and Fee Schedule.

Reports from program committees, divisions, districts, and fellowship groups were given by representatives, indicating that ministries in the life of the Region are vibrant and far-reaching.

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 25 and June 1. 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 Birmingham in 2014 will receive 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. The new congregation launched by the Region in 2013, Renovando Tu Fe, in Pensacola, will receive Regional funding for two more years as well. Such financial support for these two new congregations 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 2014, 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.

2014 REGIONAL ASSEMBLY SET FOR APRIL 25 - 27

The 2014 Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida will be held in Fort Walton beach, Florida, and will be co-hosted by First Christian Church and Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana on April 25-27, 2014. Complete information on registration and housing was sent out in the January and March Leader's Packets and is available on the web-site <www.alnwfldisciples.org>

The 2014 Regional Assembly will focus on the theme, "Love One Another – Amemonos Unos a Otros." With the theme as a guide, the Assembly will reflect upon Jesus words to his disciples as he neared the end of his earthly ministry. Jesus expressed God's desire that love one another as a way of giving witness to God's love for the world.

We will have two special guests who will be preaching and leading workshops: Rev. Juan Rodriguez and Rev. April Johnson. Rev. Rodriguez will preach on Friday night and Rev. Johnson will preach on Saturday morning. They will both lead workshops on Saturday morning and afternoon.

SPECIAL GUEST LEADERS FOR THE 2014 REGIONAL ASSEMBLY



Rev. Dr. Juan Antonio Rodriguez was born in Puerto Rico, raised in New York City, but “grew up” in Indiana. Both his grandfather and father were lay Disciple preachers in Puerto Rico and New York. His childhood church home was Primera Iglesia Discipulos de Cristo en Brooklyn. He later served for 30 years as the organizing Pastor of Iglesia del Pueblo-Hope Center in Hammond, Indiana. This 1981 new church start is now a predominantly Latino multi-cultural congregation which has become a growing urban ministry center seeking to serve the diverse community which surrounds it. Rev. Rodriguez also served as pastor for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Hammond for the last six years of its faithful 100 year plus ministry (1986-1992). He has also served as Pastoral Psychotherapist Intern (1989-1992) and as Adjunct Professor for Field Education at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago (2007-2010). In 2012 Rev. Rodriguez began his service as Regional Minister in Florida. For 41 years he has been married to Sonia Colon, a life-long Disciples leader. They share life with Rico, their “wonder dog.”

Rev. Rodriguez is guided in his life and ministry by certain beliefs and commitments. He states: “I am committed to building community. I believe that openness and respect go far toward insuring that individuals feel safe to learn, grow, and serve. I believe in speaking the truth in love. I believe in continuous consultation and collaboration.”



Rev. April G. Johnson serves as the Minister of Reconciliation for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. She brings to this work a deep passion for racial justice and compassion. As Minister of Reconciliation, Rev. Johnson facilitates the church-wide process of awareness and action toward healing the fractures in the body of Christ caused by systemic racism. She collaborates with trained facilitators, regional and congregational staff leadership, and ecumenical partners to guide the Church’s effort toward racial reconciliation. In her capacity as both pastor and administrator, Rev. Johnson emphasizes the importance of relationship-building across difference to promote pro-reconciliation as a guiding principle of the church’s global witness.

Prior to her current call, Rev. Johnson served at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois as Assistant Dean of Students/Director of Diversity Services and as Associate College Chaplain.

During her tenure at the College, Rev. Johnson provided leadership in developing a campus climate of welcome and inclusion. She also led several cross-cultural short-term service-learning opportunities for students in Belize, Central America and Kenya, East Africa.

Rev. Johnson received her Bachelor’s of Arts from the University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana and her Masters of Divinity from Howard University in Washington, DC. While at Howard, she was the Assistant to the Editor for the Journal of Religious Thought and the editor of the school’s weekly student-staff newsletter. She enjoys writing, travel and would like to return to playing golf. Rev. Johnson is a native of Chicago, Illinois.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY WORKSHOPS

Workshop led by Rev. Juan Rodriguez

This workshop will have as its title, “Disciples Building Beloved Community.” Understanding ourselves as part of God’s “*Beloved Community*”, we will seek to discern how WE can witness to the endless love of God revealed through Jesus Christ as a gift for the whole world. Our time together will be focused on the rich historical, theological, cultural and ethnic diversity that we as Disciples represent, *and can draw on*, to serve the multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-cultural world that surrounds our Disciple congregations.

Workshop led by Rev. April Johnson

This workshop will have as its title, “Fruit from on High.” The workshop will focus on Jesus’ command to love one another in John 15:17 and will lift up the task of Jesus’ followers to bear fruit that will last.



God's Family (including families of all shapes, sizes, and ages) gathered at Oak Mountain State Park for a weekend of fun, food, fellowship, worship, hiking, fishing, camping, and more!! A dozen families from eight different congregations were involved.

We hope you'll plan to join us next year. It will be a great chance for our Christian Church (Disciples Of Christ) in Alabama-NW Florida FAMILY to be together!!!

Dates for next year's camp will be announced this summer.



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
First Christian Church, Florence
Snow Hill Christian Church, Ft. Deposit
First Christian Church, Ft. Walton Beach
Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Fort Walton Beach
Sellers Memorial Christian Church, Hayneville
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, Vallev

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 2014 by congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida to the Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings (Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas) has decreased by 22.01% from the amount given year-to-date in 2013. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings are showing a 10.65% decrease from the amount given through February, 2013. Week of Compassion un-designated giving in Alabama-Northwest Florida is showing a 14.1% decrease from the amount given through February, 2013.

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.

What I Learned at the First Senior Adult “Lock In”

On January 28th, a small group of senior Disciples met in the Regional Office with our Regional Ministry to plan for the next Senior Adult Retreat to be held this fall. What started out as a planning meeting turned into a very different type of ministry when the snow began falling.

About an hour into the meeting, the group decided to reschedule to a later date in order for those in attendance to get home before it got any worse. I had promised my husband that I would not take any unnecessary chances and began calling my daughter who lives in Fulondale to see if it would be possible for me to get to her house. As the snow continued even harder, it appeared that I was going to be spending my time at the Regional Office. Shortly after, two of the other seniors returned as they had not been able to get over the bridge crossing the Cahaba River. About an hour later, the last senior was brought back to the office after his truck had slid off the road. What to do?



Because of the very steep hill on Highway 52, cars were starting to grow in number at the bottom of the hill. They were lined up on the side of the road. Some attempted to make the drive, but few made it. Cars were off the road, across the road, and on the side of the road. The parking lot in front of the office soon filled up and the occupants were invited in to get warm, have something hot to drink, or use the rest room facilities. Many of the people were within a mile or less from their destination but just couldn't get up the hill and there was nowhere to go in the other direction as well. Most were able to find a way out but Mike was with us the whole time.



There was some food left from the meeting and also some food Susan had in the freezer for her lunches. She had assured John that we could use whatever she had there and we took her up on it. What seemed to be a small amount of food turned into enough to make two fairly large pots of soup, one for Tuesday night and one for Wednesday lunch. Along with John's stash of oatmeal for breakfast, and a few provisions from Grace, no one went hungry.

Since there was no outside communication other than phones, we had a limited idea of what it was like throughout the area. An I phone makes a very small TV screen, but we were able to stream Fox 6 weather for a while. In order to pass the time away, we continued our meeting and finished our planning.

But where was everyone going to sleep? And how were they going to stay warm (the office is a little drafty). The storage area upstairs yielded a few sheets and some kind of fabric that I think Nisha may have used at camp as a backdrop of some sort. A few hand towels were also found and an emergency kit with a few over the counter drugs. John was able to obtain a few mats from Grace that were used as sleep mats. I hit the jackpot because I had an air mattress in my car that had been returned to me only a couple of days earlier (even if it did have a slow leak). No one slept well but at least we were inside and had food and water.

We were able to make it safely to John and Valya's house about midafternoon on Wednesday where we shared a meal with them and were provided a real bed to sleep in that night. Everyone was able to return home safely after breakfast on Thursday.

So what did I learn? That our Regional Office (as well as most of our churches) is not prepared for this type of emergency. Most emergency events are short term but there should be supplies for up to 72 hours. A **weather radio** may have alerted us earlier to what was happening and would have kept us apprised on the ongoing conditions. A **battery operated radio** (and batteries) would have allowed us to have more information about road conditions (and maybe provided a little music to take our minds off our situation). **Blankets, small pillows, flashlights, personal care kits, an assortment of nonperishable food items, a variety of over-the-counter medications, and water** are an absolute necessity. There is adequate space upstairs to store these needed items. We were very fortunate that we didn't lose power but, if we had, it would have been a whole different story. I encourage you to make sure your church has these necessary items in case you every find yourself in a similar situation.

What else did I learn? People are kind, generous, and caring in times of emergency. They try to help where ever and how ever they can. They are willing to share whatever they have. And God was with us. He kept us safe, He kept us fed, He kept us well, and He worked thru us to minister to others in a loving, caring way. God sometimes works in mysterious ways. Let's continue to keep ministering to others as if it were an "emergency".

Kathy Mason
Member, Regional Division of Mission

The 2014 Men's Retreat was held at YMCA-Hargis on March 14-15. More than 40 men gathered to focus on the theme, "Rise Up, O Men of God." Rev. Arnold Nelson, Senior Minister at First Christian Church, Duncan, OK, served as retreat leader. New officers were elected at the retreat. New officers are: Kenny Hays (president), David Lynch (First Vice President), John Churchill (Second Vice-President), and Johnny Timmons (Secretary-Treasurer).



On March 9, 2014, Rev. Paul Ingram retired from active ministry after nearly twenty years as pastor with Azalea Hills Christian Church in Mobile. The congregation celebrated the Ingrams' ministry on March 9. Rev. Ingram received the Honored Minister Pin and his spouse, Linda Ingram, received the Honored Minister's Spouse Certificate from the Pension Fund. Regional Minister John Mobley made the formal presentation.

On March 30, 2014, Rev. Jim Storie was installed as senior minister at First Christian Church, Florence. Pictured here (left to right) are Regional Minister John Mobley, Board Chairperson Tonitia Butler, Rev. Storie and his spouse, Rachel Storie.



MIRACLE DAY IS COMING – June 7, 2014

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region will be sponsoring its 8th Region-wide Miracle Day on Saturday, June 7, 2014, at First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa. Please make your plans to be in Tuscaloosa as Disciples from all across the Region gather to worship, work, and witness to our unity in Christ. The projects envisioned will strengthen the ministry of the host congregation for its mission in its community. There will be something for everyone, skilled and unskilled. Each person will be able to make a contribution.

In mid-April each congregation will receive a packet of information that will help promote Miracle Day in the congregation. This packet will include volunteer forms that need to be completed for each person who plans to participate. It will be helpful if volunteer forms can be completed and sent to the host congregation in advance of Miracle Day.

Donations for Miracle Day may be sent to the Miracle Day Treasurer, Dona Sulzman, at First Christian Church, 627 Paul W. Bryant Drive, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401. Checks should be made payable to “Miracle Day - First Christian Church.” All gifts are tax deductible and will be properly acknowledged.

DISCIPLES CONGREGATION RECEIVES RECOGNITION

Grateful Life Community Church in Huntsville, Alabama, will receive the 2014 Interfaith Mission Service Direct Service Award at an awards ceremony in Huntsville on April 29, 2014. The congregation has impacted many lives in the past year through its outreach and service to persons in various kinds of need.

An officer of Interfaith Mission Service writes: *“The 2014 awards will be presented to (ministries) that have continued to promote racial harmony, religious respect, social justice, and care for the most vulnerable....they have envisioned a more compassionate and just world, and have sought to bring it into being.”*

Rev. Sherry Birney serves as pastor with Grateful Life Community Church.