# THE CHRISTIAN
# ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

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

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*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

FEBRUARY

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery |
| 7 | CWF/Disciples Women Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena |
| 10 | Senior Adult Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena |
| 13 - 14 | Congregational Transformation Event - First Christian Church, Birmingham |
| 15 - 22 | Week of Compassion Offering promotion |
| 21 | Division of Administration and Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office |
| 28 | Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - First Christian Church, Birmingham |

MARCH

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 - 5 | Black Ministers Retreat - Montgomery, Alabama |
| 12 | Optional Arrival Date for Men's Retreat |
| 13 - 14 | Men's Retreat - YMCA-Hargis |
| 20 | "Healthy Boundaries" Workshop for Clergy (9:00 am - 3:30 pm) - Regional Office |
| 29 - April 5 | Easter Offering promotion (for General Ministries of the Church) |

APRIL

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 | Easter |
| 8 | Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena |
| 8 - 10 | College of Regional Ministers - Kansas City, MO |
| 11 | Children's Worship and Wonder Refresher Workshop (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office |
| 11 | Regional Convocation Board (10:00 a.m.) - Harrison Street Christian, Greenville |
| 11 - 14 | General Board of the Christian Church - Kansas City, MO |
| 17 - 18 | Anti-Racism Workshop for Clergy - First Christian Church, Montgomery |
| 24 - 26 | Family Camp - Oak Mountain State Park |

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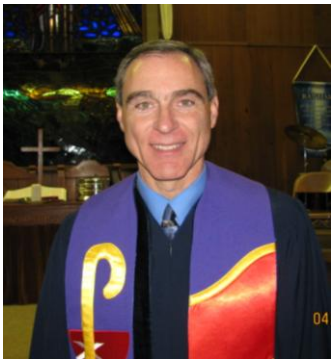
"We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."
– 2007 Disciples Identity Statement

**REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGIONAL MINISTER**



February is Black History Month in our nation, not just for African Americans but for all of us. Before I offer some reflections on the importance of this annual observance, let's begin with a brief history lesson. We all need to be familiar with the name, Carter G. Woodson.

The son of a slave, Carter G Woodson was born in New Canton, Virginia, on December 19, 1875. He began high school at the age of 20 and then proceeded to study at Berea College, the University of Chicago, the Sorbonne, and Harvard University, where he earned a Ph.D. in 1912. Carter G Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 to train Black historians and to collect, preserve, and publish documents on Black life and Black people. He also founded the Journal of Negro History (1916), Associated Publishers (1922), and the Negro Bulletin (1937). Woodson spent his life working to educate all people about the vast contributions made by Black men and women throughout history. Mr. Woodson died on April 3, 1950, and Black History Month is his legacy.

I personally came to understand Black History Month to be a valuable observance in my early years of Regional ministry. As many of you know, the Regional office during my early years of service in Alabama-Northwest Florida was in Vestavia Hills. Lining the walls of the old Regional office building were photos of saints of the church who had left a legacy of service to the Region. I won't name them all, but there were pictures of faithful servants who had started many of the churches now in existence in the Region. There were early state secretaries. There were framed pictures of Oscar Pendleton Spiegel, Samuel Pickens Spiegel, James Edward Spiegel, J. Allen Branch, Percy E. Kohl, T. O. Slaughter, and several others. There were photos of former Regional Ministers.

In my early days as a Regional Minister I began to wonder about the history of the 19 African American congregations that were a part of the Region I had been called to serve. There were no photos on the wall of any African American leaders in Alabama-Northwest Florida. Every person coming to the Regional office only got a partial glimpse of history by looking at the pictures lining the walls. I knew that I needed to make a special effort to gain a more complete understanding of the saints whose legacy I would stand upon in my work as Regional Minister. I needed to be intentional in my effort to learn, which is the purpose of Black History Month. This set-aside month provides us a way of being intentional in seeking information that grounds us more fully and accurately in our history as a nation.

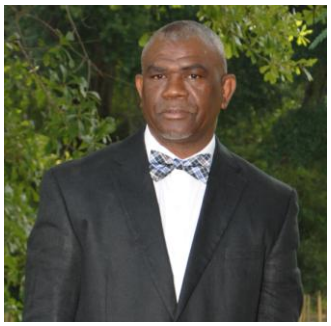
In my conversations with African American Disciples in this Region, I was thrilled to learn of the Lum School in Letohatchee which provided Christian education for African Americans in the 1800s. I learned about the Brayboy brothers, W.T, D.C, and J.O., who preached for many years in Lowndes and Montgomery Counties. Saints such as A.J. Jeffries and J.E. McCall gave leadership in the mid-twentieth century to African American Disciples. C.J. Hinson and Earl Murray, Sr., and many others, provided leadership in more recent years. No pictures of these leaders were on the wall at the old Regional office, but they are clearly a part of the story of God's work in the history of this Region.

So I am an advocate for efforts to gain a more complete understanding of history. Because we are One church, it is history that belongs to all of us and all of us should care about it. So I challenge us to observe Black History Month with a renewed desire to learn something about the life we share together – both in the church and also in our nation. We will be enriched as we honor saints and heroes who may have previously been hidden from our view.

Your Partner in Ministry,

John P. Mobley
Regional Minister

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE ASSOCIATE REGIONAL MINISTER



Well it‘s that time of year again when in a fit of optimism many of us make great promises to ourselves about what we are going to do in the New Year that we usually abandon about the second week in January. This year why not take a deep breath and consider coming to the Congregational Transformation Event to be held at First Christian Church, Birmingham AL. The theme for this event is: “Wine and Wineskins: Fresh Vessels for the Everlasting Wine.”

Jesus constantly challenged the religious practices gone stale, their original meaning long forgotten and now become simply public ritual. He warned, “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.“ Matthew 6:1

In Mark 2:22, Jesus said, ”No one puts new wine into old wineskins: otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." With that in mind it is imperative that I challenge the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama –Northwest Florida and Meridian Mississippi to make a commitment to 1. **Commit** yourself to forget your failures 2. **Commit** to give up grudges 3. **Commit** to restore relationships and 4. **Commit** to turn your back on your transgressions.

Jesus and his disciples were saying by their words and actions: “You can’t put new ideas into old mind-sets. You can’t get new results with old behaviors.” The comparison is a very good one when we think of the properties of wine and wineskins. When wine is new, it is in a state of fermentation. It bubbles and expands as the fermentation gases are released. A fresh, pliable wineskin can absorb such expansion and slowly age, with the wine until the fermentation process is complete.

To put fresh wine into old wineskin, however, is asking for trouble. The old wineskin has assumed a definite shape and is no longer any good. It is fixed and somewhat brittle. The activity of the new wine will stress it beyond its ability to yield. So both the wine and the skin are lost. We can’t put new ideas into old mind-sets. We can’t get new results with old behaviors.

I challenge you to bring your lay leaders to the Transformation Event on February 13-14, 2015. This is a time to reflect, get some fresh ideas, to evaluate where you are as a congregation and embrace new directions. Great workshops have been planned to provide fresh ideas for the 21st Century Church.

Your Partner in Ministry,

Dale Braxton
Associate Regional Minister

**More than 40 ministers and spouses gathered in Orange Beach, AL, on January 12-14, 2015, for the annual Ministers and Mates Retreat. Resource leaders (kneeling to the right) were Rev. Rick Morse (far right) and his daughter, Rev. Laurie Budlong Morse (next to Rick.)**

**CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION EVENT**
**FEBRUARY 13-14, 2015**
**"Wine and Wineskins: Fresh Vessels for the Everlasting Wine"**
**First Christian Church, Birmingham**

The Region's Program Committee on Church Development has sponsored five congregational transformation events since 2008. Moving to an every-other-year schedule, the next event will be held on February 13-14, 2015, at First Christian Church, Birmingham. These weekend events have included prominent preachers and a variety of workshop leaders. These events have provided ideas and inspiration to help congregational leaders to be agents of transformation in their own congregations. Our Friday night preachers have included Dr. Fred Craddock, Dr. Sharon Watkins, Dr. Bill Lee, Dr. Todd Adams, and Dr. William Willimon, all of whom have brought us powerful messages.

In 2015 the Program Committee on Church Development is excited to sponsor a sixth Region-wide congregational transformation event. The theme is "Wine and Wineskins: Fresh Vessels for the Everlasting Wine." The Friday evening worship service on February 13 will feature Dr. Richard L. Hamm, church consultant and former General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Dr. Hamm will also lead a plenary workshop on Saturday morning entitled, "What Transforming Congregations are Doing Right."

Richard L. Hamm was born in Indiana and raised in Florida. He returned to Indiana to attend Butler University (B.A., 1970) and Christian Theological Seminary (D.Min., 1974). Dick is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and served congregations for 25 years in Indiana, Kansas and Missouri.

Dr. Hamm served as Regional Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee (1990-1993) and he served as General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada from 1993 to 2003.

Dr. Hamm is the author of three books, *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* and *From Mainline to Front Line* and *Recreating The Church: Leadership For The Post-Modern Age*. He has written and spoken extensively on the subject of church renewal and transformation and coaches and consults with congregations, middle judicatories, denominational agencies and other church organizations. Dr. Hamm is a Ministry Partner of The Columbia Partnership.**http://www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org**

Dick and his wife, Mindy, live in Indianapolis. They have two adult children and five grandchildren.

On Saturday, February 14, there will be a variety of workshops to help equip participants to be agents of transformation in their own congregations. Following Dr. Hamm's plenary workshop, there will be opportunity for persons to choose from a variety of workshops, listed below:

- "Healthy Pastors Lead to Healthy Congregations" (led by Rev. Eugene Fisher, Pension Fund)
- "Learning to Ask the Right Questions" (led by Rev. Beth Thomason, Madison Christian Church, and members of The Journey team at Madison Christian Church)
- "Effective Inclusion of Children in the Church's Ministry" (led by Rev. Lea McCracken, First Christian Church, Meridian, MS)
- "What God wants FOR Us: Church Planning with the End in Mind" (Led By Rev. Troy Tatum, First Christian Church, Birmingham)
- "The Gifts Hidden in Conflict: Learning the Tools to Transform Struggle into Harmony" (led by Rev. Anna Shirey, First Christian Church, Florence)

– Two workshops will be offered in Spanish. In the morning the workshop will be "Understanding the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," and the afternoon workshop will be "Evangelism in Hispanic Communities." Both of these workshops will be led by Rev. Roberto Rodriguez, Church Planter, Primera Iglesia Cristiana (Discipulos de Cristo), Birmingham.

There will be program activities for elementary school-aged children on Saturday. Robin Blakemore, a part of the Ministry Staff at First Christian Church, Birmingham, will provide leadership.

The congregational transformation event will include lunch, fellowship, and worship in addition to the workshops. The event will end around 2:45 p.m. on Saturday.

The cost of registration for "Wine and Wineskins" is $25 for an individual registration ($10 per child age 12 and younger) or $250 for a congregational registration (which covers registration for as many as the congregation would like to bring). It is imperative, however, that congregational registrations include a listing of all of the persons who will attend so that adequate preparations can be made. The registration deadline is February 4, 2015.

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Drury Hotel, 3510 Grandview Pkwy (off Hwy. 280), at a rate of $89.99/night, plus tax, for rooms with either one king bed or two double beds. Only a few doubles are available. An evening reception with hot food and a deluxe, hot breakfast are included. Also there is an indoor/outdoor pool with hot tub. The block of rooms will be held until January 13, 2015. Individual reservations may be made by calling 1-800-325-0720 and mentioning the group number 2161391 for the "Christian Church - Disciples of Christ." Reservations may also be made on-line at <www.druryhotels.com>http://www.druryhotels.com and entering the group number 2161391. The local hotel number is 205-967-2450. The fax is 866-249-0164.

## 2015 MEN'S RETREAT SET FOR MARCH 13-14

The annual Men's Retreat is planned for March 13 -14, 2015, at YMCA-Hargis. For a nominal added cost, men have the option of arriving on Thursday, March 12, for fishing, hiking, and fellowship prior to the beginning of the retreat on Friday afternoon. The Disciples Men's Cabinet has put together a great retreat filled with fun, fellowship, and challenge for all men in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. The theme for the 2015 Men's Retreat is "Your Gifts...God's Mission." The guest leader for the retreat will be Rev. James E. Brooks.

Jim Brooks serves as Interim Senior Minister at First Christian Church, Montgomery, Alabama, beginning in January, 2015. Jim retired in May, 2014, after a 12 year ministry as pastor with First Christian Church, Winder, Georgia. Jim has served congregations in South Carolina, Kentucky, Illinois, Alabama, and Georgia. He has served in regional ministry as Associate Regional Minister in Georgia. He also has served in general ministry as Director of Christian Education Ministries with the Division of Homeland Ministries. For 23 years Jim served as Director of the Andros Mission Project, which began in 1989 when he was serving as Associate Minister with First Christian Church, Birmingham. For 43 consecutive years Jim has been involved in camp/conference ministry in several different regions. Jim has led numerous retreats and workshops over many years of ministry.

Jim received his bachelor's degree from Charleston Southern University in 1973 and his Master of Divinity degree from Lexington Theological Seminary in 1976. For over 41 years Jim has been married to Katrine Brooks, who currently works as Human Resources Director for Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, University of Georgia.

The Men's Retreat formally begins with dinner at 6:00 p.m. on Friday and concludes by 2:30 p.m. on Saturday. All men of all ages are encouraged to participate in this time of renewal, inspiration, and fellowship.

Each year at the Men's Retreat there is an important offering collection which provides resources for the Disciples Men to support specific mission efforts in and beyond the Region. Men's groups in congregations are urged to collect their money in advance of the retreat so that each congregation's gifts may be included with the offering collected at the retreat. Registration forms and information on costs were included in the November Leader's Packet. The early-bird deadline for registration is February 21. After that date there is an increase in the registration fee. Please contact the Regional office if more information is needed.

## FAMILY CAMP SET FOR APRIL 24-26, 2015

We are excited about our upcoming Family Camp at Oak Mountain State Park for ALL those who are in God's Family - this event is open to everyone from infant to senior adults. The event will be held on April 24-26, 2015. Cost is $15.00 - Adults & $10.00 - Children (Max $50 per family), which covers our meeting space, S'mores on Friday night, and Cook-Out Saturday night.

Several lodging options are available for you to choose from. Folks can choose from tent camping, RV camping, or 2 bedroom cabins at Oak Mountain State Park, or nearby hotels provide another alternative. There is a wide variety of activities. Hiking, Games, Petting Zoo, Horseback Riding, Canoeing, Wildlife Sanctuary Tours are available. We will also enjoy time for fellowship and worship.

We encourage your family, congregation, women's group, Sunday school class, or other group to join us for this exciting time together. Please contact Nisha Warbington at Nisha7@aol.com if you have any questions, or would like to reserve a cabin, or a tent site. Cabins will be on a first come/first served basis. If you prefer an RV site or local hotel, those reservations can be made directly with those locations. RV Reservations can be made by calling (205) 620-2527. A flyer with additional information and registration information will be included in the March leader's packet, and can be found on the website under Outdoor Ministries Link.

## NEWS OF THE CLERGY

**Mickey Johnson** was ordained on Sunday, January 25, 2015, at First Christian Church, Valhermoso Springs. **Robin Blakemore** was presented with a certificate of commissioning on Sunday, January 25, 2015, for her service as Minister of Discipleship with First Christian Church, Birmingham.

## CONGREGATIONS SEEKING A MINISTER

Decatur, First (Bob Powell is Interim Minister)
Fairhope, Fairhope (John Alford is Interim Minister)
Hartselle, First (Jerry Ridling is Interim Minister)
Meridian, First (Cameron Douglas is Interim Minister)
Mobile, Azalea Hills (Phillip Hayes is Interim Minister)
Montgomery, First (Jim Brooks is Interim Minister)
Tuskegee, Mt. Calvary Missionary
White Hall, Mt. Zion

## OUTREACH GIVING UPDATE

The outreach 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) decreased by 5.66% from the amount given in 2013. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings decreased by 3.3% from the 2013 amount. Week of Compassion giving in Alabama-Northwest Florida, regular and designated, decreased by 32.38% from the amount given in 2013. The Reconciliation Offering in Alabama-Northwest Florida, regular and designated, decreased by 49.25% from the amount given in 2013. In 2014, the Easter Offering in Alabama-Northwest Florida decreased by 3.57% compared to 2013, the Pentecost Offering increased by 7.84%, the Thanksgiving Offering increased by 0.51%, and the Christmas Offering increased by 11.86%.

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.

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, Ft. 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, 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.*

**The Young Adult Winter Retreat was held at Camp Chandler on January 16-17, 2015. Rev. Troy Tatum served as facilitator.**

**Twenty-five ministers from the Tennessee and Alabama-Northwest Florida Regions will participate in Colleague Groups in 2015. The groups will study preaching. Pictured above are the ministers who gathered for a Kick-Off Retreat at Joe Wheeler State Park Lodge on January 25-27, 2015. Rev. Dr. Dan Moseley (bottom row, third from left) served as the resource leader.**

**Rev. Mickey Johnson was ordained on January 25, 2015, at First Christian Church, Valhermoso Springs. Pictured here are Mickey Johnson and his wife, Linda (center), along with several other ministers who participated in the service.**

**Robin Blakemore was formally commissioned for her service as Minister of Discipleship with First Christian Church, Birmingham, on Sunday, January 25, 2015. Pictured here (l to r) are: Rev. Jan Watts, Minister of Music, Rev. Troy Tatum, Senior Minister, Robin Blakemore, and Regional Minister John Mobley.**

# THE ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA REGION EXPRESSES ITS SINCERE GRATITUDE TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE 2014 ANNUAL FUND

(* denotes a Board member, **denotes a staff person)

David G. Aichele
Alabama-NW FL Convocation
John & Frances Alford
Mr. & Mrs. William Bagby
Dr. & Mrs. Jack Baldwin
Deryll & Lorraine Banning
Danny & Mona Barfield
Bill Barham
Dorothy A. Battle
Bruce Bebensee
Marie Bittle
Judy Blalock
Connie Bradow
**Dale & Mercedes Braxton
Bessie Brooks
Cindy Brooks
Steve & Allison Brown
Larry Burger
George & Muriel Castillo
Steve Chun
*Katelyn Clark
*Jim & Janice Clifford
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Jose' M. Matos
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Andrea McNeill
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Johnny & *Floretta Timmons
Willie & Margaret Timmons
Garry & Twila Tyree
Mark & Dawn Underwood
Valley Christian Church
Margaret J. & Mack M. Vann
Daren & **Nisha Warbington
Lisa Watson
Ethel Williams
*Ethelyn Williams
Bill & Kay Wolfe
Margaret Womble

Anyone wishing to make a tax deductible contribution to the Annual Fund may do so at any time.
Contact the Regional Office at 205-425-5245 or via email at alnwfl@aol.com for more information, or use the form below.

## *YOU CAN BE A PART OF THE ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA* ANNUAL FUND

The **Annual Fund** is.....

.....an invitation for individuals to give additional financial support for the ministries of this Region. While the Region is supported through the Disciples Mission Fund and through the Christmas Offering, these dollars alone will not maintain current ministries and develop new ministries that are envisioned.

.....an opportunity for individuals to make a difference in the lives of children, youth, young adults, men, women, pastors, and students. Gifts to the **Annual Fund** directly impact people right in your own congregation and in neighboring Disciples of Christ congregations.

.....an opportunity to undergird this Region so that we can achieve excellence in everything we do. Nothing less is worthy of the Christ we serve.

----------Please clip and return----------

Enclosed is my/our gift to help the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region continue its current ministries with excellence and to develop exciting new ministries which will strengthen congregations for mission and ministry.

Name_____E-mail_____

Address_____

City_____State_____Zip_____

Phone_____Congregation_____

Amount of Gift $_____

Payable to: Christian Church in Alabama-NW Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080

***Thank You for Your Support!!!***