At least two persons in each congregation, the Minister and Board Chairperson, and perhaps others, receive this Packet. Please review this material carefully to determine how it needs to be shared most appropriately within your congregation.

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Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA
861 Highway 52
Helena, AL 35080
(205) 425-5245
(205) 425-5246 (fax)
e-mail: alnwfl@aol.com
website: www.alnwfldisciples.org

Regional Officers and Regional Staff
May, 2012

Moderator: Stuart Price
613 Owens Road
Auburn, AL 36830
334-844-2673 (w) 334-821-1123(h)
e-mail: pricesb@auburn.edu

Regional Minister: John Mobley
861 Highway 52
Helena, AL 35080
205-425-5245(w)
e-mail: jpmobley2@aol.com

Moderator-Elect: Jan Pooley
2805 Jerry Pate Court
Shalimar, FL 32579
850-651-5124 (h)
e-mail: jpooley5@cox.net

Associate Regional Minister Dale Braxton
8420 County Rd. 45
Ft. Deposit, AL 36032
334-227-4752
email: braxtondale@hotmail.com

First Vice Moderator: Jeremy Harbin
P. O. Box 1188
Hartselle, AL 35640
256-773-6911 (w) 256-345-6088 (h)
e-mail: jeremyharbin@gmail.com

Youth Ministries Staff Person: Nisha Warbington
15561 Dockery Road
Coker, AL 35452
205-330-8968 (h) 205-454-2054 (cell)
e-mail: Nisha7@aol.com

Second Vice Moderator: Angela Rudolph
P. O. Box 353
Hunstville, AL 35640
334-548-6222 (h)
e-mail: angela.rudolph@adph.state.al.us

Administrative Assistant: Susan Henderson
861 Highway 52
Helena, AL 35080
205-425-5245(w)
e-mail: alnwfl@aol.com

Secretary-Treasurer: Edward Williams
704 Grove St.
Homewood, AL 35209
205-746-1720 (c)
e-mail: edwms5@aol.com

Regional Representative to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2008-2013:

Lester Smith
852 Hatcher Street
Montgomery, AL 36109
334-271-3882
e-mail: lester.smith.06@gmail.com
ITEMS OF INTEREST  
(from within the Region)

Outreach Giving

The giving by congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida to the Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings (Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas), at the end of September, 2013, shows a 3.21% increase over the amount given for the same time period in 2012. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and these four Special Day Offerings have increased 0.43% over the year-to-date amount in 2012. Total gifts to Week of Compassion, regular and designated, by Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations, have increased 33.65% over the amount given through September, 2012. Church-wide year-to-date giving to Week of Compassion, regular and designated, is showing an increase of 12.0%. The 2013 Reconciliation Offering in Alabama-Northwest Florida, year-to-date, is 296.95% above the 2012 amount. Church-wide year-to-date giving to the Reconciliation Offering is showing a 0.8% increase compared to the 2012 amount.

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.

News of the Clergy

Rob Scofield has been called to serve as Interim Minister with First Christian Church, Florence. He began his new ministry in mid-September. Troy Tatum was installed on October 6 as senior minister with First Christian Church, Birmingham. Troy’s ministry began in September. Jose Diaz and Ana Diaz have been approved for ordination by the Committee on the Ministry. They will be ordained at a joint service on Sunday, November 3, 2013, at Primera Iglesia Cristiana in Fort Walton Beach. Israel Martinez and Jeanette Martinez have been approved for commissioning by the Committee on the Ministry for their work as church planters with Iglesia Cristiana - Renovando Tu Fe in Pensacola. Certificates of Commissioning are to be presented to them at their congregation on November 3, 2013.

Ministerial standing has been granted by the Committee on the Ministry to the following persons, all of whom were ordained in different denominations: Brad Henderson (Birmingham), Jane Hull (Huntsville), Zach Seitz (Huntsville).

Congregations with Ministerial Vacancies

Athens, First (C. J. Cobb is Interim)  
Falkville, Cedar Plains  
Florence, First (Rob Scofield is Interim)

(Continued on back)
Joys and Concerns of the Clergy

Don Rice (retired, Valley) is recovering from a round of chemotherapy treatments he had in the latter part of the summer as part of his fight against cancer. Lionel Young (retired, Montgomery) is recovering from a recent hospital stay that resulted from issues Lionel was having with one of his feet. Duane McGormley (retired, Dothan) is recovering from heart surgery that he had in September. The mother of Sue Goebel, wife of Tom Goebel (Tuscaloosa, First), has bone cancer. She lives in Connecticut. The mother of Valya Mobley, wife of John Mobley (Regional Minister), is recovering from heart valve surgery she had on October 15.

(Please notify the Regional Office of other joys and concerns.)

Mark your calendars for the next required training opportunities for clergy:

Healthy Boundaries for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers - March 21, 2014
Anti-Racism Training for Ministers – April 17-18, 2015.

Note: These workshops are required for all ministers who wish to maintain their ministerial standing. They must be repeated after every 10 years.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY - 2014
April 25-27, 2014 - Fort Walton Beach, FL
co-hosted by First Christian Church and Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana

MIRACLE DAY - 2014
June 7, 2014, at First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa

**Please do not plan activities on your church calendars that conflict with these dates.

Demographic Service Available

Congregations in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region can access demographic information on their communities by going to www.Link2lead.com and following the directions given (click on “register” to get started). This Region is providing this service at no cost to your congregation. If you have not downloaded recent demographic information for your community, with the latest census updates, please do so in order to lead your congregation to meet the needs of your community. Thank you for your gifts to the Disciples Mission Fund, which makes this ministry possible.
NOVEMBER
2    CWF/Disciples Women’s Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
4    Project Advisory Team (4:00 p.m.) - Westwood Christian Church, Pensacola
5    Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian Church, Montgomery
7 - 8  Senior Adult Retreat - Rolling Hills Camp and Conference Center, Calera, AL
17 - 24 Thanksgiving Offering (for ministries of higher education)

DECEMBER
3 - 6  College of Regional Ministers - Phoenix, AZ
7    Regional Nominating Committee (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
9    Committee on the Ministry (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
14   Executive/Personnel Committee (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
17   Staff Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
15 - 22 Christmas Offering (for ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region)

JANUARY, 2014
9    Colleague Groups Closing Luncheon/Program - Montgomery Bell State Park, TN
13 - 15  Ministers and Mates Retreat - Hilton Garden Inn, Orange Beach, AL
17 - 19  Young Adult Winter Retreat - Camp Chandler
22   Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
18 - 25  Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
25   Committee on Recommendations (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
24 - 26  Youthtopia (for all Chi Rho and CYF youth) - Camp Chandler

FEBRUARY, 2014
1    CWF/Disciples Women Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
4    Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
6 - 7  College of Regional Ministers - Indianapolis, IN
8 - 11  General Board of the Christian Church - Indianapolis, IN
15   Division of Administration and Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
16 - 23  Week of Compassion Offering Promotion
22   Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - First Christian Church, Birmingham

MARCH, 2014
13   Optional Arrival Day for Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
14 - 15  Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
21   “Healthy Boundaries” Training for Clergy (9:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
21 - 23  “Family Camp” - Oak Mountain State Park, Pelham, AL
29   Program Committee on Church Development (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office

APRIL, 2014
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
25 - 27  Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Assembly - Ft. Walton Beach, FL

(Continued on back)
MAY, 2014
6 Commissioning and 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

JUNE, 2014
1 - 8 Pentecost Offering (for new congregation establishment)
7 Miracle Day (worship begins at 8:00 a.m.) - First Christian, Tuscaloosa
8 - 13 Beach Camp - (“The Lighthouse” Retreat Center at Romar Beach Baptist Church) - Orange Beach, AL
21 - 23 Discovery Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler
23 - 27 Junior Camp, Chi Rho Camp, and CYF Conference - YMCA-Camp Chandler
28 Regional Convocation One-Day Workshop - Edward Point Christian, Century, FL

JULY, 2014
12 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
19 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
24 - 27 23rd Biennial Session of the National Convocation - Columbus, Ohio

AUGUST, 2014
9 Clergy-Women’s Luncheon (11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
13 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
20 - 23 College of Regional Ministers and Forum of Regional Moderators - Indianapolis, IN

SEPTEMBER, 2014
2 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
6 Anti-Racism Team (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
9 - 11 SERF Retreat (tentative) - Christmount, Black Mountain, NC
20 Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - TBD
27 Program Committee on Church Development (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena

OCTOBER, 2014
4 Division of Mission (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
8 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
11 Disciples Men’s Cabinet (8:30 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
17 - 19 Young Adult Beach Retreat - Orange Beach, AL
25 Division of Administration and Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
REGIONAL PRAYER CALENDAR
FOR NOVEMBER, 2013 - JANUARY, 2014

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN ALABAMA-NW FLORIDA

Note: Congregations are urged to lift up in prayer during worship the congregation(s) designated on each Sunday of the year. Special prayers are encouraged for the ministers listed as well. A phone number is listed for each congregation (in some cases an e-mail address is also listed) in order for persons to make contact with that congregation to learn of special joys and concerns prior to the Sunday when it is listed.

November 3 - Valhermoso Springs, First (256-778-7921) Mickey Johnson, Minister (e-mail: <mickey@tvpine.com>)
November 10 - Jasper, First (205-384-6302) Jack Baldwin, Minister (e-mail: <jack.baldwin@ccunet.org>)
November 17 - Valley, Fairfax (334-756-3941) Duwayne Bridges, Minister (e-mail: <burningbridges@msn.com>)
November 24 - Montgomery, United (334-262-3382) Larue Smith, Jr., Supply Minister (e-mail: <laruesmith@wildblue.net>)
Matthews, Mount Pleasant (334-227-4251) Danny Reeves, Minister (email: <dano57@charter.net>)

December 1 - Tuscaloosa, First (205-758-2968) Tom Goebel Minister (e-mail: <tandsgoebel@hotmail.com>)
December 8 - Valley, River View (334-756-3538) Frank Rittenberry, Minister (e-mail: <frittenberry@att.net>)
December 15 - Pensacola, Westwood (850-456-2092) Rick Malugani, Minister (e-mail: <ricmal57@gmail.com>)
December 22 - Ambassadors for Christ, Pamela Wilson, Minister (334-437-5423 or e-mail: <pamlove@camelliacom.com>)
December 29 - Hayneville, New Salem, Willie Smith, Minister (334-324-4338 or email: <ministerwjsmithdiscipleofchrist@yahoo.com>)

January 5 - Athens, First (256-232-5611) C.J. Cobb, Interim Minister (e-mail: <cj.cobb@wyle.com>)
January 12 - Anniston, First (256-236-1316) Laura Hutchinson, Minister (e-mail: <laurahutchinson@bellsouth.net>)
January 19 - Auburn, Village (334-887-5111) Sandy Downs, Minister (e-mail: <sanford.downs@adss.alabama.gov>)
January 26 - Dothan, First (334-792-2401) Bill Smith, Minister (e-mail: <bsndhn@gracea.net>)

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
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**NOTE:** THIS REPORT COMPARSES GIVING JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2012 TO GIVING JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2013
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**NOTE:** THIS REPORT COMPARES GIVING JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2012 TO GIVING JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2013
Come Home
2013 Thanksgiving Offering
www.disciplesmissionfund.org
Received in most congregations on November 10 and 17.

Disciples Divinity House
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
BRITE
DIVINITY SCHOOL

Lynchburg
TCU

HIRAM
Bethany

Barton

TRANSYLVANIA

EUREKA
Columbia

DRURY

CHRISTIAN

MIDWAY

SEMINARY

Jarvis

CHAPMAN

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Lexington

DISCIPLES DIVINITY HOUSE
@Vanderbilt

Your gift to the Thanksgiving Offering helps underwrite the education of students attending our 14 member undergraduate institutions and our 7 seminaries or divinity houses.
You are helping ensure that when students from your congregation go away to study they will Come Home to a Disciples institution.

Please give generously to this year’s Thanksgiving Offering.
Support our students so they can Come Home to a Disciples of Christ Institution!

The Colleges and Universities of the Christian Church

Find us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/TCUCC.
2013 Christmas Offering for Regional Ministries

“What Gifts Shall We Bring?”
Matthew 2:11

Matthew's story of the Wise Men who come seeking the newborn King is a familiar one, re-enacted in countless Christmas pageants every year. Amidst the costumes, animals, shepherds and mangers crowded into most depictions of the Nativity, the gifts they bring often are seen as just props for the Magi to carry. Yet they are far more than that.

Scholars believe the Wise Men came from ancient Persia (modern day Iran), and early Christian art often depicts them in Persian clothing. If so, their journey was long and arduous—and even as it neared its end finding “the one who has been born king” was not easy. He was not to be found in Jerusalem, the Holy City, as they expected, but in the tiny village of Bethlehem; even there they had to search for him. Yet when they found the Child, they were prepared. Bowing down, they worshiped him. “Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense [frankincense] and of myrrh” (Matthew 2:11), gifts that they had carried with them all the way from Persia, extravagant gifts fit for a King.

We may think ourselves incapable of giving such gifts until we remember that the good news of Jesus’ birth also came to common folk like the shepherds, and that extravagance comes in many forms. For the shepherds, it came in the form of praising God. For you, maybe it will be in doing mission together in response to a disaster or on an immersion trip to learn about another culture. Your extravagant gift to the Christmas offering, whether large or small, supports the many ways Disciples across your region discover and share their gifts of ministry. Whatever gift you bring, give it joyfully; that’s the kind of giving that makes God smile, and therein lies the secret of its extravagance.

As we celebrate anew the Good News of God-with-us, the coming of our Lord, what gifts shall we bring? Whatever it is, may we present them in humble thanksgiving and with joyful extravagance!

2013 Christmas Offering is in support of Regional Ministries.

The 2013 Christmas Offering for Regional Ministry will be received in many congregations on December 15 and 22.
Note: The following two pages in this Leader’s Packet are “copy-ready” pages which have been produced for use in worship bulletins on the Sundays between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Simply copy them in the quantity needed and cut them in half. They may be used in addition to promotional material that may be sent to you electronically.

The first page includes bulletin inserts for December 1 and 8. They are promotions for the 2013 Christmas Offering which will support the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

The second sheet includes bulletin inserts for December 15 and 22. They are also promotions for the 2013 Christmas Offering which will support the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

Your Help Is Needed:

A strong 2013 Christmas Offering in each of the Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations is very much needed in order to help this Region reach its ministry goals for 2014. Lay and clergy leaders are asked to be advocates for the ministry of the Region in their promotion of this special day offering.

In addition to using the next two pages as bulletin inserts, you may also use them in the following ways:

- as “Minutes for Mission” during worship
- as teaching tools in Sunday School classes, men’s and women’s groups, Board meetings, Elders/Deacons meetings, etc.
- as flyers placed in church hallways
- as newsletter inserts

Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
Gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its priority of “renewing spiritual identity and practice.”

(From the Region’s 2010 “Statement of Mission Priorities”)

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY AND PRACTICE

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is an expression of the church that is committed to the spiritual health of its members. Just as congregations provide programs that are aimed at helping their parishioners grow in their faith and become spiritually mature, so also the Region offers programs that invite persons into deeper relationships with God and call them to lives of witness and service. The Regional staff work together as a team with a variety of different planning groups to provide spiritual growth opportunities throughout the year. The list below details some of what is available to all congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida, thanks to the ministry of the Region.

Retreats/Workshops for Ministers - each January, and at other times
Nurturing the spirituality of children through Children Worship and Wonder training (in partnership with Disciples Home Missions)
Camps for young people, beginning after 2nd grade through grade 12
Retreats for Young Adults in January and in the Fall
Spring Gatherings and Fall Retreats for Women
Men’s Retreats (in March)
Senior Adult Retreats (early November)
Convocation Assemblies and/or One-Day Workshops (annually)
Biennial Congregational Transformation Events (in February)
Biennial Regional Assemblies (in April)

The Region also encourages spiritual growth through prayer. Regular emails to clergy invite them to lift up one another in prayer and support. The Regional Prayer Calendar aims to facilitate an active prayer life among our congregations as they pray for each other.

All gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 15 - 22

Gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its priority of “renewing and equipping Christian leadership and discipleship.”

(From the Region’s 2010 “Statement of Mission Priorities”)

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region embraces its important role in nurturing and equipping leaders for the church. Through the Committee on the Ministry, the Region gives oversight to the nurture and care of clergy as they engage in a variety of ministries for the church. The Committee provides accountability for ministers, holding them to certain requirements as they seek to remain in good standing with the church. This Committee provides workshops and encourages continuing education. A subcommittee gives oversight to funds that have been given to support the training and nurture of clergy. Through these funds the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has helped clergy leaders become educated and equipped for leadership in the church today.

In 2013 the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region, in collaboration with the Tennessee Region, has provided an opportunity for clergy leaders to participate in Colleague Groups that have been focused on the theme of evangelism. The resources, encouragement, and support that participants have received through this ministry in previous years (2006, 2009, and 2011) have been appreciated by participants and, in many cases, have resulted in a more focused and more effective ministry. The 2013 Colleague Groups are equipping participants to lead congregations as they seek to be faithful to the Great Commission in a rapidly changing environment.

The Region gives witness to the historic Disciples belief that ministry belongs to all Christians, not just clergy. Through the Regional Division of Nurture, many opportunities are provided – through retreats, workshops, assemblies, and other gatherings – that equip lay leaders as they help their congregations faithfully carry out their mission.

All gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 15 - 22
Gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its priority of “renewing commitment to mission in local communities and around the world.”

(From the Region’s 2010 “Statement of Mission Priorities”)

MISSION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Region seeks to empower and challenge congregations to impact their communities through Christian witness and service. Working with Week of Compassion and the Office of Disciples Volunteering, the Region served as a catalyst for congregations seeking to be a part of recovery efforts following the deadly tornadoes that ripped through Alabama in 2011. Two congregations became mission stations, hosting groups of Disciples from around the country as they came to work in recovery efforts. The Region encourages and celebrates many specific ministries of congregations that are aimed at meeting community needs. Such ministries have included after-school programs and tutoring, feeding/clothing ministries, Family Promise partnership, pre-school ministries, adult day care, recreational ministries, HIV/AIDS education, and much more. Disciples congregations, often assisted and even funded by the Region, are providing a Christian witness as they engage in ministries that are strengthening communities.

Every biennium the Region sponsors Miracle Days as occasions for persons to gather in unity from all across the Region at a particular location for hands-on ministry to increase the host congregation’s capacity for ministry in its community. There have been 7 Miracle Days sponsored by the Region since 2000. The next one is scheduled for June 7, 2014, at First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa.

Through its Anti-Racism Team, the Region continues to challenge its congregations to pay attention to the continuing division that exists in society due to racial discrimination. Structures and systems in which some are privileged and others disadvantaged are to be dismantled in the name of Christ. The Region is committed to its identity of being an anti-racist institution, yet it recognizes we have a long way to go to achieve true justice for all in our world.

All gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 15 - 22

Gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its priority of “renewing commitment to mission in local communities and around the world.”

(From the Region’s 2010 “Statement of Mission Priorities”)

MISSION AROUND THE WORLD

The Region has entered into a mission partnerships with the Christian Commission for Development in Honduras and the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Honduras. Facilitated in this partnership by Global Ministries, the Region is working to build the capacity of our brothers and sisters in Honduras as they provide vocational training for their young people. The Region has made substantial grants to both partners, in 2012 and in 2013, as a sign of solidarity with our new Honduran friends. The Region also made it possible for two representatives from Honduras to attend the 2012 Regional Assembly and to make visits throughout the Region during the week following. The Disciples Women are planning to sponsor and host a woman from Honduras who will join our women at the 2014 Quadrennial Assembly in Atlanta. The Region commissioned one of its ministers to spend the winter of 2013 in Honduras with partners there. A third delegation of Disciples from Alabama-Northwest Florida took place in March, 2013. At least one congregation in Alabama-Northwest Florida is making plans to send a group on a mission trip to Honduras in the coming months.

The Region enjoys a special relationship with Elena Huegel, our Global Mission Partner. Elena has been serving in Chile and makes regular visits to the Region to share about the work that Disciples are doing through partners in Chile.

The Region encourages people-to-people and woman-to-woman mission trips. The women of the Region, in particular, have demonstrated a commitment to the end of global human trafficking and a concern for international justice. Through education, child sponsorships, and other financial support, Disciples of Christ in Alabama-Northwest Florida are making a difference around the world.

All gifts to the 2013 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 15 - 22
REGIONAL MINISTRIES SUPPORTED THROUGH OUTREACH DOLLARS

When a congregation in Alabama-Northwest Florida makes a gift to the Disciples Mission Fund or to the Christmas Special Day Offering, the following ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region are made possible:

Camp and Conference
Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF) Conferences (each summer)
Chi Rho (Junior High) Camps (each summer)
Junior Camps (older elementary age) (each summer)
Discovery Camps (younger elementary age) (each summer)
Specialty Camps, such as Beach Camp and Family Camp

Young Adult Ministries
Support for Congregations Doing Campus Ministry
Support for Congregations in their outreach to young adults
Winter Young Adult Retreat (each January)
Young Adult Beach Retreat (every Fall)
Young Adult electronic ministries
Young Adult Mission Opportunities

Retreats for Spiritual Growth and Fellowship
“Youthtopia” (for Chi Rho and CYF youth - each January)
Women's Retreats (each September or October)
Men's Retreats (each spring)
Senior Adult Retreats (each fall)

Leadership Development/Educational Events
Christian Women's Fellowship/Disciples Women (CWF/DW) Events (each spring)
Training/Networking for Adult Leaders of Youth
Region-wide Training Workshops (annually)
Convocation-sponsored workshops (each June)
Youth Council Officers Training/Orientation (biennially)
Training for Moderators and Board Chairpersons (biennially)
Workshops on Stewardship and Outreach
Presentations from Global Mission Partners
Facilitating Global Mission Trips and Partnerships
Training in “Children Worship and Wonder”

Ministry Support
Ministers/Mates Retreats (each January)
Clergy Colleague Groups
Continuing Education workshops
Anti-Racism Training (every two years)
Boundary Training (annually)
Support for Women Clergy
Support for non-parish ministers
Ministry Assistance Program
Funding for Ministerial Education and Support
Interim Minister Training Workshops
Providing Accountability for ministers, maintaining standards for ministerial standing
Enlisting mentors/advisors for persons in Ministry Care
Giving counsel to ministers in the Search and Call process
and facilitating their consideration by congregations

(Continued on back)
Assemblies
Regional Assemblies (every 2 years)
Convocation Assemblies (every 2 years)

Congregational Support
Listening Conferences
Congregational Leadership Coaching
Church Transformation Events
Sponsorship in “The Journey” (with Hope Partnership)
Boundary Training for Volunteers
Children Worship and Wonder Training
Consultations on Congregational Programming
Consultations during ministerial transitions
Consultations in times of conflict and/or crisis
Sharing in significant events in congregational life
Maintaining a resource/lending library for congregations
Giving counsel to search committees and facilitating their
consideration of prospective ministerial candidates

Communications
The Christian (6 issues a year - sent electronically)
E-mail regarding pastoral concerns of clergy
Leader's Packets (6 times a year)
Sharing information/resources from the General Church
Offering resources and ideas through a website
Maintaining permanent files on congregations and clergy

Facilitating Shared Ministries
Establishing and receiving new congregations
Miracle Days (every two years)
Mission trips - Partnerships in Honduras
Reconciliation and Anti-Racism Ministries
Justice Ministries through Alabama Arise
Resource sharing between congregations

Leadership and Pastoral Care
Facilitating Colleague Groups for Pastors
Pastoral relationships with clergy and lay leaders
Advocating for greater unity and inclusivity in the church
Giving witness to covenantal relationships and facilitating partnerships between congregations and other
entities of the church
Promoting faithful stewardship of the church's resources
Promoting new forms of mission and ministry

How Much Should Our Congregation Give to the Disciples Outreach?

In past general assemblies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), congregations have been urged to give
at least a tithe (10% of all receipts) to Disciples outreach ministries through Disciples Mission Fund and the Special Day
Offerings. Some congregations exceed the tithe, some give less. Whatever your congregation gives for Disciples
Outreach, it should be given not out of obligation but out of gratitude for the privilege of being a part of the common
mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). These dollars result in the faithful communication of God's
redeeming love for humanity, made known in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your commitment to the whole mission which God is giving to the Christian Church (Disciples
of Christ).

November, 2013

Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
2014 MINISTERS AND MATES RETREAT

Hilton Garden Inn
Orange Beach, Alabama

January 13 -15, 2014

Guest Leader

Rev. Randall S. Johnson, Vice-President
Christian Church Foundation

Theme

“Focusing on the Main Thing will Set you Free”

“What are your passions? Do you get to spend time nurturing those passions or are there too many other obligations or distractions which get in the way? What are your priorities? Are they the same as your passions? It is my observation that life has a way of tiring us out if we are not nurturing our passions. The theme of our program will be “Focusing on the Main Thing will Set you Free.” We will explore ways in which we might be energized through finding ways to focus on using the unique gifts and graces that God has given to each one of us.”

Cost – $30 per person
(includes administrative costs and cost of Monday banquet)

The Ministers and Mates Retreat is open to all ministers with standing---active or retired, commissioned or ordained---in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Those who are under the care of the Committee on the Ministry in the Region are also welcome to attend. Hotel information and registration forms are sent to all ministers with standing in October. Please contact the Regional office if this information is needed. Join us for a stimulating event, combined with opportunities for rest and relaxation in a beautiful setting.

Christian Church in Alabama-NW Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
2014 Youhtopia
Winter Retreat for Chi Rho & CYF (Grades 6-12)
At CAMP CHANDLER
www.campchandler.org

Join us as we enjoy a weekend of games, challenges, and adventures led by your Regional Youth Council to Explore...

“Listening to God”

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.” – Psalm 46:10

WHEN: January 24-26, 2014
(Begins at 7:00 pm Friday - ends at 10:00 am Sunday)

Cost: $100.00 (includes lodging, meals, snacks, and T-shirt)

Each church is expected to provide one paid registered adult for every 1-6 youth attending the event. All adults attending must register and pay fees.

What to Bring?

- Bible
- Offering
- Sleeping bag/bedding
- Fitted twin sheet/Pillow
- Toiletries
- Towel
- *Snacks to Share*
  (Girls Sweet and Boys Salty)
- Sturdy shoes
- Flashlight
- Jacket/Raincoat
- Camera
- Closed toe shoes for high ropes
- Bug spray

WE ARE A DRUG-FREE COMMUNITY-NO DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR TOBACCO!!
REGISTRATION FORM FOR Youhtopia
DEADLINE: January 7th, 2014
(Sign, Include Payment, and Mail to)
Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Hwy 52, Helena, AL 35080

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M/F_________ T-SHIRT SIZE - (subject to availability if registration is not received by deadline) ____________

2014 COVENANT for Participants
Please read (or have read to you) the following:

- I will come to retreat expecting to grow in my faith and in relationship with others, becoming a special part of the retreat community. In order to do this, I covenant to follow all the rules and guidelines set by the Christian Church in Alabama Northwest Florida and any others set for this event. With this, I commit myself to the following: To be on time, attend and be attentive for all activities and participate in them fully
- Have fun and make sure everyone else does too!
- To respect each other regardless of age and to respect others’ feelings and thoughts
- I will not go from adult to adult to get an answer I want
- Be myself and open to making new friends
- Be inclusive at all times
- Cooperate with EVERYONE at ALL times
- Be respectful of God’s beauty in this special place and only leave footprints behind
- To take all that I learn about God and share it with my friends, family and church

2014 MEDICAL INFORMATION AND RELEASE
MEDICAL HISTORY: Answer with (yes or no):

- ______ Do you have any health problems?
- ______ Are you currently under the care of a physician or psychologist?
- ______ Do your need handicapped-accessible facilities?
- ______ Do you have any food or other allergies?
- ______ Do you expect to have any difficulty with normal event activities?
- ______ Do you take any prescription medication?

Should your child be allowed appropriate over-the-counter medications to be given as needed? Circle One:

YES or NO

Detail All Medical and Dietary Issues Below:
(if more room is needed, please attach a sheet to this form)

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

SIGNATURE, AGREEMENT AND RELEASE:
In case of emergency, I hereby give permission to the physician selected by the camp director to hospitalize, order injections, anesthesia or surgery for the child named above in order to secure necessary, proper medical care. I understand that I will be contacted immediately in the event that something unforeseen happens requiring my attention. I release the Retreat staff and management, Event directors and counselors, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida and its staff, from all responsibilities in case of sickness or accidents causing injury occurring during the event. I have provided proof of insurance to those in charge.

Emergency Contact(s) Name & Phone Number:

________________________________________________________

Insurance Information:

Name of Insurance Company, Address & Telephone Number

________________________________________________________

Member Name & Member ID

________________________________________________________

Signature of Parent/Guardian -regardless of age of youth

________________________________________________________
REFUND POLICY

Refund Policy for events sponsored by the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region: 100% refund for emergencies, provided that notification is received prior to the beginning of the event; 50% refund for emergencies in which notification (written) is made after the beginning of the event; 100% refund for non-emergencies if requested in writing at least seven days prior to the first day of the event; No refunds will be given for non-emergency cancellations after seven days prior to the beginning of the event. Written requests for refunds must be received by the Regional Office, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080 (email <alnwfl@aol.com>), within seven days of the last day of the event.

While refunds are not available other than as outlined in this policy, substitutions will be allowed as long as the original registrant, or responsible adult, is able to locate an eligible participant who is able to take the slot and as long as the original registrant, or responsible adult, communicates this information to the Regional office. The Region will not be responsible in assisting in identifying a substitute. Notification should be provided to the Regional Office as soon as possible and any substitute must complete the necessary paperwork prior to arrival at the event.

Approved by the Regional Board, February 20, 2010
STATE OF ALABAMA )

_____________________________ COUNTY )

YMCA HOLD HARMLESS AGREEMENT

I, _______________________________, as the parent or guardian for

(Parent’s Name)

_____________________________, a minor child who is in my care and

(Child’s Name)
custody, do hereby grant my permission for my child to attend a program or event at YMCA Camp Chandler. I fully understand the nature of camping and recreational activities associated with the use of the camp facilities and/or programs includes an inherent risk of danger, which may result in personal injury or harm to my child. I understand that my child will be under adult supervision at all times but, notwithstanding any level or degree of supervision, that accidents may occur which may result in physical injury or harm to my child. It is with the full understanding of the risks associated with these types of activities that I grant permission for my child to participate in the program to be conducted at YMCA Camp Chandler, and I agree to indemnify and hold harmless YMCA Camp Chandler, the Montgomery Metro YMCA, its staff, directors, employees, agents and/or representatives from any claim for any injury or damage which may result from my child’s attendance and participation in the program conducted on camp property. Permission is granted for my child to participate and I understand that by signing this form I am voluntarily and knowingly accepting responsibility for my child’s participation in the activity or program to be conducted at YMCA Camp Chandler. I also grant permission for pictures and images of my child to be taken while participating in activities and used for YMCA promotional purposes.

Dated this __________ day of ______________________, 20 __________.

Parent’s Signature: __________________________________________
YOUNG ADULT WINTER RETREAT

YMCA-Camp Chandler
near Wetumpka, Alabama

January 17 -19, 2014

Theme

"Banned Questions About Jesus"

Guest Facilitator

Rev. Troy Tatum
Senior Minister, First Christian Church, Birmingham

Cost — $50 per person
(This event is subsidized by the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region)

**********************************************************************************************************************************************

The Young Adult Winter Retreat is open to all who consider themselves to be young adults in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Persons in this group might be students, and non-students, married or single, with children and without children. Young adults in Alabama-Northwest Florida are a diverse group, yet they all are needing to be nurtured in their faith and strengthened through their fellowship with one another. Being together in the retreat setting will allow participants to grow closer to God to each other.

Christian Church in Alabama-NW Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
YOUNG ADULT WINTER RETREAT 2014
(With Rev. Troy Tatum, Senior Minister, First Christian Church, Birmingham)

January 17 - 19, 2014 ---- YMCA-Camp Chandler
Check-in begins as early as 4:00 p.m. on Friday. The Retreat officially begins with dinner on Friday at 6:00 p.m. and ends Sunday morning after worship and before lunch

Please note: Lodging is dormitory-style. Attendees are reminded to bring their own bedding, towels, and toiletries.

"Banned Questions About Jesus"

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Please detach and return --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

REGISTRATION FORM
(Use a separate form for each person)

Name:____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address:
Street...........................................................................................................................................................................................................
City..................................................................................................................................................................................
State..............................................................................................................................................................................
Zip...................................................................................................................................................................................

Phone No.:_________________________________________________________E-Mail Address:__________________________________________________________

Congregation________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Please note any food allergies on this form.

Any young adult who is wanting to participate in this event but who is unable to pay the registration fee is asked to contact John Mobley <jpmobley2@aol.com>. Limited financial assistance may be available. All grants will be kept confidential.

Please enclose payment of $50 with this Registration Form
Payment must be received by January 10, 2014.

Mail To:

Christian Church in AL-NW FL, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080 Phone (205-425-5245) Fax (205-425-5246)
REFUND POLICY

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Approved by the Regional Board, February 20, 2010
MEN’S RETREAT
(YMCA-Hargis Retreat, Chelsea, Alabama)

March 14 - 15, 2014
(Registration/Check-in begins as early as 2:00 p.m. Retreat officially begins with dinner on March 8 at 6:00 p.m. and ends Saturday by 2:30 p.m.)
Optional Arrival Date - March 13, 2014 Men may come a day early for fishing, hiking, horseshoes, table games, and fellowship time (Added cost - $30, no meals included).

“Rise Up, O Men of God”

Resource Leader:

Rev. Arnold Nelson
Pastor, First Christian Church, Duncan, Oklahoma
Chaplain for the General Conference of Disciples Men

Registration Cost: $80/person ($70 if received before Feb. 22)
** $40/person for those coming for Saturday only

Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
MEN’S RETREAT 2014

March 14 - 15, 2014 — YMCA-Hargis
Registration/Check-in begins as early as 2:00 p.m. on Friday. The Retreat officially begins with dinner on Friday at 6:00 p.m. and ends Saturday by 2:30 p.m.

Optional Arrival Date - March 13, 2014 Some men may wish to come a day early for fishing, hiking, horseshoes, table games, and fellowship (Added cost - $30.00, no meals included).

*Men are reminded to bring their own bedding, towels, and toiletries. Men are also reminded to bring their Challenge Goal offerings to the Retreat.*

“Rise Up, O Men of God”

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REGISTRATION FORM
(Please use a separate form for each person)

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Address: _________________________________________________________

Street __________________________ City __________________________ State _______ Zip _______

Phone No.: ____________________________ E-Mail Address: __________________________

Please check one: _____ I will arrive March 13, one day early _____ I will arrive March 14
(If arriving on March 13, add $30 to registration payment)
_____ I will be coming for Saturday only (cost is $40)

Will this be your first Alabama-NW Florida Men’s Retreat? ______ Yes ______ No

Congregation ____________________________

*Limited financial assistance may be available upon request by pastors to either Phil Terry, Men’s President, or John Mobley. All financial assistance grants will be kept confidential.*

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Please enclose payment of $80 with Registration Form (or $70, if received prior to February 22). This payment covers the cost of registration, three meals, and lodging at YMCA-Hargis. Persons coming for Saturday only should pay $40, which covers breakfast and lunch.

Payment in full must be received no later than March 10.

Mail To:

Christian Church in AL-NW FL, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080 Phone (205-425-5245) Fax (205-425-5246)
REFUND POLICY

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Approved by the Regional Board, February 20, 2010
Continuing Education Opportunity for Ministers and Persons in Ministry Care

“HEALTHY BOUNDARIES”

a Workshop for Ministers and those in the Ministry Care Program of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED THIS WORKSHOP IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

Attendance at this workshop is required in order to maintain Ministerial Standing or be continued in Ministry Care.

Resource Leaders:

Dr. Dale Braxton and
Dr. Nisha Warbington
(Certified Trainers through the FaithTrust Institute)

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2014
9:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.

Note: For those with Ministerial Standing or who are in the Ministry Care Program who are required to attend this workshop, there is no cost to participate. For all others, the cost is $50. Reservations are necessary for ALL persons planning to attend and must be made by calling 205-425-5245 or by emailing <alnwfl@aol.com> by March 8.

Location of the Workshop
Regional Office
861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080

Christian Church In Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, Alabama 35080
Christian Church (DOC) in ALNWFL Family Camp 2014

Please join us at Oak Mountain State Park for a wonderful gathering of families of all sorts for a weekend of fellowship, fun, and worship!!

Mark Your Calendars March 21-23, 2014

We will gather as a group for meals, fellowship, and worship each day, and there will also be plenty of free time for you to spend as a family doing a variety of fun activities around Oak Mountain. Lodging options will include tent camping, cabins, RVs, nearby hotels, so every family can find their comfort zone. Visit OakMountainCabins.com for more details.

Additional Information will be available in the coming months so keep an eye on the Regional Website, Leaders’ Packet, Newsletter, and Facebook Page!!
Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida

April 25-27, 2014
Fort Walton Beach, Florida

Co-Hosted By:
First Christian Church and Primera Iglesia Cristiana Of Ft. Walton Beach

For More information contact the Regional Office at
861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080 • 205-425-5245
Alnwfl@aol.com • www.alnwfldisciples.org
Check out our retreat pictures on our Facebook page at Disciples Women In Al-Nwfl Region or Like our page! Share with everyone what your group is doing.

Email Ellen Rawls for questions at: Ellenrawls@aol.com

Our ladies gathered at Camp Chandler on October 11th – 13th for a marvelous, spirit-filled weekend. LaVerne Thorpe, Vice-President of International Disciples Women’s Ministries, poured out wisdom to us on how all of us can be ready to answer God’s call with “Lord, Here am I”. Rev. Diane Wood shared the labyrinth as a spiritual practice with us. We shared our faith walks and also community service projects. We had crocheting and mask making activities to prepare for Quadrennial 2014. Special thanks to our Retreat Directors, Linda Caswell and Jeanne Bellamy! Thanks so very much to everyone who helped to make our retreat successful.

Margie Lee from Dothan is our Quadrennial Promotional Coordinator. Arlene Pimentel, Quadrennial Assembly Coordinator of the International Disciples Women’s Ministries encourages all of us to like the Facebook page at www.dhm.disciples.org or check out www.discipleswomen.org. There are a multitude of resources available at the IDWM website. The theme is “I See You”. Participants are encouraged to create a mask to enter into a fundraiser for Human Trafficking. The entry fee is $10 and all proceeds will go to fight Human Trafficking. Human Trafficking victims are hidden in plain sight behind whatever masks their hidden feelings. Our Global Service Project will be the Minnie Vautrin China Fund to help women in China. Our Regional Service Project is split between The WellHouse (Human Trafficking Victims’ shelter) in Birmingham and bringing a Honduran woman to Quadrennial 2014.


Make plans to attend Quadrennial 2014 in Atlanta June 25th – June 29th at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. Go to www.discipleswomen.org and click on Quadrennial Assembly under Resource Pages.
E-newsletters: Worth More Than You Know

E-newsletters are pervasive—marketers, businesses, politicians, civic organizations, and physicians, among many others, prize them for the content they deliver. Churches have also embraced e-newsletters because information can be easily shared with members. But they’re worth more—much more.

Whether your congregation is new to e-newsletters or a long-time user, the vast majority of congregations do not fully mine the reader information that e-newsletter companies make available. Many people are aware that e-newsletters provide “open” and “click” rates; however, this overlooks 90 percent of what makes e-newsletters such a powerful tool for building community, empowering your staff, and reaching out to others.

Using E-newsletters Effectively

In an age where social media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) and mobile technology represent the cutting edges of communications, e-newsletters are a bit old-school. What sets e-newsletters apart from any other form of electronic communication?

- They provide a true look into readers’ reactions to what your church is supporting. While social media allows for feedback and reaction, those writing are aware that everyone is seeing what they’re saying and reacting to, so they self-screen what they say. They may “like” something not because they really like it, but because a friend—or the minister—put it up. E-newsletter subscribers, however, do no such self-screening. Most are unaware that others are tracking what they open and click (though this is beginning to change), and in the comfort of their home or office they feel no compunction to engage something for reasons other than genuine interest.
- They provide unparalleled granular detail about who reads your material. E-newsletter data allow you to track readers’ reading histories, who they have shared the information with, and how many times any given piece is read over time and by who.
- They can help develop a stronger sense of community. E-newsletters require a great deal of work. Some congregations are finding that in this work there is an opportunity to create community by turning members into profile-writers, book reviewers, designers, and editors. The e-newsletter goes beyond sharing information; it develops community.

Best Approaches

Developing healthy approaches to working with e-newsletters ensures that you remain flexible in your work. Done right, e-newsletters should constantly be changing as you use them to experiment with new ideas and adapt to what your members show interest in.

- Think and Learn. E-newsletters are popular tools for sharing and promoting activities and programs. In reality, pushing information is among the least effective uses of this tool. When building your e-newsletter, think first about what you want to learn, not what you need to communicate. Are your education programs connecting with people? Do you understand how people connect with one another? What are the big ideas your congregation wrestles...
with? Are people’s spiritual needs being met? Are they growing spiritually? Are there undiscovered volunteers you don’t know about? Running articles that test these ideas will yield rich results.

- **Track, Track, Track.** It’s not enough to know how many times something was opened, or how many clicks it received. Alone, this data tells you little. However, placed in context, and measured over time, you will begin to understand the habits and interests of your congregation. Are people on mobile or desktops? Do they read in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Are they sharing the information on social media? If they are, which channels? Do certain members read everything? Who are they? Do certain members just lurk? Why? What time of year do people respond to topics? Tracking can tell you all this, and raise hundreds of additional questions.

- **Embrace Being Wrong.** The desire to be right all the time will impede your ability to learn what your e-newsletter is teaching you. Pieces that receive few clicks and opens aren’t failures but important lessons in what people respond to. Maybe it was poorly written. Poorly timed. Poorly placed. Ask the hard question: Why did this fail to engage congregational readers? Then search for the answers.

### Mistakes to Avoid

We expect a lot out of our church communications. And although most of us know that no one way of communicating will reach everyone, we want to believe that we can develop one channel that most people in the congregation will depend on for information. And while carefully designed e-newsletters will tell you a lot, they are not a panacea anymore than social media, print newsletters, bulletin boards, phone trees, or public announcements. But to get the most out of this communication tool, here are five practices to avoid:

- **Don’t send a PDF of your existing print newsletter.** Most people don’t read print newsletters. Putting your print piece in e-newsletter format won’t change that. An e-newsletter represents a whole other way of communicating, so wrapping it up in an online format won’t make the print version more appetizing, or the electronic communication exciting.

- **Don’t expect everyone to get on board.** As noted above, e-newsletters can be great community builders. But not everyone is going to share your excitement. Don’t expect or force them to. If you do, those who resist will feel left out and unheard.

- **Don’t expect instant results.** Building a readership takes time. Many church leaders expect half or more of the congregation will read the e-newsletter in the beginning. They’re shocked when they realize that only 10 percent of subscribers (and not everyone subscribes) will read what you write at first. Time, patience, and a willingness to be wrong and to learn will change this.

- **Don’t abandon other communication channels.** On average, you can only expect 10 percent of subscribers to click through and read your e-newsletter early on. Most congregations are fortunate to get 30 percent of members to subscribe initially. If you drop other communication channels right away, you’re effectively cutting off 60-70 percent of your congregation. Allow the e-newsletter to blossom and work in tandem with other ways of communicating.

- **Don’t ignore the tracking.** The ability to track what every reader reads, and doesn’t read, over long periods is what sets e-newsletters apart from social media, the website, and print publications. If you choose to ignore it, you have effectively nullified all the positives that e-newsletters bring to a congregation.

### So What Do I Use?

There are many good e-newsletter programs on the market. The oldest, and probably best known, is Constant Contact, which features robust analytics, easy design, and a full range of exceptional templates. Many other programs share the program’s one drawback—it costs. Not much at first, but Constant Contact and others charge for every little feature.

MailChimp is an excellent alternative. Analytics, photos, and basic templates are all free, as are sending the emails—so long as your list doesn’t exceed 2,000 people and you don’t send more than 12,000 individual emails per month. Most churches will never come close to this.

### Final Thoughts

E-newsletters offer a communication learning experience that no other tool can match. With careful tracking, you can learn what your congregation reacts to, improve the way you communicate with them, and test new ideas. The results? Empowered staff, a more connected congregation, and unprecedented insight into your members’ lives.

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**About the Writer:** Martin Davis owns Sacred Language Communications, formerly directed Alban’s Congregational Resource Guide, and has 20 years of experience working with congregations (www.sacredlanguagecommunications.com).

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www.TheParishPaper.com
Why a Sense of Belonging Matters

With our cultural emphasis on individuality, too many people are lonely and feel disconnected from others in their community. Because a sense of belonging can be linked to economic development, city planners and community organizers attempt to create environments where residents can enjoy a sense of belonging. Local churches also provide some of the fiber that weaves people together by offering them a place to belong and to be known.

Strong congregations organize in ways that help people feel close as they worship together, disclose life’s joys and sorrows, and share their deepest beliefs. Strong congregations find approaches to encourage emotional attachment because having a sense of belonging is a basic human need. Psychologist Abraham Maslow, who wrote about the hierarchy of human needs, cited belonging as the third most important, coming after only physiological and safety needs. For worshipers, the sense of belonging is how individuals experience community. Intentionally fostering a sense of belonging among members is one of the weight-bearing walls in the structure of strong congregations.

What Creates a Sense of Belonging?

Focusing on members’ vertical relationship with God alone—with little attention to their horizontal relationships with other worshipers—slowly unravels the community’s overall health. What exercises increase the congregation’s heart rate?

Offering friendship. Close friendships generate feelings of belonging. One of the most important resources a congregation can offer to people is friendship. People flourish when we give them our time, attention, and acceptance. Unfortunately, congregations too often offer “help” to those in need without also offering friendship. Likewise, worship services may be experienced in the same space, but the opportunity to make friends is not part of the equation. Strong churches create many avenues for people to learn the names and interests of others as well as group social time. Intentionally practicing multiple means for long-term members as well as newcomers to be known and to know others is sacred work. As John O’Donohue asserts: “Friendship is the nature of God.”

The size of the congregation doesn’t make a difference in whether people have close friends within the church or whether their participation is increasing or decreasing. Both large and small churches must engage in practices to address this fundamental human need.

Helping worshipers grow spiritually. When congregations help worshipers grow spiritually, they are also creating stronger bonds with others. Worshipers who are spiritually connected are also emotionally connected. The venue for spiritual growth varies but most people need to devote time to private devotional activities, seek to grow through worship service participation, learn from and with others in a small-group setting, and discover new truths through service and leadership. Frederick Buechner shares the conviction that “when faith stops changing and growing, it dies on its feet.” Congregations that fail to meet these needs of their members place them at spiritual risk.

Creating opportunities for participation and service. Worshiper involvement and participation that grows over time signal that the sense of attachment and belonging is also rising. People gain a sense of

HOW CAN YOU SAY WE HAVE NO FRIENDS AT CHURCH? WE’VE BEEN SITTING NEXT TO TED AND SUE AND CUTE LITTLE CHARLIE FOR 6 YEARS!

TOM AND HELEN AND CUTE LITTLE MEGAN.

FLETCHER
satisfaction from contributing to the congregation’s ministries and feel part of a team.

Typically, a sizable percentage show up at worship but sit in the bleachers during other church activities. In the average congregation, only one-third of the worshipers engage in at least four of these ways: attending services; joining a small group; holding a leadership position; being a part of church decision making; and regularly giving money. Some churches believe that they lose members because new attendees drift away not long after joining. But in truth, these newcomers never formed meaningful attachments. Effective congregations build assimilation bridges by which newcomers quickly bond to new friends, groups, and service opportunities.

Meeting age and life cycle needs. Congregations with a healthy heart—those with a high percentage of worshipers feeling a strong sense of belonging—recognize how younger worshipers connect to places (e.g., through sport teams or mission activities). Worshipers younger than forty-four years of age count on being emotionally attached to their congregation as a key ingredient for their commitment and involvement. At the same time, congregations cannot take older worshipers’ attachment for granted. In fact, congregations with an older age profile tend to have lower overall scores on sense of belonging measures.

Building positive engagement in the congregation’s future vision. When a congregation captures worshipers’ imagination about the church’s future ministry possibilities, worshipers also have a greater sense of belonging. They are able to envision what the faith community working together can accomplish with God’s help. Further, they have been offered a stake in that future by committing to share their time and talents to make it happen. Everyone acts on the shared belief that the best years of the church’s ministry lie ahead.

When Being Friendly Is Not Enough

A true congregational strength consistently operates whether or not the worshipers or leadership are aware of it. Further, a real strength is embedded in the behaviors, beliefs, and values of the majority of worshipers. As a result, a number of worshipers can leave without diminishing this strength nor does it depend on a few key leaders. A genuine congregational strength gains momentum and muscle when it becomes central to the conscious identity of the congregation.

Without routine maintenance and regular exercise, the strength of a healthy sense of belonging among church members and the experience of community quickly deteriorate. Strong congregations demonstrate four pathways to generating feelings of belonging. They:

- Develop groups that help people feel loved and give them the opportunity to express love for others.
- Promote friendships that give newcomers feelings of acceptance and self-esteem.
- Offer service or leadership roles and responsibilities that give people a sense of purpose, meaning, and positive self-identity.
- Present spiritual-growth experiences that deepen members’ life-shaping values.

Each of these pathways are like load-bearing walls. Remove one or more of the walls and the structure is weaker and more vulnerable to mission failure.

The Bottom Line

“The hunger to belong is not merely a desire to be attached to something. It is rather sensing that great transformation and discovery become possible when belonging is sheltered and true.”

This description underscores why strong churches make possible the greatest individual transformations and discoveries of all. With the significance of belonging in mind, review the structure, practices, and rituals present in your current worship services, educational programs, small groups, ministry outreach, and decision-making processes.

- Does participation give people the chance to make friends and deepen their relationships with others?
- Does involvement foster greater spiritual growth and understanding?
- Does participation help people to learn more about the congregation’s ministry vision and help them find a place to use their gifts toward that purpose?

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