**THE CHRISTIAN**
**ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA**
A Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) In Alabama-Northwest Florida Publication

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**IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER**

*All meeting locations are at the Regional Office unless otherwise noted*

**APRIL**

2  Women’s Spring Gathering - First Christian Church, Montgomery (10:00 a.m.)
6  Licensing and Ordination I (9:15 a.m.)
16  Division of Mission (10:00 a.m.)
17 - 24  Easter Offering (for general ministries of the church)
23  Regional Assembly Planning Committee (10:00 a.m.) - New Hope Christian Church, Letohatchee

**MAY**

10  Licensing and Ordination II (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian Church, Montgomery
13 - 14  Retreat for Clergy on Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation - Ramada Inn, Montgomery
15 - 20  Young Adult Spirituality and Sexuality Retreat at Smith Lake
25  Staff Planning meeting (10:00 a.m.)
29 - June 5  Pentecost Offering (for new congregation establishment)

**JUNE**

5  Labyrinth Dedication & Celebration, Village CC, Auburn (5 year anniversary)- 4:00 p.m.
10 - 15  Beach Camp (begins at 7:00 p.m. and ends at 10:00 a.m.) - Noah’s Ark Retreat Center - Panama City Beach, FL
20 - 24  Junior Camp, Chi Rho Camp, and CYF Conference (begins and ends at 10:00 a.m.) - YMCA-Hargis
24 - 26  Discovery Camp (begins at 10:00 a.m.; ends at 4:00 p.m.) - YMCA-Hargis
24 - 26  Regional Convocation Assembly - New Hope Christian Church, Letohatchee
GOD’S ACTIVITY AMONG US
(stories of how God is using the Christian Church to touch and transform lives)

What My Faith Means To Me

My name is Jeff. Having lived an outlaw life of violence, drugs, crime, and white supremacy, hate and evil flowed through my entire being. Called a sociopath, a bad seed, a devil in human form, I was hated and feared. The God I knew was the hell-fire and brimstone ‘gotcha-punishing’ God taught to me by a well-meaning Grandmother. All I wanted was to be as far from Him as possible.

I studied hate. I was involved in smuggling drugs, guns, even humans. I planned and instigated violent crimes against Jews and people of color—all this to be accepted by those I thought were the “right” people…the strong, the merciless. I worked hard to be the most violent, the most hateful, the most vicious. After nearly clubbing a man to death and being sent to prison for the criminally insane at age 52, for the first time in my life, I was afraid. I asked God to take my life, or tell me how to handle the fear I had never known before. I heard a voice in my spirit just as clear as a bell…“I'll take care of you because I love you, and I have work for you. For the first time in my life, I felt peace and love. I knew then he wasn’t a “gotcha” God. He loved me. He freed my soul from tons of guilt and hatred. The greatest joy of all is I’m forgiven for all the evil deeds I committed, all the people I hurt…some physically, some mentally, and many financially.

He has called me to help the homeless. I myself have been homeless since my release from prison in December of 2008. It’s tough, but it gives me the insight to know what my people need. Jesus chose to be homeless, and we, the sick and afflicted street people, are who he came to. He has called me to Grateful Life Community Church (Disciples of Christ). I am there to serve and protect my pastor and my church family. I have been forgiven much, and feel a strong need to give much back. I no longer have the capacity to hate. He loved me enough to die for me. He has given me a very precious special teacher who has never judged me, never condemned me, only encouraged and loved me like I’ve never known before, and has shown me how powerful His love is. I’m learning in leaps and bounds how to use this powerful weapon. His love has so worked in me that today, my two best friends are a Jew and a black man. I would give my life for either of them without hesitation. I love you all, and pray that you can know and experience the depth and power of His love. I keep foremost in my mind the greatest joy of all…I’M FORGIVEN!

( Editor’s Note: In Luke 15:10 we read the words of Jesus, “I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Thanks be to God for this story of transformation, made possible through the ministry of a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).)

“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

(Editor’s note: Stories, submitted by our readers, are needed for this regular feature of our newsletter. Pastors, in particular, are asked to share stories that celebrate the ways that God is working in the ministries of Disciples congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida.)
REFLECTIONS FROM THE REGIONAL MINISTER

How can I begin adequately to thank Disciples in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region for their love and generosity! I was totally surprised and overwhelmed on Friday evening of the “What If...?” congregational transformation event as Moderator Kay Stegall presented me with words of appreciation, a card, a framed poem of gratitude, and a staggering monetary gift from Disciples in Alabama-Northwest Florida – all in honor of the 15 years of service I completed as Regional Minister in February, 2011. I didn’t know what to say when this was presented to me, and I really do not know what to say now. My heart is very full of love and thankfulness.

The greatest honor of my ministry was receiving the call to serve as Regional Minister in Alabama-Northwest Florida in 1996. Since that time, the joy and fulfillment that I have experienced through this ministry are far beyond what I ever could have imagined or hoped for. The people with whom I have been privileged to serve have been an inspiration to me. The congregations that have invited me into their lives in a variety of ways have lifted my spirit. I thank God each day for this calling. I truly believe it is the best ministry that the church has available – at least it is the best one for me. I hope that my gifts have added something of value to the ministry we share together. Your expressions of love and affirmation convince me that perhaps they have. Thanks be to God. May it continue for many more years!

I am deeply grateful for the many individuals who made monetary gifts to honor me. I realize in these difficult economic times that such gifts were sacrificial in nature. Although I feel undeserving of such a gesture, I receive it in the spirit in which it was given, with love and appreciation. Thank you! Thank you! There will be special ways that Valya and I will use this money during this sabbatical year. The Region’s Executive Committee has approved a sabbatical for me from July 15 until October 15. Although the break from this ministry will help me to be at my best as your Regional Minister, I have no doubt that I will be grateful for the opportunity in October to return to such a loving, supportive Region.

Your partner in ministry,
John P. Mobley
WOMEN OF THE REGION SET TO GATHER IN MONTGOMERY

On Saturday, April 2, 2011, all women of the Region are encouraged to attend the Women’s Spring Event, "Tell It--What's Your Story?" This gathering will be held at First Christian Church, Montgomery, beginning at 10:00 a.m. Lunch will be served. Information on this event was shared in the March Leader’s Packet. Please contact Betty Wright, Regional Women’s Ministries Staff Person, if more information is needed. Betty’s email address is <btywright@aol.com>.

Village Christian Church will host a Miracle Day anniversary celebration on June 5, 2011 from 4-6 PM. Everyone in the Region is invited to participate, especially those persons who participated in Miracle Day 2006. Pastor Diane Wood reports "The meditation garden and labyrinth have been a blessing to the Opelika/Auburn community for five years and so we are throwing a party and inviting our neighbors to celebrate with us.” There will be a brief program in the pavilion during which the Region's new portable canvas Santa Rosa labyrinth will be dedicated. Afterward, there will be a time of fellowship and fun activities for kids of all ages.

GOT SPIRIT?? –
Traditional Summer Camps
YMCA Hargis

CYF Conference (9th-12th grade)
Chi Rho (6th-8th grade)
Junior (4th-5th)
June 20-24, 2011

Cost is $225.00 before June 1st
& $265.00 after June 1st

Discovery Camp (2nd & 3rd grade)
June 24-26, 2011

Cost is $135.00 Before June 1st
& $150.00 after June 1st

BEACH CAMP
(formerly Fine Arts Camp)
For Youth in Grades 6th-12th
June 10th-15th at Noah's Ark in PCB, FL

Beach Camp: $225.00 before June 1st
$265.00 after June 1st

Last summer, our Region was able to use the Fine Arts Camp setting as a wonderful tool for outreach. Our youth were able to share with those visiting Panama City Beach by participating in beach ministry and by leading a Backyard Bible School at a local campground. These experiences led us to revision our beach camp, which will focus more on the idea of outreach through art, music, education, and evangelism. Encourage your youth group to consider making this your Youth Mission Trip!!
Tell it! Disciples worship a God of Transformation!

With forklifts and power cables all over the floor of the yawning 79,000 square foot Nashville Convention Center Plenary Hall, the space will look like anything but a holy place on Fri., July 8. But by the time a child lights the candle at Opening Worship on Sat., July 9, the Holy Spirit and the hundreds of people who have planned for this moment will have set things right. Here's a summary of the celebrations planned.

What does Moses have to say to 21st Century Disciples?

Opening Worship - 7:30 p.m., Sat., July 9

Opening worship of the 2011 General Assembly will set the stage for the entire gathering as Disciples hear the story of Moses' sermon to the Israelites before they cross into the Promised Land (Deut. 6:1-12). The congregation will hear the welcoming music of the Kentucky Men's Chorus, a 100-member choir that will sing time-honored hymns in the moments leading up to worship (The Chorus will begin shortly after doors open at 7 p.m.). Opening worship will feature a musical instrument that the Assembly hasn't seen in a few years - the organ, played by acclaimed Disciples organist, Julia Callaway, Vine Street Christian Church.

A pioneering pastor who led a new church start in Olathe, Kans. before Disciples made church planting a priority, Holly McKissick, a gifted leader and storyteller, will bring the message.

The offering received Saturday night will go toward the Pension Fund's 13th Check to supplement the pensions of retired ministers and missionaries. Disciples who have always wanted to say, "I played a Nashville stage to a crowd of thousands," are invited to join a volunteer guitar ensemble. Write to generalassembly@ogmp.disciples.org for more information. Watch www.disciples.org/ga for sign up.
Movement for Wholeness offers a healing touch
AIDS/HIV Healing Worship 8:30 - 9:30 a.m., Sun., July 10

Disciples will gather on Sunday morning in the plenary hall in a service of prayer and healing for those living with HIV/AIDS, and their caregivers. Past General Assemblies have included the service, but moving it to the plenary hall underscores the importance of helping people living with HIV/AIDS to feel the acceptance of the church, event planners say.

Sunday's scriptural emphasis is Mark 2:1-12 - the story of a paralyzed man whose friends literally "raise the roof" to get him to Jesus. Bringing the sermon is William L. "Bill" Lee, former Disciples moderator and pastor of 800-member Loudon Avenue Christian Church. Lee and his congregation are a healing presence in Roanoke, Va., where they founded and operate a clinic serving 9,000 uninsured or under-insured patients a year.

Worship will be limited to one hour, to allow time for participants to also worship in the local community at the location of their choice. Doors open at 8 a.m. for seating.

A Gospel Choir, under the direction of Steevon Hunter, will celebrate with special music.

Nashville sure to 'bring it' when it comes time to 'Sing it!'
"Sing it!" Concert 7:00 p.m., Sun., July 10

Sunday night's gathering, which features a number of musical Disciples who call Nashville home, is a benefit concert for Week of Compassion, the Disciples disaster relief and development organization.

Week of Compassion was on hand in Nashville right after the spring 2010 floods, providing emergency relief grants and solidarity on behalf of Disciples.

Songwriter Craig Wiseman, recording artist Gabe Dixon, flutist Michael Morton (a Nashville native transplanted to Los Angeles), and the ever-popular singer/songwriter Andra Moran are only a few of the local artists whose presence will make this General Assembly unforgettable.

Dixon, son of a Disciples minister, has performed with Paul McCartney, Alison Krauss, and O.A.R. His group's 2008 album earned "Best of the Year" status from Paste, American Songwriter, and the year-end Village Voice critics poll. His new solo album, One Spark, will be released this spring, and will feature a duet with Alison Krauss.

Wiseman is married to Disciples minister KK Wiseman. Seventeen of his songs reached #1 on the charts, including his Grammy-Award winning, "Live Like You Were Dying," performed by Tim McGraw. His music has been recorded by Faith Hill, Kenny Chesney, Beverly Knight, Roy Orbison, Dolly Parton and Brooks & Dunn. He was named ASCAP's Songwriter of the Year three years running.

Morton and Moran will co-host the concert. Morton, on flute, has accompanied past General Assemblies and Disciples gatherings. Co-host Moran, a contemporary Christian artist and longtime favorite among Disciples, brings her effervescent personality and guitar-strumming talents to the stage.

After the free concert, Week of Compassion will host a reception at the Country Music Hall of Fame. The reception is a ticketed event, ($25) to help raise funds and awareness about Week of Compassion.
**There's something moving among us**
Emergent Worship; 7:30 p.m. Mon., July 11

With the witness of Luke 10 as a guide, Disciples worshiping on Monday night can expect a few challenges about what it means to be a movement for wholeness in a post-Modern era. Popular author, speaker, and evangelical pastor **Brian D. McLaren** will bring the message. McLaren is considered one of the most innovative of Christian leaders today. He appears frequently on television, radio, news programs and print media outlets, including "Larry King Live," "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly," "Nightline," Christianity Today, Christian Century and the Washington Post. Time Magazine has identified the 55-year-old as one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals.

During worship, he will dig deeply into Luke 10:1-28, where Jesus sends out seventy in pairs ahead of him. When these followers return with joy, Jesus celebrates, too and reminds them to stay humble and focus on God's salvation.

Worship will also feature the stories of some Disciples who feel they have been "sent" into the world to represent Jesus. Monday night's offering will benefit **Reconciliation Ministry**, which leads the denomination's effort to move toward wholeness by becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racism church.

**'Once upon a time'... the power of story explored**
"Tell it!" Testimonies, 7:30 p.m., Tues., July 12

Disciples gathering for the Tuesday night "Tell It!" Testimonies may be there as much because of the beloved storyteller who will host, as they are for the inspiritational stories. During Tuesday night's gathering, **Fred B. Craddock** will invite the listener into an intimate setting akin to a fireside chat. Doors open at 7 p.m. for seating.
He'll share why stories matter, and he'll even share a bit of his own faith journey. And he will introduce Disciples to "testify" to the presence of God working in the world. Onstage with Craddock will be the **Cherry Log Christian Church Choir**, under the direction of **Richard Lumpkin**.

Craddock, is Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, emeritus, in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. His books include Cherry Log Sermons, Craddock Stories and Reflections on My Call to Preach.
For more than six decades he has enlightened, delighted, compelled, and most of all engaged Disciples with his stories shared in the context of sermons.
Attendees are invited to participate in an outdoor, **Immigration Prayer Vigil** immediately following the story-telling experience.
How will they hear the good news?
Commissioning worship, 7:30 p.m., Wed., July 13

In Romans 10:11-15, the Apostle Paul underscores the importance of taking the gospel as the community goes forth. The final evening’s worship will conclude the 2011 General Assembly with a great "sending forth" to "Tell it!" to all of God's children. **Marian Wright Edelman**, founder and leader of the Children’s Defense Fund and lifelong advocate for children, will preach. Under Edelman's leadership, the Children's Defense Fund has become the nation's strongest voice for children and families and has functioned in that role for 38 years. She'll bring a word of challenge to a church called to "Tell it!" to our children and our children's children.

We'll also celebrate the gifts of the children and youth in our midst, including music by the **Assembly Youth Choir led by Thomas Schuyler** of Vine Street Christian Church in Nashville, and an accomplished musician. **Madison Oliver**, 13, member of the First Christian Church of Orange, in Orange, Calif., has been studying ballet at the Tracy Dee Academy of Dance since the age of 3. She will bring her gifts to the worship, including leading the recessional as the Assembly disperses.

Wednesday's offering will benefit **Disciples Mission Fund**, which funds Disciples ministries all over the world.

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**CENTER FOR FAITH AND GIVING STEWARDSHIP ACADEMY**
**PRE-ASSEMBLY EVENT ON JULY 8, 2011, NASHVILLE, TN**

Join us for a rich day filled with leadership by some of the best and brightest authors and speakers about the church’s most compelling subject — stewardship! This event is for both clergy and lay people who want to know more about this spiritual discipline and who want to be equipped to lead lives as faithful stewards. This day will enable you to provide leadership in your congregation on this important issue and will broaden your understanding through the recognition that stewardship is not fund raising. It is about much more than money—it is about responding to the activity of a Generous God with the whole of our lives. Stewardship is a lifestyle that leads to the healing of creation and brings wholeness in a fragmented world.

For more information about the Stewardship Academy, visit http://www.disciplesmissionfund.org/Stewardship/tabid/683/Default.aspx
Easter Special Day Offering

General Ministries that receive support from the Easter Offering include:

- Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries
- Church Extension
- Council on Christian Unity
- Disciples Benevolent Services
- Disciples of Christ Historical Society
- Disciples Home Missions
- Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries
- Higher Education and Leadership Ministries
- National Convocation
- North American Asian/Pacific Disciples
- Pension Fund

IS YOUR CONGREGATION A CANDIDATE FOR HOSTING THE NEXT MIRACLE DAY IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA?

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has held six successful Region-wide Miracle Days since 2000. These Miracle Day projects have attracted Disciples from all across the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region to work together to enhance a host congregation’s capacity for ministry.

The Region’s Division of Mission hopes to recommend that Miracle Days continue to happen in Alabama-Northwest Florida. The date for the next Miracle Day has been set tentatively for Saturday, June 9, 2012. Applications from congregations that have an interest in hosting the next Miracle Day are welcomed. An application can be found in the March Leader’s Packet and on the Region’s website <www.alnwfdisciples.org> or you may contact the Regional office to request an application. If your congregation has a vision for a new ministry that requires physical preparation and that can only be achieved by a large number of volunteers working alongside volunteers from your congregation, you may want to consider hosting Miracle Day in 2012. Although the original deadline for submitting applications was March 31, 2011, applications will be considered that arrive to the Regional office prior to April 15, 2011.
NEWS OF THE CLERGY

Jeremy Harbin has ended his ministry as pastor with Union Christian Church, Tuskegee, in order to accept a call to serve as pastor with First Christian Church, Hartselle. Jeremy begins his new ministry in April. An installation service is being planned for Sunday, May 15, 2011. Jerry Ridling concluded his service as Supply Pastor with First Christian Church, Hartselle, at the end of March. Ken Whisenent has accepted a call to serve as pastor with Westwood Christian Church, Pensacola. He began his service on the first Sunday in March. An installation service is being planned for Sunday, April 3. Phillip Hayes will conclude his ministry as Interim Minister with First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa, on the first Sunday in May.

Diane Stephenson has been approved for ordination by the Committee on the Ministry. A Service of Ordination is being planned for Sunday, April 3, at 4:00 p.m., at Oakmont Christian Church, Saraland. Tom Stephenson has been approved for ordination by the Committee on the Ministry. A Service of Ordination is being planned for Sunday, May 22, at 4:00 p.m., at First Christian Church, Robertsdale.

The following ministers are participating in the 2011 Colleague Group ministry, which has “congregational transformation” as its focus: (north group) Cameron Douglas, John Gregory, Rebecca Littlejohn, Tommy Morgan, Jerry Smith, Edd Spencer, Bob Stegall, and Edward Williams. (South group) Mike Barnes, Dale Braxton, Clifford Jackson, Danny Reeves, Ken Whisenant and Pamela Wilson. The 2011 Colleague Groups are sponsored by the Alabama-Northwest Florida and Tennessee Regions, in partnership with the Oreon E. Scott Foundation, Disciples Home Missions, and Church Extension.

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING A MINISTER

Athens, First
Birmingham, Roebuck
Tuscaloosa, First (Phillip Hayes is Interim)
Tuskegee, Union
Valley, Fairfax

OUTREACH GIVING UPDATE

The year-to-date giving in 2011 by congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida to the Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings (Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas) decreased by 14.11% from the amount given year-to-date in 2010. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings are showing a 14.03% decrease from the amount given year-to-date in 2010.

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.
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.

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
First Christian Church, Birmingham
Valley Christian Church, Birmingham
First Christian Church, Dothan
First Christian Church, Ft. Walton Beach
Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Fort Walton Beach
First Christian Church, Huntsville
Mt. Pleasant Christian Church, Mathews
First Christian Church, Pensacola
Snow Hill Christian Church, Mt. Willing

DISCIPLES MEN'S RETREAT

Forty men gathered at YMCA-Hargis on March 18-19, 2011 for the annual Men's Retreat. Rev. Bruce Barkhauer, Minister of Faith and Giving, was the retreat leader. The theme of the retreat was "Living Generously." Rev. George Dudley (pictured left) provided music leadership.