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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**Regional Officers and Regional Staff**

**September, 2014**

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Jan Pooley</td>
<td>2805 Jerry Pate Court Shalimar, FL 32579</td>
<td>850-651-5124 (h) 850-585-3497 (e)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jpooley5@cox.net">jpooley5@cox.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator-Elect:</td>
<td>Cameron Douglas</td>
<td>1138 Way Thru The Woods SW Decatur, AL 35603</td>
<td>256-606-8284 (e)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pastore1@me.com">pastore1@me.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Vice Moderator:</td>
<td>Gerri Johnson</td>
<td>P. O. Box 9776 Montgomery, AL 36108</td>
<td>334-263-1742 (h) 334-531-0419 (c)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gl_wondering@yahoo.com">gl_wondering@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Vice Moderator:</td>
<td>Loretta Rucker</td>
<td>2520 Lawn Ave. SW Birmingham, AL 35211</td>
<td>205-925-1826 (h) 205-541-0925 (c)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lorettar@bellsouth.net">lorettar@bellsouth.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary-Treasurer:</td>
<td>Carmencita Ortiz</td>
<td>20 Forever Wild Lane Oxford, AL 36206</td>
<td>256-419-6775 (c)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:marifoldamily@msn.com">marifoldamily@msn.com</a></td>
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**Regional Minister:**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Mobley</td>
<td>861 Highway 52 Helena, AL 35080</td>
<td>205-425-5245(w)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jpmobley2@aol.com">jpmobley2@aol.com</a></td>
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**Associate Regional Minister**

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dale Braxton</td>
<td>8420 County Rd. 45 Ft. Deposit, AL 36032</td>
<td>334-227-0011 (w)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:braxtondale@hotmail.com">braxtondale@hotmail.com</a></td>
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**Youth Ministries Staff Person:**

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<tr>
<td>Nisha Warbington</td>
<td>15561 Dockery Road Coker, AL 35452</td>
<td>205-330-8968 (h) 205-454-2054 (cell)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Nisha7@aol.com">Nisha7@aol.com</a></td>
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**Administrative Assistant:**

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<tr>
<td>Susan Henderson</td>
<td>861 Highway 52 Helena, AL 35080</td>
<td>205-425-5245(w)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:alnwfl@aol.com">alnwfl@aol.com</a></td>
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**Regional Representative to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2014-2017:**

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<tr>
<td>Beth Thomason</td>
<td>2007 Orba Drive NE Huntsville, AL 35811</td>
<td>256-837-8182 (w) 256-714-0943</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bethom66@yahoo.com">bethom66@yahoo.com</a></td>
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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, 2015, shows a 2.50% increase over the amount given for the same time period in 2014. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and these four Special Day Offerings have decreased by 3.65% from the year-to-date amount in 2014. Gifts by Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations to Week of Compassion through September, 2015, have increased by 56.38% above the amount given through September, 2014. Church-wide giving to Week of Compassion, regular and designated, is showing a year-to-date increase of 2.4%.

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

Edd Spencer began his service as Interim Minister with First Christian Church, Montgomery, in mid-September. Pat Parvin has been called as pastor with Village Christian Church, Auburn, and will formally begin his ministry as pastor on November 1. An installation service is scheduled for November 15.

Clifford Jackson has been approved for ordination by the Committee on the Ministry. A service of ordination is scheduled for Sunday, November 22, 2015, at Sellers Memorial Christian Church, White Hall, where Clifford serves as pastor.

CONGREGATIONS WITH MINISTERIAL VACANCIES

Hartselle, First (Jerry Ridling is Interim Minister)
Helena, Grace (Brad Henderson is Transitional Pastor)
Huntsville, First (Cameron Douglas is Interim Minister)
Meridian, First
Mobile, Azalea Hills (Phillip Hayes is Interim Minister)
Montgomery, First (Edd Spencer is Interim Minister)
Pensacola, First (Paul Ingram is Interim)

JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE CLERGY

A son of Connie Bradow (retired, Pensacola) died in late August and a memorial service was held in late September. Connie also had open-heart surgery on October 19 in Pensacola and is now recovering.

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

(Continued on back)
2016 REGIONAL ASSEMBLY in ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

April 29 - May 1, 2016

First Christian Church, Florence, Alabama

Theme: “...And Who Is My Neighbor?”

Special Guests
Rev. Dr. Bill Lee, Pastor, Loudon Avenue Christian Church, Roanoke, VA
Rev. Rebecca Hale, Vice-President of Mission/Ministry, National Benevolent Association
Rev. Vy Nguyen, Executive Director, Week of Compassion

*Registration Information will be included in the January Leader’s Packet.*

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.
DATES FOR YOUR INFORMATION November 1, 2015

NOVEMBER
3 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
5 - 6 Senior Adult Retreat - St. Bernard Retreat Center, Cullman, AL
7 CWF/Disciples Women Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
21 Regional Nominating Committee (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
15 - 22 Thanksgiving Offering Promotion (for higher education ministries)

DECEMBER
1 - 4 College of Regional Ministers - San Diego, CA
7 Committee on the Ministry (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
12 Executive/Personnel Committee (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
13 - 20 Christmas Offering promotion (for Regional ministries)
15 Staff Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office

JANUARY, 2016
11 - 13 Ministers and Mates Retreat (Hilton Garden Inn) - Orange Beach, AL
15 - 17 Young Adult Winter Retreat - YMCA-Camp Chandler
20 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
22 - 24 Youthtopia (youth grades 6 - 12) - YMCA-Camp Chandler
30 Regional Committee on Recommendations (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena

FEBRUARY, 2016
2 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
6 CWF/Disciples Women Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
20 Division of Administration/Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
21 - 28 Week of Compassion Promotion
27 Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - First Christian Church, Birmingham

MARCH, 2016
5 Division of Mission (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
8 - 10 42nd Annual Black Ministers Retreat - Christ Tabernacle Church, Jackson, MS
10 Optional Arrival Day for Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
11 - 12 Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
20 - 27 Easter Offering Promotion (for General Ministries)

APRIL, 2016
1 “Healthy Boundaries” workshop for clergy (9:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
13 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
29 - May 1 Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Assembly - First Christian Church, Florence
30 Mission Gathering (3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.) - First Christian Church, Florence

MAY, 2016
3 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
8 - 15 Pentecost Offering promotion (for new congregation establishment)

(Continued on back)
MAY, 2016 (continued)
7  2\textsuperscript{nd} Annual Hispanic Encounter (tentative) - Location TBD
11  Committee on the Ministry (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
14  Biennial Planning Meeting (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
17  Regional Staff Planning (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
23 - 27  Certificate Program for Hispanic Ministers - Lexington Theological Seminary

JUNE, 2016
5 - 10  Beach Camp - Dauphin Island, AL
20 - 24  Junior Camp and CYF Conference - YMCA-Camp Chandler
24 - 26  Genesis Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler
24 - 26  Discovery Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler
25  Regional Convocation One-Day Workshop - New Salem Christian, Hayneville, AL
24 - 28  Chi Rho Camp - YMCA-Camp Chandler

JULY, 2016
9  Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
14 - 16  National Hispanic and Bilingual Assembly - Coral Gables, FL
21 - 24  24\textsuperscript{th} Biennial Session of the National Convocation - Kansas City, MO
30  Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery

AUGUST, 2016
10  Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
28  "Senior Adult Sunday" in Alabama-Northwest Florida

SEPTEMBER, 2016
6  Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
10  Anti-Racism Team (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
13 - 15  Southeast Regional Fellowship Retreat - Christmount, Black Mountain, NC
17  Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - Location TBD
24  Program Committee on Church Development (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
25 - Oct. 2  Reconciliation Offering Promotion (for Anti-Racism efforts)
30 - Oct. 2  Women's Retreat (tentative) - YMCA-Camp Chandler (tentative)

OCTOBER, 2016
2  World Communion Sunday and Reconciliation Offering Sunday
8  Division of Mission (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
12  Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
13  Optional Arrival Day for Young Adult Beach Retreat - Orange Beach, AL
14 - 16  Young Adult Beach Retreat - Orange Beach, AL
22  Division of Administration and Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office

Christian Church In Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL. 35080
REGIONAL PRAYER CALENDAR
FOR NOVEMBER, 2015 - JANUARY, 2016

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 1 - Valhermoso Springs, First (256-778-7921) Jeremy Harbin, Minister (e-mail: <jeremyharbin@gmail.com>)
November 8 - Jasper, First (205-384-6302) Jack Baldwin, Minister (e-mail: <jack.baldwin@att.net>)
November 15 - Valley, Fairfax (334-756-3941) Duwayne Bridges, Minister (e-mail: <burningbridges@msn.com>)
November 22 - Montgomery, United (334-262-3382) Larue Smith, Jr., Minister (e-mail: <laruesmith@wildblue.net>)
November 29 - Tuscaloosa, First (205-758-2968) Tom Goebel Minister (e-mail: <tandsgoebel@hotmail.com>)

December 6 - Valley, River View (334-756-3538) Frank Rittenberry, Minister (email: <frittenberry@att.net>)
December 13 - Pensacola, Westwood (850-456-2092) Betty and David Massey, Co-Pastors (e-mail: <dmassey74@msn.com> or <howdybetty@aol.com>)
December 20 - Ambassadors for Christ, Pamela Wilson, Minister (334-437-5423 or e-mail: <pamlove@camelliacom.com>)
December 27 - Hayneville, New Salem, Willie Smith, Minister (email: <pastorwjsmith@gmail.com>)

January 3 - Athens, First (256-232-5611) Clint Coffey, Minister (e-mail: <jclintjr@juno.com>)
January 10 - Anniston, First (256-236-1316) Laura Hutchinson, Minister (e-mail: <laurahutchinson@bellsouth.net>)
January 17 - Auburn, Village (334-887-5111) Pat Parvin, Minister (e-mail: <pparvin@wellsmailing.com>)
January 24 - Dothan, First (334-792-2401) Bill Smith, Minister (e-mail: <bsndhn@graceba.net>)
January 31 - Birmingham, Primera Iglesia - Roberto Rodriguez, Church Planter (e-mail: <palmarito8433@gmail.com>)

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
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**TOTAL** | 172,564.02 | 189,530.63 | -1.76

**NOTE:** THIS REPORT COMPARES GIVING FROM JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2014 TO GIVING JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2015

Christian Church in Alabama - Northwest Florida, 861 Hwy 52, Helena, AL 35080
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TOTAL | 37,956.97 | 41,009.37 | 8.04 | 1,422.72 | 2,217.50 | 55.66 |

STAY CONNECTED

Subscribe to DISCIPLES NEWS SERVICE for weekly news updates.

Link under Disciples News Service on www.disciples.org

Join the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) fan page on Facebook: www.facebook.com/christianchurchdoc

Share ideas on the Disciples Exchange Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/disciplesexchange

Part of the Office of General Minister and President Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada
Thanksgiving Offering
November 8 & 15, 2015
(Most Congregations)
Benefiting students at Disciples Colleges, Universities, Seminaries & Divinity Houses
Please, give generously to this year’s offering!
www.DisciplesMissionFund.org

The Thanksgiving Offering benefits the Colleges, Universities, Seminaries, and Divinity Houses affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

These learning communities are an extension of the church, challenging students to understand and respond to God’s call to serve. From the very beginnings of the movement, Disciples have founded institutions of higher learning, encouraging students in their intellectual pursuits. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is still committed to higher education. Your gift to the Thanksgiving Offering helps underwrite the education of students attending one of our fourteen undergraduate institutions and our seven seminaries or divinity houses.

Thousands of students have attended the Colleges and Universities of the Christian Church receiving both a quality education and the opportunity to remain within our Disciple’s heritage. Your financial gift provides scholarships and support for spiritual life offices. By giving to the Thanksgiving Offering you are investing in our students and helping keep education costs down.

The Thanksgiving Offering also provides scholarship and support for those pursuing theological education at one of our seven seminaries or divinity houses. Consider the many generations of pastors, who, if not for the support of faithful congregations and individuals over the ages would not have flourished as our pastors, teachers and leaders. What impact has your pastor had in the life of your church, community or region? You can thank them by supporting the Thanksgiving Offering.

Attending a Disciples College or Theological School is possible through the scholarships and grants that are made available by generous individuals, the Disciples Mission Fund and your gifts to the Thanksgiving Offering.

Please give generously to this year’s Thanksgiving Offering.
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!
Introduction Page for

Bulletin Inserts

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 November 29 and December 6. They are promotions for the 2015 Christmas Offering which will support the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

The second sheet includes bulletin inserts for December 13 and 20. They are also promotions for the 2015 Christmas Offering which will support the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

Your Help Is Needed:

A strong 2015 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 2016. 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, youth groups, 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 2015 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its ministry.

“CARING FOR CONGREGATIONS”
(From the document, “Marks of a Faithful Regional Church”)

A major part of the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is caring for its congregations. Just as congregations provide care for their participants – nurturing them spiritually, offering pastoral care and support, and connecting them to networks for service – so also do Regions invest much time and energy into the well-being of congregations.

Every program that is offered by the Region (camps, retreats, workshops, etc.) can be considered an extension of the congregation’s ministry. Because congregations support the work of the Region, they can offer a variety of opportunities to their members that will nurture them and equip them for service to God. These opportunities are intended to strengthen participants for their roles within their home congregations. In this way, the Region supports congregations.

More specifically, Regions support congregations as they have special needs. Congregations that are facing a transition in ministerial leadership rely on the Region to guide them through a process of seeking a new minister. Congregations wanting to offer special training for elders, deacons or other key roles in the church often turn to the Region for instruction and guidance. Congregations experiencing conflict often need assistance from the Region in helping to mediate and move past the conflict in healthy ways.

The presence of the Region with congregations on special days and observances, usually through Regional staff, is a significant ministry in itself as it gives opportunity for pastoral interaction with congregational leaders. Often a representative of the Region, when invited to do so, will bring a message of encouragement to the congregation which strengthens its ministry.

The Regional staff are always available to offer counsel to congregations. The Regional office maintains resources that are available for congregational use in a wide variety of circumstances. Congregations know they are not alone as they seek to be faithful to God. They frequently call on the Region to partner with them along the journey. It is a major part of what a Region is called to do.

All gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 13 - 20

Gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its ministry.

“CALLING OUT AND DEVELOPING LEADERS”
(From the document, “Marks of a Faithful Regional Church”)

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region assists individuals in discerning God’s call upon their lives. The programs of the Region provide opportunities for persons to become involved and take on leadership responsibilities. Through involvement in Regional ministries, persons often discover gifts and graces that can be a rich blessing to the church, whether through clergy or lay leadership.

Many ordained ministers in the church remember their experiences in camp and conference, when they were teenagers, as being the times when they began to sense the call of God upon their lives. The camp setting, along with the encouragement of caring adults, provides an opportunity for young people to begin asking meaningful questions about God’s desire for their lives.

The Region’s Committee on the Ministry works directly with ministerial and ministry candidates. Following the guidelines approved by the whole Church, the thirteen members of this Committee meet frequently to give nurture and support to those who are sensing God’s call to give service to the church through ordained or commissioned ministry. The Committee assigns mentors and advisor to ministry candidates, allocates funding for theological education, and directs candidates toward training opportunities that will equip them for church leadership.

Each Regional retreat for youth, young adults, men, women, and senic adults, is carefully planned to provide spiritual enrichment and opportunities for personal development. Over the years, many quality leaders have been invited to lead these events. The content of their presentations have provided the impetus for many participants to begin new ventures in their lives of service to the church. The value of these events for nurturing church leaders, whether clergy or lay, cannot be overstated.

All gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING - DECEMBER 13 - 20
Gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its ministry.

“CAREING FOR MINISTERS”
(From the document, “Marks of a Faithful Regional Church”)

Every person in ministry needs a pastor. Ministry can be rewarding in so many ways, but it can also be challenging, frustrating and exhausting. It sometimes can be lonely, even when surrounded by many people. Those persons who are called to serve in ministry are, first and foremost, human beings. They have emotional and spiritual needs like everyone else. They try to do their best amid a variety of expectations within congregations. They like to please others, but cannot always do so. They need support – and the Region is committed to their support and well-being.

The Regional staff seek direct relationships with persons in ministry. They care about ministers and their families. They reach out to them in times of hardship. They are always available for ministers to call upon for guidance, encouragement, and care.

Through the Committee on the Ministry, the Region gives oversight to the nurture and care of clergy. The Committee provides accountability for ministers, holding them to certain standards in order to remain in good standing with the church. The Committee offers workshops and encourages continuing education. The Committee provides a confidential pastoral counseling service for ministers through the Turner Clergy Center in Columbus, Georgia, which has developed a network of pastoral care providers in Alabama and northwest Florida. The Region covers most of the cost of pastoral counseling as a way to encourage ministers to seek professional support to remain emotionally and spiritually healthy.

On odd-numbered years the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region provides ministers with an opportunity to participate in Colleague Groups that will be focused on a particular theme related to ministry. The resources, encouragement, and support that participants will receive through their Colleague Groups will strengthen each minister’s effectiveness.

All gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

CHristmas Offering - December 13 - 20

Gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will strengthen the Alabama-NW Florida Region for its ministry.

“ENCOURAGING...MISSION”
(From the document, “Marks of a Faithful Regional Church”)

The Region is committed to finding ways for congregations to work together in mission, helping them to accomplish more by working together than they could accomplish alone. The Region facilitates these opportunities in order to give witness to our unity as we embrace a common mission in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Region fosters collaboration among congregations in the establishment of new congregations. The Region enlists volunteers from existing congregations to serve on Project Advisory Teams which oversee the work of church planters and provide guidance for the congregations-in-formation. Currently the Region is supporting two congregations-in-formation: Iglesia Cristiana Renovando Tu Fe, Pensacola, and Primera Iglesia Cristiana, Birmingham.

The Region assisted the four Hispanic congregations in the Region in having an Encounter in May, 2015. This combined gathering resulted in the formation of a Hispanic Ministries Commission that will plan events to strengthen the ministries of the Hispanic congregations in the Region.

In recent years the Region has helped its congregations extend the witness beyond our national borders through our partnerships in Honduras. By working together as a Region, we have been able to be in relationship with brother and sisters in Honduras, and we have provided resources to help them in training persons for leadership in the church.

Groups that the Region brings together, such as Regional Youth, Disciple Men, Disciples Women, and Senior Adults, have engaged in direct ministries and/or provided funding for ministries that are impacting lives daily. An example of such a ministry is Christian Services for Children in Alabama, based in Selma which administers programs and services in the areas of family preservation and therapeutic foster care. The children reached through this ministry have often experienced neglect and abuse. We, as a Region, are expressing God’s care for them through our common support of Christian Services to Children in Alabama.

All gifts to the 2015 Christmas Offering will be directed to the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Please give generously!

Christmas Offering - December 13 - 20
REGIONAL MINISTRIES SUPPORTED THROUGH OUTREACH DOLLARS

When an individual contributes to the Annual Fund or 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)
Genesis Camps (kindergarten and first grade)
Specialty Camps, such as Beach Camp and Family Camp

Young Adult Ministries
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)
Hispanic Ministries Commission events (annually)
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)
- Hispanic Encounters (every two years)

Congregational Support
- Listening Conferences
- Congregational Leadership Coaching
- Church Transformation Events (in non-Regional Assembly years)
- 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 (normally 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).

May, 2015
2016 MINISTERS AND MATES RETREAT

Hilton Garden Inn – Orange Beach, Alabama

January 11 -13, 2016

Guest Leader

Rev. Bruce Barkhauer,
Minister of Faith and Giving, Center for Faith and Giving
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Theme

“Living an Abundant Life”

Ministry is about helping people experience all that God wants them to experience in life. Ministers preach and teach about things that contribute to a full and meaningful life. But sometimes ministers (and spouses) struggle with dimensions of their own lives that are not life-giving. In hopes that ministers will practice what they preach, this retreat will focus on the keys to the abundant living that God desires for all who give leadership to the Church.

Cost – $40 per person
(includes administrative costs and cost of Monday banquet)

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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
2016 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...

“And Who Is My Neighbor?”
(a sneak peak at our upcoming Regional Assembly 2016 Theme)

...and who is my Neighbor?

WHEN: January 22-24, 2016
(Begins at 7:00 pm Friday - ends at 10:00 am Sunday)

Cost: $110.00 (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 for Regional Youth Fund
Sleeping bag/ bedding for Twin Bed
Toiletries
Towel

*SNACKS TO SHARE*
(Girls Sweet and Boys Salty)
Sturdy shoes

Flashlight
Jacket/ Raincoat
Closed toe shoes for high ropes
Bug spray

WE ARE A DRUG-FREE COMMUNITY-NO DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR TOBACCO
REGISTRATION FORM FOR Youhtopia
DEADLINE: Postmarked by January 4th, 2016
(Sign, Include Payment, and Mail to)
Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Hwy 52, Helena, AL 35080

NAME

CONGREGATION

ADULT CHAPERONE

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

PHONE

EMAIL

GRADE

GENDER

T-SHIRT SIZE - (subject to availability if registration is not received by deadline) ____________
Would you prefer Long Sleeved or Short Sleeved? ____________

2016 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
  • To “Park” technology during keynotes, small groups,
    and other times when we are in “group” space.

Signature of Participant: ____________________________

Signature of Parent/Guardian: ______________________________

2016 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
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 <ahnwfl@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 15 -17, 2016

Theme

“Faith in the Midst of Tragedy and Loss”

Guest Facilitator

Monty Love
Lay Leader, First Christian Church, Huntsville

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 and to each other.

Christian Church in Alabama-NW Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
YOUNG ADULT WINTER RETREAT 2016
(With Monty Love, Lay Leader, First Christian Church, Huntsville)

January 15 - 17, 2016 ---- 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.

“Faith in the Midst of Tragedy and Loss”

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 8, 2016.

Mail To:

Christian Church in AL-NW FL, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080 Phone (205-425-5245) Fax (205-425-5246)
...and who is my Neighbor?

Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
In Alabama-Northwest Florida

April 29-May 1, 2016
Florence, Alabama

Hosted By:
First Christian Church
Of Florence, Alabama
MEN’S RETREAT
(YMCA-Hargis Retreat, Chelsea, Alabama)

March 11 - 12, 2016
(Registration/Check-in begins as early as 2:00 p.m. Retreat officially begins with dinner on March 11 at 6:00 p.m. and ends Saturday by 2:30 p.m.)
Optional Arrival Date - March 10, 2016 Men may come a day early for fishing, hiking, horseshoes, table games, and fellowship time (Added cost - $30, no meals included).

Theme: To Be Determined

Resource Leader:

Rev. Dr. Cameron Douglas

Registration Cost: $80/person ($70 if received before Feb. 26)
** $40/person for those coming for Saturday only

Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, AL 35080
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. Must be repeated after 10 years.

Resource Leaders:

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

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2016
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 25.

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

Christian Church In Alabama-Northwest Florida, 861 Highway 52, Helena, Alabama 35080
Navigating the Currents of Endowments and Reserve Funds

Donations to religious nonprofits climbed to historic levels, exceeding 115 billion dollars in the past year. Yet that rising tide hides small and turbulent undercurrents. Namely, charitable giving for religious institutions as a percentage of all nonprofit contributions continues on a thirty-year downward slide. Because people give to many worthwhile causes, including the church, leaders must make a case for how the congregation's mission advances God's will.

Permanent Endowment Fund Principles
First Church observed the 75th birthday of its endowment and celebrated the wonderful ministries it funded. However, for the past two years, leaders began dipping into the principle to pay staff salaries and subsidize the operating budget. The decision to go beyond an “interest-only” funding strategy generated conflict among members. Although some members preferred funding staff salaries through endowment principle monies rather than reducing staff, others felt it violated the trust of the endowment's donors. What is the best approach?

Start by obtaining the current guidelines for endowment funds from your denomination's regional or national offices. Most guidelines stipulate the appropriate uses of the endowment's interest income and principle funds. Further, endowment plans offer procedures for what happens if the congregation ceases to exist.1

Every congregation should establish an endowment fund. Even if the beginning balance is modest, an endowment fund attracts contributions that people would not have given otherwise to the congregation. People give generously to an endowment if (a) church leaders publicize the endowment and its accomplishments twice a year, and (b) the endowment funds ministries that church members passionately support. Also, the process for making bequests should be accessible. A church that printed, “Remember the church in your will,” in every worship service bulletin received bequests for decades. Additional information can be included on the church website.

Create two endowment funds—one for facilities and one for missions. Some members love to contribute to buildings and facilities because they receive joy from seeing holy spaces created for new generations. Sometimes people are motivated to give out of a sense of pride or attachment to a church that played a significant role in their family life or in the community's history. In contrast to these bricks-and-mortar types, another group of members love to make significant gifts to mission outreach—local, regional, and world. They know that their gifts will make a difference in these efforts and will continue to fund the causes they care deeply about far into the future.

Reserve Fund Principles
In addition to a facilities endowment, every congregation should create a maintenance reserve fund. Each year, church leaders place in an escrow fund a predetermined percentage of their total annual facilities-maintenance budget. A general rule is 10 to 15 percent of the total

...AND TO THINK, DAD'S FINAL GIFT TO THE CHURCH CREATED THIS HOLY SPACE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME!
facilities-maintenance budget. Other congregational leaders place a predetermined percentage of their total annual operations budget, about 1 percent or 2 percent, in a facilities-maintenance escrow fund. In both instances, these escrow funds provide for unexpected, expensive repairs—such as a new roof, a new heating or air conditioning system, or new technology upgrades.

One universal law is that the unexpected will happen sooner or later. A reserve fund prevents an event from becoming a crisis and protects church leaders from depleting the facility endowment’s principle for ongoing maintenance.

Methods to Grow the Endowment
Several strategies boost endowment funds beyond just collecting the interest.

Make a case for the mission. After discussions and information meetings with church members, identify three or four mission priorities that speak to the congregation’s core identity and commitments. For example, the congregation may take pride in its excellent music or arts ministry, community mission programs, or global mission partnerships. Committed current members are likely to feel strongly about these church strengths and want to insure their financial support during occasions when regular congregational income fluctuates. However, always communicate that the endowments provide for expanded ministry opportunities beyond the reach of the ongoing annual budget.

Know your congregation’s giving patterns. Track pledges and giving habits from church records by age (members younger than 20, members in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and above). Determine what portion of the annual budget is funded by each ten-year age group, and pay special attention to members over age 60. Members older than sixty are the most likely to see the church’s endowments as good investments. One idea is to challenge older members to endow their pledges by making a gift that equals twice their annual pledge with a zero added. For example, a $1,500 annual pledge by two equals $3,000. When a zero is added, the suggested endowment gift is $30,000.²

Rejuvenate or expand your current endowment programs. Some churches focus on the investment returns of current endowment funds and make few efforts to solicit new gifts. Churches that offer Wills and Estate Planning Seminars every few years provide a valuable service for their members because an estimated 51% of Americans age 55 to 64 do not have wills.³ The reason is denial. Although the seminars are not designed to influence people to put the congregation in their wills, estate planning often leads people of faith to make bequests that strengthen their church’s ministries. With renewed focus, congregations can increase the number of people who have included the church in their estate planning by 20 percent each year.⁴

How to Minimize Risks
Two common problems arise when congregations develop an endowment or reserve fund dependency.

The accumulation of money makes leaders lose sight of ministry. For example, in a congregation that declined by more than 50 percent, the endowment funded a staff twice as large as appropriate for a church of its size. The endowment generated enough interest to pay salaries and operating expenses indefinitely. With that trajectory, the congregation could continue to exist without any members! Their challenge is learning how to connect with the spiritual needs of people currently in the community.

The talk of money is always tied to the church’s need to balance the budget. Reserve funds or endowments provide a convenient excuse for members that their financial gifts are not needed. Church leaders must connect every mention of giving to its spiritual foundation. Financial giving is essential in helping believers form, retain, and grow in their relationship with God. The spiritual need to give is far greater than the church’s need to receive.

Looking for a Great Investment?
People yearn to make a difference and search for ways to fulfill that desire. Thirty-five years after his assassination, the prayer for Archbishop Oscar Romero speaks to this truth: "The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us."⁵

2. “50 Ways to Improve Your Annual Stewardship Campaign,” Lewis Center for Church Leadership (www.churchleadership.com).

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As congregations face change and new challenges, conflict is part of the process. Too often, under stress, church leaders and members fall into bad communication habits that prevent the airing of concerns and objections. Healthy conversations help people manage conflict and move them toward acceptance of new initiatives. Productive communication speeds up the process from planning to action and keeps members on track to accurately assess new realities.

Communication Fashions to Avoid

Appropriate and effective actions by church leaders rest on good thinking. Do you recognize some of these communication and thinking mistakes?

1. **All or Nothing Thinking.** Painting reality as black and white is easy. Recognizing some shades of gray in any situation takes more time and thought. New ideas can be quickly judged as “terrible” or the “greatest ever.” Most new ideas fit in neither category. Nearly all ideas possess some merit and leaders can hone them into a better strategy. And even the best and greatest ideas need further development.¹

Beware of any proposal that only offers two alternatives. For example, “we must cut our staff salaries immediately or stop paying our utility bills.” There is always a third way, or fourth avenue, or fifth alternative.

Polarized thinking can be used to describe members too (such as “we have good members and bad members”). Congregational efforts can be falsely judged as “successful” or “a complete failure.” Instead of putting all of reality into two baskets, creative people explore the positive and negative aspects of complex situations.

2. **Overgeneralizing.** After an unpleasant pastoral tenure with a recent seminary graduate, the congregation’s leaders vowed to never call another pastor without decades of pastoral experience. Unfortunately, those vows limit the number of gifted pastors who could effectively serve with the church. And that view limits what the congregation could learn from the experience.

Taking one bad (or good) experience and using its specific outcome to make a general rule about how the universe works is more than a leap of faith. A specific situation is just that—unique to a particular event, time, and place. A healthy conversation recognizes the multitude of factors that produce any given outcome.

3. **Filtering Out the Positive.** After seventeen years of service, the pastor of First Church retired. He possessed many ministry strengths but some members expressed dissatisfaction with his administrative skills. As the search committee screened candidates, they made administrative experience a top priority. As a result, their next pastor was a phenomenal administrator with few other ministry gifts. His tenure was brief as the members realized they had focused too narrowly on the previous pastor’s weaknesses without appreciating all the leadership positives of their long-time pastor.

¹BY THE FIFTH COMMITTEE MEETING, IT WAS OBVIOUS IT WOULD ALWAYS BE "US" VERSUS "THEM."
A narrow focus on just the negatives or just the positives prohibits leaders from forming a realistic and balanced outlook. Identifying the positives and negatives of a situation is part of healthy communication.

4. Assigning Motive. We observe behavior and make guesses about why people are acting in ways that we deem irrational or counterproductive. Our inferences can be completely wrong because we can never be certain what someone else is thinking. Because we are not mind readers, healthy conversations include questions about what people believe, what they value, and why they wish to pursue one strategy vs. another. It is okay to ask: Why is this approach important to you?

5. Catastrophizing. Imminent disaster is rarely just around the corner and usually events do not explode into a crisis. Nostalgia about the past fuels some members to be doom-and-gloom prophets. Because their worldview is really a long-standing belief that all things are in decline, they see every event as the last shoe to drop. Healthy church conversations include discussions of many plausible outcomes, including positive ones.

6. Emotional Reasoning. Fear can inhibit effective discussions and prevent new ideas from being implemented. Leaders prone to elaborate explanations for why actions cannot be taken are often masking their fear of change. People often change their attitudes and feelings after they try something new, not before they do something new.

7. Labeling. Naming people or experiences puts them into hard categories based on an isolated incident. Hard categories block the reception of new information and make healthy communication much more difficult. Labeling tends to highlight the negative rather than illuminate the whole situation or person.

8. Fortune-Telling. Most people like to try their hand at predicting the future or like speculating about the future. However, none of us knows what will happen tomorrow. None of us knows what God has in store for the congregation and its mission. Negative predictions ignore all the possible outcomes and can be self-fulfilling congregational prophecies.

9. Personalization. When the pastor or lay leaders support a different strategy than some members, the focus can quickly shift away from the facts of a specific situation to a polarizing of people. The “us” vs. “them” type of thinking does not help people see the facts clearly because the focus shifts away from what to who.

10. Looking for the Perfect Plan. Churches can operate with the unrecognized conviction that discussing a problem equals solving the problem. They are convinced that lengthy discussion will eventually lead them to the perfect course of action, even if those discussions take many months or years. In general, only implementing a new idea reveals the required modifications to a strategy for use in a specific context. Successful new strategies more often occur when leaders use a “do-it-and-fix-it” method than when they wait for the perfect plan.

**Clues to Improving Communication**

Recognizing that our views are not always based on realistic thinking is hard to swallow. Sometimes our thinking is irrational or inaccurate. Acting on our faulty thinking leads to unnecessary conflict in a church setting. What steps can we take to improve our communication?

**Let go of the past.** Too much of the present conversation is actually attempts to rewrite history. Help yourself and others to make peace with the past.

**Exercise forgiveness and patience.** Everyone has made one or more thinking errors on the list. And the more important the decision, the more likely it is that our first response is not 100 percent rational. Managing our thoughts, taming our emotions, and behaving well is not easy.

**Value the practical experiences of leaders and other congregations.** Listen carefully to the observations of those who have tried and failed as well as those who tried and met success.

**Uncover the theology, philosophy, and heart-felt passions that lead to change.** When people marry their strategies with their deepest convictions, long-lasting change is more likely.

**Remain hopeful about the future.** A congregation’s script should be positive and energize members for what lies ahead in ministry.

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