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

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

FEBRUARY
4 CWF/Disciples Women Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
7 Commissioning and Ordination South (9:15 a.m.) - United Christian, Montgomery
10 - 11 Congregational Transformation Event - First Christian Church, Birmingham
15 Senior Adult Cabinet (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
18 Division of Administration and Stewardship (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office
19 - 26 Week of Compassion Offering Promotion
24 - 25 Administrative Committee of the Christian Church - Indianapolis, IN
25 - 28 General Board of the Christian Church - Indianapolis, IN
28 - March 3 College of Regional Ministers - Indianapolis, IN

MARCH
4 Regional Board (10:00 a.m.) - First Christian Church, Birmingham
7 - 9 43rd Annual Black Ministers Retreat - Centennial Christian Church, St. Louis, MO
16 Optional Arrival Day for Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
17 - 18 Men’s Retreat - YMCA-Hargis
25 Anti-Racism Team (10:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
31 “Healthy Boundaries” workshop for clergy (9:00 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena

APRIL
7 - 8 Anti-Racism Workshop for Clergy - First Christian Church, Montgomery
9 - 16 Easter Special Day Offering (for general ministries)
12 Commissioning and Ordination North (9:15 a.m.) - Regional Office, Helena
28 - 30 Family Camp - Oak Mountain State Park
29 Women’s Spring Event - First Christian Church, Montgomery

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

– 2007 Disciples Identity Statement
Communication is very important in maintaining relationships. When communication breaks down, relationships are likely to become unhealthy. Trust becomes harder to achieve. Meeting the expectations of the other party is difficult.

Not only is communication itself important, but it also matters how we communicate. The best communication is clear and easy to understand. It also needs to be timely to allow for the best responses from the other party. It needs to invite some kind of response from the recipient so that a two-way relationship is maintained.

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region values its relationships with its congregations and leaders. A big part of what the Region does in maintaining strong relationships has to do with communication. The Region is committed to sharing appropriate information in a clear and timely manner. The Region is also looking to share this information in ways that are likely to reach the intended audience. It doesn’t make sense to spend time and energy communicating if you don’t ensure that the communication will reach the other party.

If you are reading this newsletter, you are one of the few people who has either gone to the Region’s web-site to find it, or you have received a link through an email and you have chosen to click on the link. Some of you may be reading a hard-copy of the newsletter that was printed out for you. Although the Region is extremely grateful for your interest and willingness to take extra steps to get to the newsletter, the truth is that, in all likelihood, you are in the minority. Most of the people we are trying to reach with this newsletter are not being reached at all.

In 2017 the Region hopes to launch some new communication practices. Our intention is to make the communication more appealing and easier to digest. The new ways of communicating will enable the Region to reach a significantly larger audience. The tools of communication will offer easy access to electronic registration forms and on-line payment options. If we are successful to utilizing new tools of communication, it will likely replace the Regional newsletter in its current format.

Having said that, however, we know that many in our audience prefer hard-copy and directly-mailed communication. Our Leader’s Packet will continue to be sent to those who request it, either due to their not having email access or due to their preference for paper copies. In upcoming issues of the Leader’s Packet, recipients will see a form in which they may state their desire to continue to receive hard-copy mailings.

The world we live in is experiencing many changes as a result of technology. People receive information in new ways, often in faster and more efficient ways. But the basic need for healthy communication to maintain important relationships has always been with us. The Region is committed to healthy communication so that the relationships that are fundamental to our existence can be strong. Your patience and support of our efforts will be greatly appreciated.

Your Partner in Ministry,

John P. Mobley
Regional Minister
Ephesians 4:1-6 “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

It appears that for the last few months we are at a crossroads. As Christians we are a divided people, and it should not be so. There are many issues that cause this division. These issues include, but are not limited to, the election, Black Lives Matters Movement, Support of the Men and Women in Blue, the Affordable Care Act, and the crisis in education. It is okay to have differences. That’s part of being human. It is the way God made us. Husbands and wives have differences, but they must work hard at building on common ground, talking through differences, and maintaining a unity in the face of all sorts of situations and obstacles. Differences aren’t the problem. It is how we handle the differences.

We have been chosen as children of the light and as Christians to appeal to the world as the Apostle Paul did to the Church to be united and whole. Paul begins Ephesians chapter 4 with a strong appeal to the Christian to act with integrity, to live out their faith in every day practice. He encourages them to conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of their high calling as Christians, to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

I must confess that we live in a fragmented world and it is our hope that all be welcomed to the table as God has welcomed us. I must confess to you that I am still growing in my understanding of the unity the spirit brings. I believe in the spirit of unity that all brethren must work together to ensure peace among them. For it is written in Romans 14:19, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

In the months ahead, let each of us be that “army of one” who will help our country, our state, our nation and world be one, united in faith and, indeed, in love. We are commanded to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This unity does not spring out of one's tolerance or intolerance. It comes from the spirit of God—therefore, as much as it lies in you, live peacefully with all men.

“In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one community of love throughout the whole wide earth.” Join hands, disciples of the faith, whatever your race may be; all children of the living God are surely kin to me.”

Cassandra Smith was ordained into Christian Ministry on December 11, 2016, at Mt. Zion Christian Church in White Hall, Alabama. Pictured here with Cassandra is Associate Regional Minister Rev. Dale Braxton.
The Region’s Program Committee on Church Development has sponsored six congregational transformation events since 2008. Offered on an every-other-year schedule, the next event will be held on February 10-11, 2017, at First Christian Church, Birmingham. These weekend events have included prominent preachers and a variety of workshop leaders. These events have provided ideas and inspiration to help congregational leaders to be agents of transformation in their own congregations. Our Friday night preachers have included Dr. Fred Craddock, Dr. Sharon Watkins, Dr. Bill Lee, Dr. Todd Adams, Dr. William Willimon, Dr. Richard Hamm, all of whom have brought us powerful messages.

In 2017 the Program Committee on Church Development is excited to sponsor a seventh Region-wide congregational transformation event. The theme is “Passion and Mission.” The Friday evening worship service on February 10 will feature Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas, Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics and Director of the Academy of Preaching and Celebration at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. For many years prior to this faculty position, Rev. Thomas served as senior pastor with Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, TN.

In addition to preaching on Friday night, Dr. Thomas will lead a plenary workshop on Saturday morning. The title of his workshop will be “Preaching For Moral Imagination.”

Dr. Thomas says the following about this workshop: “What is needed more than ever in our churches and our nation is ‘moral imagination,’ the ability to see God’s right order in our families and communities. This workshop will help to stimulate the moral imagination of the participants in preaching and the church.”

Following Dr. Thomas’ plenary workshop on Saturday, February 11, there will be opportunity for persons participate in workshops that will help them to become agents of transformation in their own settings. Persons may choose from a variety of workshops, listed below:

– (In Spanish, morning) “Señales de esperanza en un mundo en conflicto” (led by Rev. Gilberto Collazo, President, Hope Partnership) Escuchamos de los muchos retos que enfrenta la iglesia, ministerios cerrando, iglesias siendo vendidas, personas dando la espalda a Dios y la iglesia, y tantas otras noticias deprimentes. Pensamos que estos son problemas de las iglesias norteamericanas, pero nosotros no estamos exentos de estas realidades. Es hora de prepararnos para enfrentar los retos de este nuevo siglo. Dios todavía nos tiene en su agenda. Dios aun nos llama a servir y transformar por medio de su Espíritu las comunidades donde estamos ubicados. Entendamos que Dios no nos llama a ser exitosos, sino a ser fieles a su llamado. Conozcamos cuales son las características de las iglesias que están ofreciendo ministerio transformador en sus comunidades y como su congregación puede desarrollar un plan de trabajo misisonal que lleve a su iglesia a nuevas oportunidades de ministerio y empoderamiento para los miembros de su iglesia.

– (In English, afternoon) “Signs of Hope in a Troubled World” (led by Rev. Gilberto Collazo, President, Hope Partnership) We hear of the decline of the church; ministries closing, buildings being sold, people giving up on church, and so many more depressing news flashes. It is time to flip the script. God is still invested in God’s people and the communities we are called to serve and transform. Join us in a conversation about the new things God is doing in the life of our church. Learn about how we redefine metrics of success from profitability to faithfulness and sustainability. Learn about the marks of congregations that are becoming vital, sustainable ministries in their communities and how your congregation can also develop a mission pathway that can lead your congregation to new places of ministry and empowerment for your church.
- “Spiritual Disciplines for Transformational Leaders, Clergy and Lay” (led by Rev. Mark Benson, Senior Minister, First Christian Church, Meridian, MS) Do you ever find yourself carrying the responsibilities of leadership in your church? Feel yourself stretched thin and at times tired and stressed? Come to this workshop and learn more about spiritual practices and disciplines that can help you recharge. You'll learn about the importance of maintaining good spiritual health so that you can be an example and leader in your congregation.

- “Worship as an Inclusive Transformational Act” (led by Rev. Jim Brooks, Interim Minister, First Christian Church, Tuscaloosa, AL). We misunderstand the purpose of worship when we become spectators for the performance of the preacher and musicians. Theologian Soren Kirkegaard is quoted as saying that God is the audience at worship and we are the actors. But what if we and God are the actors and audience? "Lights, camera, action!"

- “Church Technology 101: An Introduction to 21st Century Tools for Ministry” (Led By Rev. Troy Tatum, Senior Minister, First Christian Church, Birmingham). It can be difficult to keep up with rapidly changing technology, but there are a number of tools available to churches that can help them to be more effective and efficient in their ministry, often allowing them to have a greater impact with a smaller investment of time, energy, and resources. This workshop will provide participants with an overview of options and best practices around subjects like digital communications, social media, online giving, database management, and related topics.

- “The Pain and Promise of Building an Inclusive Church" (led by Rev. Shane Isner, Senior Minister, First Christian Church, Montgomery)- This workshop will focus on helping congregations and their leaders embrace the joy - and hurt - of including greater diversity in their ranks. The new Senior Minister with FCC, Montgomery, will draw upon the congregation’s unique story to identify several necessary and relevant issues and also the pitfalls that may or may not be avoided. Radical hospitality, Rev. Isner has learned, comes with a cost, one that churches often struggle to bear. Yet it always has been the way of the future for every new generation of Jesus’ followers. Therein lies the church's mission, and so its enduring hope.

- “Things a Congregation Need to Know When the Pastor is Bi-Vocational” (led by Rev. Dr. Dale Braxton, Associate Regional Minister and Pastor, Snow Hill Christian Church, Mt. Willing, AL) Being a bi- vocational pastor brings challenges and opportunities for the pastor as well as the church. An effective pastor will include and nurture the help of others, empowering them to share in the ministry by providing clear responsibilities and duties in the overall care of the church.

    There will be program activities for elementary school-aged children on Saturday. Leigh Tatum, member at First Christian Church, Birmingham, will provide leadership.

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

    The cost of registration for “Passion and Mission” is $25 for an individual registration ($10 per child age 12 and younger) or $200 for a congregational registration (which covers registration for as many as the congregation would like to bring). It is imperative, however, that congregational registrations include a listing of all of the persons who will attend so that adequate preparations can be made.

    Flyers and registration information was included in the January Leader’s Packet. Please contact the Regional office if more information is needed.
2017 MEN’S RETREAT SET FOR MARCH 17-18

The annual Men’s Retreat is planned for March 17 -18, 2017, at YMCA-Hargis. For a nominal added cost, men have the option of arriving on Thursday, March 16, for fishing, hiking, and fellowship prior to the beginning of the retreat on Friday afternoon. The Disciples Men’s Cabinet has put together a great retreat filled with fun, fellowship, and challenge for all men in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. The theme for the 2017 Men’s Retreat is “Men Following Jesus.” The guest leader for the retreat will be Rev. Clint Coffey.

Clint Coffey began his service as Pastor with First Christian Church, Athens, in 2014. Clint grew up in the First Christian Church in Decatur, Alabama. He received a B.A. in History at University of Alabama and received his Masters of Divinity from Assemblies of God Seminary in Springfield, Missouri. Since ordination Clint has served three Disciples of Christ congregations. Clint is married to Anna Shirey, also an ordained Disciples minister, and they have two children together - Shirey and Raiden. Clint likes to ride his motorcycle, hang out with his family, and plant a garden every spring.

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

Each year at the Men’s Retreat there is an important offering collection which provides resources for the Disciples Men to support specific mission efforts in and beyond the Region. Men’s groups in congregations are urged to collect their money in advance of the retreat so that each congregation’s gifts may be included with the offering collected at the retreat. Registration forms and information on costs were included in the November Leader’s Packet. The early-bird deadline for registration is March 3. After that date there is an increase in the registration fee. Please contact the Regional office if more information is needed.

Nisha Warbington was ordained to Christian ministry on Saturday, January 21, 2017, at YMCA-Camp Chandler in conjunction with You�틀opia and the Young Adult Retreat. Pictured on the left with Nisha (center) are persons who participated in the service. They include (left to right): Troy Tatum, Belle Kahalley, Israel Martinez, Karen Ball, Dale Braxton, Laura Hutchinson, John Mobley, Roger Peadro, Jim Storie, Beth Thomason, and Carmencits Ortiz. Pictured on the right is Nisha Warbington (center) receiving her certificate of ordination from Regional Ministers Dale Braxton and John Mobley.
“GREEN TEAM” ESTABLISHED IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

The Division of Nurture has expressed its concern that the church, in all its expressions, practice good stewardship of the earth and its resources. At its meeting in 2015 the Division authorized the formation of a Creation Care Task Group to give leadership to the Region in this area of Christian discipleship. The Division also wanted to ask the young adult group in Alabama-Northwest Florida to serve as this task group.

At its 2017 winter retreat, the young adults in Alabama-Northwest Florida accepted this invitation and have become the Region’s “Green Team.” The chairperson for this Green Team is Belle Kahalley. Additional members include Katelyn Cole, Mae Margaret Davis, Kenzie King, Travis McGough, Margie Morgan, Ginger Weathers, and Alicia Wright. At its initial meeting, the Green Team agreed on specific recommendations they will propose to the Regional Board in March to help the Region be better stewards of creation. They will also help the Region satisfy the requirements for becoming a Green Chalice Region.

The 2017 Young Adult Winter Retreat was held at YMCA-Camp Chandler on January 20-22, 2017. The keynoter for the retreat was Monty Love (pictured center). The theme for the retreat was "Faith in the Midst of Tragedy and Loss."

Pictured below is the congregation that gathered and celebrated the ordination of Nisha Warbington on Saturday, January 21, 2017. Included in the picture are retreat participants, other guests from around the Region, and several of Nisha's family members.
The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has held eight 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 that Miracle Days will continue to happen in Alabama-Northwest Florida. The date for the next Miracle Day has been set tentatively for Saturday, June 9, 2018. Applications from congregations that have an interest in hosting the next Miracle Day are welcomed. An application can be found in the January Leader’s Packet, 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 2018. The deadline for submitting applications is March 31, 2017.

The 2017 Ministers and Mates Retreat was held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Orange Beach, Alabama, on January 9-11, 2017. Rev. Todd Adams, President of the Pension Fund, was the retreat leader. The theme for the retreat was "Re-Engaging with Your Call."

The giving in 2016 by congregations in Alabama-Northwest Florida to the Disciples Mission Fund and the four Special Day Offerings (Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas), shows a 6.76% decrease from the amount given in 2015. Church-wide gifts to Disciples Mission Fund and these four Special Day Offerings decreased in 2016 by 3.50% from the 2015 amount. Gifts by Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations to Week of Compassion in 2016 increased by 3.29% over the amount given in 2015. Church-wide giving to Week of Compassion, regular and designated, increased in 2016 by 3.0%. Gifts by Alabama-Northwest Florida congregations to Reconciliation in 2016 increased by 10.47% over 2015. Church-wide giving to Reconciliation in 2016 increased by 6.4%.

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.
Nisha Warbington was ordained at YMCA-Camp Chandler on January 21, 2017, in conjunction with Youthopia. Jeff Damron began his service as Pastor with Pleasant View Christian Church, Camp Hill, on January 22, 2017. Marc Nattier has begun serving in an Associate Ministry role with South Baldwin Christian Church in Foley. Fannie Ashley has begun serving in an Associate Ministry role with First Christian Church, Montgomery.

Two recently retired ministers have relocated to the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Don McLaughlin is living in Daphne. Gene Eason is living in Pensacola. We welcome these two ministers to the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

Chris Whitehead has been approved for ordination by the Committee on the Ministry. A service of ordination has been planned tentatively for Sunday, March 19, 2017, at Azalea Hills Christian Church where Chris serves as pastor.

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING A MINISTER

Huntsville, First (Cameron Douglas is Interim)
Jasper, First (LaMon Brown is Interim)
Tuscaloosa, First (Jim Brooks is Interim)

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
Village Christian Church, Auburn
First Christian Church, Birmingham
Valley Christian Church, Birmingham
First Christian Church, Dothan
First Christian Church, Florence
Snow Hill Christian Church, Ft. Deposit
First Christian Church, Ft. Walton Beach
Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana, Ft. Walton Beach
Sellers Memorial Christian Church, Hayneville
First Christian Church, Huntsville
Grateful Life Community Church, Huntsville
Madison Christian Church, Madison
Mt. Pleasant Christian Church, Mathews
First Christian Church, Pensacola
Mt. Calvary Missionary Christian Church, Tuskegee
Union Christian Church, Tuskegee
First Christian Church of River View, Valley
THE ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA REGION EXPRESSES ITS SINCERE GRATITUDE TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE 2016 ANNUAL FUND

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

Mr. & Mrs. William Bagby
Jack & Marti Baldwin
Matt & *Karen Ball
Deryll & Lorraine Banning
William Barham
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Judy Blaock
**Dale & Mercedes Braxton
Steve & Allison Brown
Charlie & Sharon Busler
Jose’ & Edith Carreras
George & Muriel Castillo
Steve Chun
*Jim & Janice Clifford
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Johnny & *Fioretta Timmons
Garry & Twila Tyree
Mark & Dawn Underwood
Valley Christian Church
*Margaret J. & Mack M. Vann
Daren & **Nisha Warbington
Wes & Kathy Weathers
Ben Webb
Pete & Jean Willis

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

The Annual Fund is......
......an invitation for individuals to give additional financial support for the ministries of this Region. While the Region is supported through the Disciples Mission Fund and through the Christmas Offering, these dollars alone will not maintain current ministries and develop new ministries that are enviorned.
......an opportunity for individuals to make a difference in the lives of children, youth, young adults, men, women, pastors, and students. Gifts to the Annual Fund directly impact people right in your own congregation and in neighboring Disciples of Christ congregations.
......an opportunity to undergird this Region so that we can achieve excellence in everything we do. Nothing less is worthy of the Christ we serve.

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

Name_________________________________________E-mail____________________
Address______________________________________________
City_________________________________________________State______________Zip________
Phone________________________________________Congregation________________________

Amount of Gift $________________________

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

Thank You for Your Support!!!