

THE NEW CHRISTIAN MESSENGER

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Disciples in Portland Choose General Minister, Revise Design *by Rev. Bill Thompson*

At the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Portland, Oregon, July 23-27, Disciples elected a new General Minister and revised the Design for the Christian Church. Business has taken a back seat, however, to mission, worship, youth, and relationships. Twenty years ago, there were more than forty business items to handle. Today, that number has fallen to sixteen, four of which were administrative motions. Disciples now gather at General Assemblies to worship together, celebrate the work of churches, inform each other of common mission work, engage in local mission projects, learn about new worship styles, and renew relationships with friends and family. The Portland assembly drew 5000 persons for the opening worship services. There were 3000 who voted in the election of General Minister Sharon Watkins. Work projects in Portland and a blood drive during the assembly were also featured. Programs for youth and children made this a family affair. The General Youth council led the Monday evening worship. Pre-assembly concerts by a gospel group, a drum ensemble, and a praise band from Florida helped prepare Disciples for worship. Some Disciples helped raise funds for new church establishment and Week of Compassion through a 5K "Spirit Walk." There was something for everyone in Portland. Future assemblies are in Fort Worth (2007), Indianapolis (2009), and Nashville (2011).

Disciples Select Sharon Watkins as General Minister *by Rev. Bill Thompson & Dr. Ray Miles*



The Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins was elected our new General Minister and President by a near unanimous vote of those gathered for the General Assembly in Portland on Tuesday, July 26, 2005. In her acceptance speech, Dr. Watkins said, "This is not about me, this is about us. We are in this together..." It was a moment filled with emotion and hope.

Dr. Ray Miles, commenting on this election says, "I could not sing the doxology which spontaneously erupted because the emotion within me was so great, so deep and so overwhelming. I am filled with hope for the future of the church to the point where tears well up and fill my eyes. Leadership is powerful when built on relationship with a person and with God. Sharon Watkins is my friend and she is dedicated to loving God and this part of God's church. If anyone can make the Disciples of Christ new and fresh she is the one. She will help us sing a new song in a new day and the Disciples of Christ can move into being what God expects us to be."

For the Disciples of Christ in Georgia what does this mean? It means we have a chance to revitalize and become new just as the whole of the Disciples do. With Sharon as General Minister and President there is a new sense of hope and a new realization that God is not finished with us.

Looking into God's future will give us the energy and vision to be what God has called us to be. Your congregation can do the same if it looks not to become what it used to be but what it is called to be. The theme of the Assembly is "Jesus Calls Us". It is true.

Rev. Watkins has been serving as Senior Minister of Disciples Christian Church, Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Her husband, Dr. Rick Lowery, is Professor of Old Testament at Phillips Theological Seminary. She becomes the seventh General Minister of the Disciples and the first woman to hold that position.

To read more about Rev. Watkins, see the news release at <http://www.disciples.org/GA05/watkinsrelease.htm>

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

September 17
Regional Board Meeting

September 20-22
Regional Ministerial Staff
Event (SERF)

September 25
NE District Meeting

October 3
NE Ministers Meeting

October 6
Deadline for Christian
Messenger

October 7-9
CWF Fall Retreat

October 15
Miracle Day
Christian Education Meeting
Reconciliation Task Force
meeting

October 22
CMAT Meeting

November 5
Disciple Women's
Commission Meeting
Disciple Men's Commission
Meeting

November 7
NE Ministers Meeting

November 11
Regional Board Meeting

November 11-12
Regional Assembly, Ray of
Hope CC

November 24-25
Regional office closed for
Thanksgiving

Kids Get Closer to God at Camp!

by Rev. Michael Weeks

What is it about summer camps and retreats that bring children and youth so close to God? My standard answer is the building of Christian Community away from the everyday concerns of life. Camp is a place set aside by our churches where we can go to practice our faith and being there in a different place brings one closer to God.

I have something to add after reading a scholarly essay by Kenda Creasy Dean. Kenda suggests that another reason is that camp ends. Take a look at this idea with me. Camp is marked, as she says, by a radical finality. We go away to a place where everyday life is suspended for a few days and hear about the eternal promises of God. We prepare for the last day of camp all week and we expect God to act with power as we leave. Anyone who has ever seen a closing circle or worship can testify to this. Campers go away as apostles of hope. They have glimpsed the future in which they are invited to take part in the Christian story.

By design many of the programs of the church do not end, but go on week after week. What if we looked at new ways to bring closure to our worship and programs and expected God to act in the end just as God acts at camp. This is food for my thoughts this fall.

We just concluded another summer of camping in Georgia. I am happy to report that our attendance was within six people of matching last summers Disciple camping numbers. We are delighted with the feedback from campers and congregations. Our counselors and directors did an outstanding job bringing the message that "God is calling" to campers. Thanks to them and to all of you in local congregations who made their participation possible.

Women's Ministry News

by Rev. Betty Brewer-Calvert

Women of Georgia Gather in Norman Park October 7-9, 2005

It's time to register for fall retreat. Forms have been mailed and are also available online at www.gadisciples.org. The theme for the 2005 retreat is "Women in the Heart of God: Refocus, Refresh, Relate." Through the everyday lives and faith of Biblical women, participants will be encouraged to examine their own lives in order to understand and live more fully their Christian calling. Rev. Petie McLean, Director of Education at First Christian Church of Glasgow, Kentucky, will be the keynote speaker. She hopes to assist participants in being more aware that they are in the heart of God, show them how to embrace that knowledge and give thanks.

Rev. McLean has led numerous retreats across the United States. Those who attended the 1998 Quadrennial Assembly will remember her as the humorous and insightful 'cleaning' woman who helped them see themselves in perspective. Rev. McLean brings a deep faith, challenging questions, an inviting personality, and a hopeful outlook to share with her sisters. Disciple women of all ages are invited to join with one another for what promises to be an outstanding week-end in which they will draw back from the busyness of life and be refreshed by God, the keynoter, and one another. Registration for Retreat has begun and participants are urged to respond and invite someone to join with them in attending.

Each church should bring a gallon of lemonade (ice and cups provided) and a couple of batches of cookies to share on Friday night. (Low-cal snacks are also welcome; but 'don't forget the cookies!') Also, churches are to bring creative or craft items to be sold in the boutique.

Treat yourself kindly: Come to Retreat 2005!

Mix in '06

Have you registered for the Mix in '06 (June 21-25, 2006)? Check out www.dreamonsisters.com. Let's go to Indy!

CHURCH FOCUS: FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ALBANY

*A Resilient Servant of the Lord
by Rev. Byron Wells*

Nestled in the Southwest corner of Georgia, First Christian Church of Albany has spread the Word of God for over eighty years. Established on July 13, 1924, the congregation has resided in three different locations as its ministry has evolved to meet the spiritual needs of Lee and Dougherty counties and beyond.

According to the congregation's pastor, the Reverend Tommy Lowery, Albany First is the best kept secret in Albany, but the congregation is working hard to let the secret out. Rev. Lowery began his ministry at Albany First in March of 1998. The week before he began his ministry at Albany First, Rev. Lowery was already busy caring for his congregants as he helped to move furniture and belongings of some of Albany First members away from rising floodwaters. A native of Eastman, Georgia, Rev. Lowery's ministry has seen Albany First begin a time of growth as new members and children have sought to share in the ministry of the congregation.

Albany First has a lot going on within its walls and beyond. Recently the congregation voted to extend a call to Johan Van der Merwe to work with the growing number of youth and children in the congregation. Johan comes to Albany First from Sebring, FL, and he brings creativity and excitement with him. Looking to the future, Albany First set aside money to begin construction on a new multi-purpose building as a result of the congregation outgrowing

its current fellowship hall. This fall the congregation will begin a number of new studies, including a study of "Forty Days of Purpose." With the combination of energy from its new members and wisdom from its experienced members, Albany First is moving forward as it seeks to reach people with the Word of God.

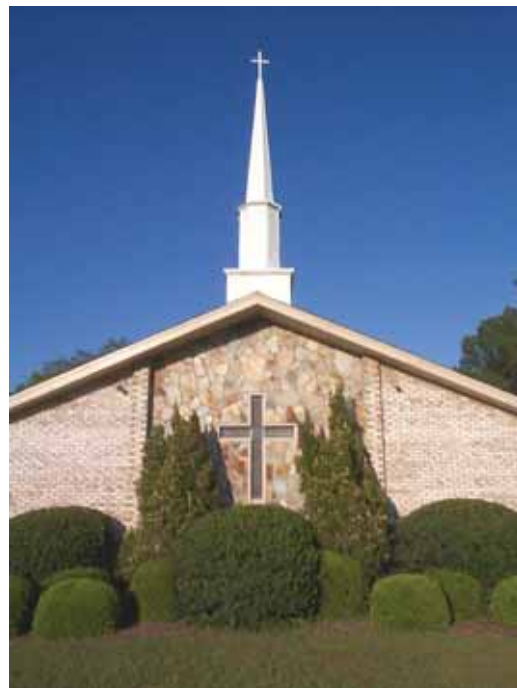
The resiliency of First Christian's members have been demonstrated many times in the recent past. Suffering from severe flooding in 1994 and 1998, and with the community undergoing damage from a tornado in 2000, the members of First Christian have overcome

many obstacles to fulfill their call as a congregation. The congregation also knows the faithfulness of their brothers and sisters in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as Week of Compassion was able to come into their community after each of those disasters and help the community rebuild. Throughout these trying times, Albany First has maintained its loving and caring reputation as it has sought to minister to its community and world.

With the combination of energy from its new members and wisdom from its experienced members, Albany First is moving forward as it seeks to reach people with the Word of God.



Rev. Tommy Lowery



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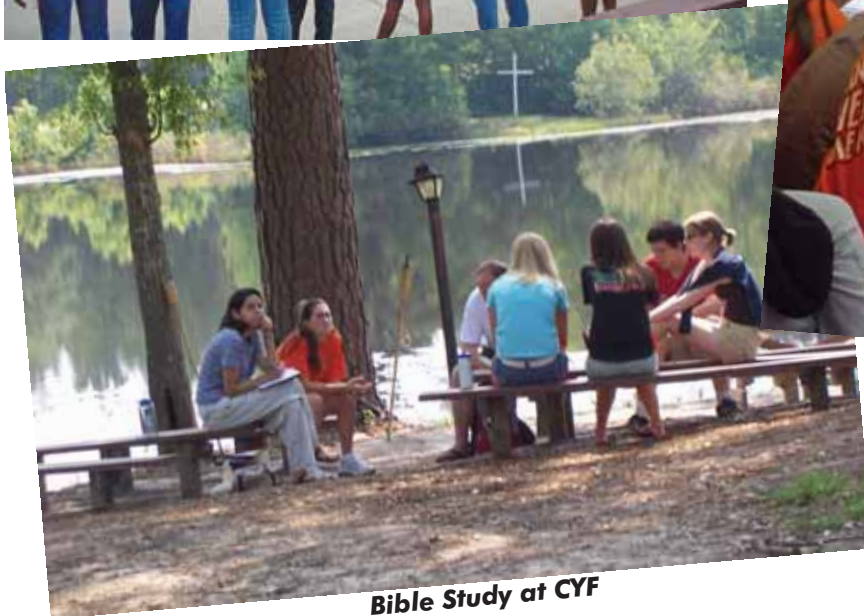
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Georgia Disciple

Umoja Circle at Camp Aim High



Bible Study at CYF



In Lavery Hall at CYF



Limbo Time at Chi Rho Camp

Dynamic groups of campers, directors and counselors made camp the best ever, with prayer, study, worship and recreation. Campers left understanding our theme: God is Calling! The pictures tell the story.

Thanks to all the staff who made this a great summer at Camp Christian Conference Center and Camp Kicklighter. For all the youth of the region, thanks to each who helped empower others for ministry. Thanks to the volunteers who have done so much for our camps.

Summer Camp

05



Chi Rho Camp water games



Watching the talents of other Camp Balaam campers



Chi Rho Mail Call



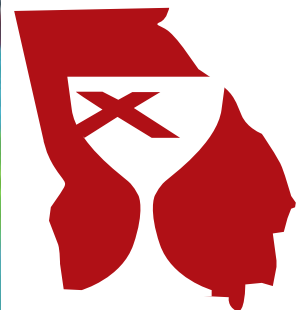
Fishing at Chrysalis II



Outdoor Challenges at CYF



Swim time at Chrysalis I



CHURCH AND CLERGY NEWS

What's Going On Around The Region

Phelps Joins Indiana Regional Staff

Rev. Dean Phelps and his wife Debbie are settling into their new home in Indiana where Rev. Phelps assumes the position of Director of Church Multiplication for the Indiana Region. The Georgia Region rejoices that Rev. Phelps' passion for mission and evangelism will continue to be lived out on behalf of Disciple congregations.

Raiford Retirement Planned

Rev. Bob Raiford concludes his ministry in both Tennessee and Georgia August 28. After 21 years as pastor of Sandersville First (see FOCUS, The New Christian Messenger, April 2004), Rev. Raiford retires to enjoy the natural wildlife habitat he and his wife Georgia will create at their new home, as they continue to express their love for God's creation. Travel and more time with granddaughter, Ruthie Weeks, complete their current retirement dreams.

Weekley to serve Interim in Boston

Rev. Keith Weekley continues to find new adventures in ministry in his 'retirement'. August 14 he began serving an interim with Christ Church United, a United Church of Christ congregation in Boston, Massachusetts. While in Boston, Rev. Weekley will live with daughter Kristen who is pursuing a graduate degree there. Rev. Weekley and his wife Connie will commute between Boston and her home in Lawrenceville for the anticipated two years of his interim, granting Rev. Weekley and Kristen a precious 'interim' of time together.

Griffin First Christian Church Calls Rev. Campbell

The Rev. E. Andrew "Andy" Campbell began his ministry at First Christian Church in Griffin on July 10, 2005. Andy is a graduate of Christian Theological Seminary and was ordained in his home church, Allisonville Christian in Indianapolis in June. During his seminary time, he was Youth Director at 7th and 8th United Church of Christ and Minister of Youth with Zionsville Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). His call to ministry brings him from a former career in restaurant management to the pastoral ministry.



Rev. Andy Campbell

Cherry Log Capital Campaign is Great Success



**Ron Midkiff (center, rear)
with Chinese Christians**

Cherry Log Christian Church has just completed a successful capital fundraising campaign, pledging \$720,000 on a goal of \$500,000 for a new building. In addition the congregation recently voted to buy additional property next to its new site, bringing the total site size to well over 12 acres. The campaign was chaired by Byron Wyndham. Chris Michael is the pastor.

Georgia Disciple leads Mission to China

Ron Midkiff, a member of Cherry Log Christian Church, is leading a mission team in China, sponsored by Global Ministries and the Amity Foundation. They are teaching English to 41 Chinese pastors and seminary instructors. This year is the second of three planned trips. They are using two books donated by American Disciples: Craddock Stories and The Peoples' New Testament Commentary. Read reports of the mission work on www.gadisciples.org.

Be a "Messenger Angel" During August

To honor the memory of the Rev. Billie Hillis, we will receive an offering during the month of August. Gifts to the "Messenger Angels" fund support our expanded publishing schedule. We have had compliments on the full color design of the *New Christian Messenger* this year.

Send contributions to The Christian Church in Georgia, Messenger Angel Fund, 2370 Vineville Ave., Macon, Ga. 31204. Your church should have offering envelopes. Contributions can also be made online at www.gadisciples.org.



Bill Thompson, Ray Miles, and Byron Wells plan the next Messenger



Miracle Day is Coming... BE THERE!

In October of 2003 we reported that Hiltonia Christian Church was growing. Now, they need rooms to house the children and Christian education programs. Miracle Day on October 15 will meet that need. We need dollars and people to do it. Watch the web site and mailings for details.

Participate in Reconciliation Week

The Reconciliation Task Force invites Georgia Disciples to participate in Reconciliation Week, Sept. 25 – Oct. 2. Plan a Week of Prayer for your church. Relationships are at the heart of reconciliation. Contact a church of a different racial or ethnic makeup and exchange prayer concerns. Plan a joint prayer service. Pray for reconciliation in your Sunday worship. Join other Disciple churches who will receive the Reconciliation Offering this year. Half will support training events designed to eradicate the causes of systemic racism, such as hiring practices. Half stays in the Georgia region to support reconciliation efforts from education to camp scholarships. More information is available on Georgia's Week of Prayer for Reconciliation at www.gadisciples.org.

I'm So Glad

Rev. George Bennett,
Regional Moderator

I'm so glad:

- That we have been given the gift of faith in God.
- That God has given us the desire to turn over the obstacles, impediments, doubts, and suspicions that get in the way of God's full use of us.
- That the universe is shot through with mystery and meaning and adventure.

I'm so glad:

- That we are a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that has taught us how to follow Jesus.
- That we don't have to be the Lord of our lives but to be a part of the merry band of disciples.
- That we have a little faith like Peter that has endowed us with the freedom to get out of the boat of certitude and comfort and walk on the wild waves and be a part of the new creation of God.

We have been given a glimpse of this new creation in Isaiah 67:17-25. I'm so glad that the theme of our November 11-12, 2005, Regional Assembly at Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur is centered on God's new creation.

- A life where the past is forgotten and no longer a burden-
- A life that rejoices in what God is creating-
- A life filled with joy-
- A world where babies no longer die but live out their life span-
- A place where people build homes and get to live in them-
- A place where people plant vineyards and get to drink their own wine-
- A prayer that is answered before is finished-
- A peaceful world where the wolf and the lamb lie down together-

I'm So Glad to be a part of this new creation and your moderator.

From Georgia's Regional Minister: ON THE ROAD TOGETHER



Dr. Ray Miles

As summer begins to wane and we anticipate the seasons changing, there are many things that come into our minds. For some it is the thought of football games on the weekend. For others it may be one last chance for a getaway vacation trip when resorts aren't so crowded. Most families with children have already begun the school year and adjusted their routine for that.

Within the church as well, the coming of fall signals a number of things. Some congregations emphasize the re-involvement in the program of the church with a "Church Loyalty Month" emphasis. Others are concentrating on gearing up all the activities that have been on hold over the summer. Choir begins, or at least starts to wear robes again. Groups which have not met over the summer begin to meet again.

Another significant part of the fall for many congregations is an emphasis on financial stewardship. September sees the beginning of planning towards the ways we will ask people to make financial commitments. Perhaps this is the year to do something out of the ordinary rather than repeat the same tired old letter asking for pledge envelopes to be sent back to the office. With the tightening availability of resources, perhaps this is the year to do something more intentional.

I am always excited about the opportunity to do a financial stewardship campaign. It is one of the important ministries of the church. I do campaigns not to raise money for the church or its ministries, but to develop stronger disciples for Jesus Christ and for Christ's church on earth.

The fall stewardship campaign is one time in the year when we ask everyone in the congregation to evaluate their relationship with Christ. We ask whether that relationship has grown and gotten stronger in the year. In our society, as in the one where Jesus ministered, money is a measuring stick of the importance of things to people. The more important something is, the more money is invested in it. Jesus said where your money is indicates where your heart will be also. If your relationship and commitment to Jesus have grown stronger, then your financial commitment to God will have grown also. If your financial investment in Christ's body on earth, the church, hasn't grown, then your relationship hasn't either.

Fall is a time to begin thinking again about the strength of your relationship with Jesus. One of the surest ways I know to develop that, is to increase what you give. Let that thought roll around in your mind as you move into Fall.

Blessings as we journey together.

