“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

St. Augustine of Hippo
Reflections on Spirituality

By Philip Lasater, a Member of the Holy Comforter in Montgomery

Understanding Spirituality is our journey to live into life and into the person God has created and is calling us to be. Spirituality is embracing the divinity of God within us. It is not separate and apart or different from recognizing that our spirituality was born from a gift of faith and grace that gives us confidence of a relationship with God. Spirituality is not an elective condition reserved for a few, and it may even be so obviously understood as each of us knowing what we are called to give of ourselves in service to others in community life.

Perhaps spirituality can be understood as immersing ourselves in the living waters we draw from the Well that never runs dry and from which our thirst is quenched and we are enabled to discover and live into the call that is ours to know and experience in this life. Our action or perceived initiation is actually a slowing, stopping, and taking the posture of receiving what God is doing, a faithful allowing of what God’s Spirit does. We first acknowledge God’s freely given abundant grace wherein we claim redemption and salvation, and then God continues to initiate the ongoing, open outpouring of indwelling grace that forms and informs the maturing path of our lives individually as well as in family and community.

Some people seem more comfortable than others with ideas and notions of what spirituality is and means. Whether or not we are spiritual is not the question so much as how we accept and acknowledge our spirituality. It is not, nor need it be, that we all look or sound the same for each of us to be spiritual in our own way. Awareness and openness to the presence of God with a desire and willingness to seek and discover lead to spiritual understanding. Ultimately from our learning how “to be,” we learn better how “to do” that which we are called to do.

If we consider physical fitness as a metaphor for spirituality, we can understand that everyone inherently possesses some level of fitness and many factors contribute to our overall level of fitness. The spiritual dimension and health of our lives depend on similar factors and choices. There is a correlation between our physical and spiritual lives in that there are better choices in nutrition, exercise, rest, recreation, how we work, and are otherwise stewards of our time.

We know there are many activities, methods, and strategies for pursing, attaining, and sustaining fitness, but those activities themselves are not fitness. Likewise, there are many practices that help cultivate and support spirituality, but the practices themselves are not spirituality. Important as these practices are serially and individually, they are not spirituality but only contribute to developing or sustaining that which is spiritual.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus found it essential to occasionally pull away from people and spend time alone in the desert or garden or across the water. This serves as a model that informs and instructs us about the need and value of quitting our body, heart, and mind and allowing the God within us as Spirit to speak, work, heal, and inspire in ways that are incomprehensible and challenge our ability to describe in words from our limited human experience. While we cannot explain how God works, we can understand the instruction to “go into our closet or inner room” when we pray.

A long line of saints and forebearers of our faith have embraced and modeled for us how to open our inner self to God and wait in faith so that God can teach us qualities of relationship. We refer to these spiritual predecessors as Contemplatives. Common to what they model for us is regular ingestion and digestion of holy text and regular prayer as experienced in many forms—praise, thanksgiving, conversation, silence, breathing, and walking, to name a few—at all times and in all things. This openness and holy listening empower our being to act. The circle of spiritual energy is set in motion and continues as we intentionally, with awareness, turn our focus to God within us and let go of attachments that distract us. As we become aware and allow the envelopment of God’s Spirit to inform our need to act/serve/minister and infuse our faith with energy to act from our contemplation, we act, and then from our action we return to contemplation and continue the cycle. Spirituality thus informs the “what” and “how” we serve and minister. Spirituality infuses our life with the energy and understanding to live into the call and urges God’s Spirit directs us to offer from ourselves. The degree to which we cultivate a discipline of daily, weekly, or regular attention to the source of our spirituality is the degree to which our spirituality is rooted and thrives.

Just as in the early Church when the primacy of faith or works was debated, today’s question about spirituality or faith in action by works is not either/or but both/and. They go together informing and energizing the other; each is essential and incomplete without the other. Spirituality is wholeness from God’s perspective, and it does not accommodate the split views of disintegration common to the human perspective without benefit of the Spirit.

We learn from those who have journeyed before us that faithful waiting and faithful disciplined exercise of those practices that produce spiritual fitness often require commitment from us without always providing manifestation of awareness or results. It seems to be a characteristic of spirituality that at some point, and often regularly, we must continue in disciplined faith practices that we know sustain us and give ourselves in service without feeling all that we may have or the desire to feel about how God is present, near, working, or growing us. While a dynamic may be simply stated, it may not be simply understood. Can we accept that understanding is less important than acknowledging and receiving?

Spirituality leads us to eventually experience the lessons of paradox. By the time we become sensitive to spirituality in our lives, we have constructed much that needs dismantling. We begin experiencing the paradox of letting go in order to become that which we have been trying to be all along. Our Western culture is very action oriented, but our faith mentors point to regular observance of Sabbath and retreat as the way that light and energy are given to our being’s path.

If we can embrace that God’s creative energy is ever in motion within and without and that our lives here contain the invitation to co-create with God, then our spiritual lives and journey to discovery of what that can mean for each of us will have begun.
God in the Midst

Christian spirituality is about opening our eyes to the divine presence all around us, in bread and wine shared, in the faces of those we love and those in need, in laughter and tears, in earthly beauty and heavenly glory. Our spirituality includes practices that help us perceive and receive this presence.

During a recent visit to London for a board meeting and a baptism, I overheard part of a conversation by the fire in an old pub (charmingly called “The Mitre”). “I am really quite a spiritual person but not religious,” one woman said to the other. “I’m afraid the Church is not for me.”

I have heard this sentiment before in different forms, but it always startles me. Is it really possible to be spiritual without being religious? I think not. Yet in popular perception, sadly, there seems to be such a gap.

This Christmas is the heart of all Christian spirituality, on which this issue appropriately focuses. We are persons of both flesh and spirit, two-dimensional beings. “Man does not live by bread alone,” as Jesus said. Life is more than the physical. To be whole and wholly alive we must have the life of the Spirit.

Spirituality is a relatively recent word in English, rarely used a generation ago. It describes the inner dimension of our lives, how we relate to the incalculable mystery of things, how we nourish our souls. In the “kingdom of thingdom” in which we live in the materialistic West, the new popularity of spirituality signals a resolved quest for meaning, for transcendence, for wholeness. In a word, for God.

Photograph by Billy Brown

“God in the midst, God in the mystery, God in the mess” of life, as I heard the Incarnation described once. It started in an out-of-the-way stable and continues in every nook and cranny of our life. In Christ, God and humanity are intimately joined; heaven and earth made one, all that is Spirit and all that is flesh are brought profoundly together. “There is no longer any distance between us and Him,” wrote Dorothy Sayers. “God and sinners reconciled,” says the old carol. Let “heaven and nature sing!”

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This perception may be an extension of our individualistic, have-it-my-way culture, our desire to be spiritual on our terms without the complexities of religion or doctrine or commitment. Perhaps it is because for some church can seem separate from real life. Perhaps it is because we Christians do not always show forth our rich spirituality adequately. I do not know for sure. But I do know that the Christmas gospel announces the end of any such gap.

In Christ we believe that God has come to be with us. God is transcendent, yes, but not distant beyond the stars. The sacred has invaded the secular. The light shines here in this darkness. God is alive and loose in the world and immersed in real life. Because Jesus was born in an ordinary stable and laid in a messy manger in the very-little-indeed town of Bethlehem, there is no place where God cannot be present.

Christian spirituality, therefore, is about the nearness of God. It is about opening our eyes to the divine presence all around us, in bread and wine shared, in the faces of those we love and those in need, in laughter and tears, in earthly beauty and heavenly glory. Our spirituality includes practices that help us perceive and receive this presence. It is about learning to sit still, about prayer that expresses our deepest longings and opens our hearts to God, about quiet meditation on the scriptures, about paying attention to the Spirit in and through all things.

It stirs our hearts and invites us to offer all that we are in humble service and extravagant generosity. All because we have seen in Christ that God is with us, as near as the beating of our hearts.

Every church is to be a stable for that kind of incarnate discovery, where all the nitty-gritty of our earthly lives meets the love of God. Each is a place and community where the world is invited to seek and see the mystery revealed in the Word made flesh, where God is embodied in imperfect lives like ours and in acts of love for others.

Ronal Rolheiser writes that spirituality is what we do with our souls, the deepest part of ourselves. “A healthy soul must do dual jobs,” he says, “it has to give us energy and fire, so that we do not lose our vitality and its other task is to keep us glued together, so that we do not fall apart and die.” This is what our prayer and worship and meditation and other spiritual practices are all about. They give life to our souls.

Energy and fire, being glued together and integrated, these are the gifts of the Incarnate One, God with us in the reality of our lives. “In him all things hold together,” as Colossians says. God is in Christ, God in the mystery, God in the mess.

May these gifts be renewed for us this Christmas. At the center of all of our festivities may we discover again the nearness of God in the Word made flesh. And may the gifts of spirituality burn brightly in our churches so that all persons may be drawn to the sacred fire of God’s love, which is the deepest desire of every heart and the hope of the world. That is our mission and our gladness.

Becky and I and all your diocesan staff wish for your Christmas to be merry because touched by the joy of God.

Your servant in Christ

When I was young, my parents made all four of us children go to church. We all sat in the same pew every Sunday expecting to be bored—and rarely being disappointed. I remember that my primary concerns in church were trying to sit still so I didn’t get in trouble, all the while resenting being all dressed up in a clip-on tie and uncomfortable hard-soled shoes. There was no connection for me between going to church and any experience of God; church was something grown-ups did for grown-ups, and the best I could hope for was to be seen and not heard. God was long ago and far away, something that concerned other people.

One summer evening when I was six or seven, my dad was trying to get me to come inside and take a bath, and I, being six or seven years old, was doing my best to stay outside so I could play. He told me I had to take a bath because we had church the next day. We followed the script appointed for parents and children: I told him I didn’t want to take a bath or go to church and asked him if he had to; he assured me that I did. Just then, and just on cue, we saw a shooting star, a beautiful and wonderful postponement of the soap and water in my near future.

It was a moonless night and dark; he pointed out the Milky Way, Venus and Mars, and Orion’s Belt. He showed me how to find the North Star from the Big Dipper and told me that I would always know which way is north. I told him that it made me feel small, on forever and ever. I told him that it made me feel small, and I remember his gentle laugh as he told me that we are all very, very small indeed. We were quiet for a moment and I remember his gentle laugh as he told me that we are all very, very small indeed. We were quiet for a moment and I remember his gentle laugh as he told me that we are all very, very small indeed. We were quiet for a moment and I remember his gentle laugh as he told me that we are all very, very small indeed.

It was a long time before I figured out that one of the reasons for going to church had something to do with the night sky. Being part of a worshiping community, saying prayers in all their richness and diversity, taking our part in the sacraments, meditations, retreats, and study, all of these are means to the same end—in the real presence of the Creator of heaven and earth, we are drawn out of ourselves, and we know that we are tiny parts of a much greater whole.

You and I are called as Christians to live in the knowledge given us through Jesus Christ our Lord that we are beloved of God, to live in gratitude for all we have been given, to love and serve God and God’s creation, including God’s other children. There are many different tools we can use in this effort, but the task is for us to find a way to bridge the gap between our ordinary small concerns and the extraordinary eternal reality of God.

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This is spirituality for me, the recognition that “it is God who hath made us, and not we ourselves,” as the Jubilate read in the old prayer book.

There is much more to reality than we can understand or imagine; at best we are applying our limited minds to reduce infinity to terms we can understand. But there are some things I believe we do know: creation must have a Creator, the Creator fashioned creation with beauty and compassion and in love, and the Creator is still creating, still making beauty, still dealing with creation compassionately, still loving.

We believe that the Creator became human in the person of Jesus Christ to invite us into fuller relationship with the Creator God, whom Jesus taught us to call Father. Respecting our ability and obligation to choose to love and serve God, we know that we are given free will, and so God often chooses to communicate with us subtly, in ways that can be and are regularly mistaken or unnoticed. We understand that there is more to humans than our physical selves. Since it is in our nature to rebel and behave selfishly, our relationship with God can be and often is distorted, and we turn away from God to ourselves.

For the life of me I can’t understand how a person can look up into a clear night sky, or witness the birth of a child, or be with someone when they take their last breath and not know, not just with their heads but deeply know in the roots of who they are, that we are part of something beyond our understanding or imagination—and knowing that want to reach out for it, long for it. A spiritual life yearns to make this larger reality and a fuller relationship with God part of our lives.

The Rt. Rev. John McKee Sloan

Bridging the Gap between Us and God

The Spirituality of Outreach

By the Rev. Deacon Gerri Aston

“We are not saved by these works of outreach, but a “personal relationship with Jesus” is empty if we do not reach out to his other children, our brothers and sisters, who are in need. Sometimes it may feel overwhelming because there is so much need that we may be tempted to shut our eyes. Our own means may be so limited that we can barely take care of ourselves and our children. But do notice that the passage from Matthew’s gospel is not only about material gifts—just as important is our gift of ourselves, our presence and our caring. This is outreach that all of us can do, and it is perhaps the most important part of any outreach that we do. This is heart and soul outreach. It is also the outreach that encircles us with our brothers and sisters and with Jesus.

As Christians, if we are to follow Jesus we must reach out to care for Christ’s family members who are in need. We are not saved by these works of outreach, but a “personal relationship with Jesus” is empty if we do not reach out to his other children, our brothers and sisters, who are in need.

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When I work serving the hungry at Community Kitchens, my presence and welcoming smile are as important as the tasty, nourishing food that is served. When I have gone to Haiti bringing doctors and nurses to heal the sick, our presence and my ministry of prayer for healing are as important as the medicine and skills we bring. This presence, prayer, and caring communicates that we are not giving a handout, but rather that we are reaching out to our family that is united through Christ and our heavenly Father.

Gerri praying with one of the patients during a medical mission trip to Haiti

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Praying with Icons and Experiencing God Within Us

By Becky Bonham, a Member of Grace Church in Cullman

During my training at the Haden Institute for Spiritual Direction at Kanuga in Flat Rock, North Carolina, I heard John Welch, who is a Carmelite monk and author of *Spiritual Pilgrims*, compare the psychology of Carl Jung to the theology of the mystic St. Teresa of Avila. More than five centuries ago, St. Teresa wrote *The Interior Castle*, which describes a crystal castle with seven chambers representing the seven stages on our spiritual journey to reach God. In the first chamber, we must decide that we need a spiritual life before we can travel onward to the second chamber, where we like what we find. In the third chamber, we are at church every time the doors open and on every committee; but our prayer life is empty.

Listening to the lecture, I realized that I was stuck against the brick wall of the third chamber and could not find the door out. After the session I approached John Welch with tears in my eyes and told him that I was ashamed to say that I was stuck in the third chamber. He assured me not to worry because most of the people in the West are stuck there. When I asked him to tell me how to get out of the third chamber, he said that I had to look inward. That is when I discovered how to live a more contemplative life.

For me, my church is where I go for community and to serve God’s people and worship. It is in my own private place where I find God. Jesus said to go into a closet and pray. I sit quietly and invite God in. This is where I truly experience the love of God within me.

People who come to me for spiritual direction are stuck in the third chamber. They work tirelessly for the Church, but they know there has to be more. I try gently to guide them from their head to their heart, which is a very long distance for some. Our lives are busy. We all have time for everything and everybody, but not ourselves. When I ask about their spiritual life the tears come, which is a good thing. As Alan Jones says in his book *Soul Making*, "Something positive happens when tears flow. Tears flow when the real source of life is uncovered, when the mask of pretence is dropped, when our strategies of self-deception are abandoned." Truth follows the tears. We find this truth when we look for God within ourselves.

People are hungry for a deeper relationship with God. We have to make Sabbath time. In his book *Sabbath*, Wayne Muller writes: "A successful life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid and need our company; war on our spirit because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities because we are fearfully protecting what we have and do not feel safe without words and with a focus on being in God’s presence. Icons offer a way of contemplative prayer as well as a way that God can speak to us, a doorway to stillness.

Our soul is yearning for a closer relationship with God. Throughout the centuries the ancient practice of praying with icons has been used to deepen that relationship, and it is becoming more common in our Western spirituality. An icon may not speak to you right away, but gradually it speaks to that part of you that is searching for God. There are many times when I cannot pray, when I am too tired to read the gospels, too restless to have spiritual thoughts, too depressed to find words for God, or too exhausted to do anything. Henri Nouwen once wrote, “But I can still look at these images so intimately connected with the experience of love.” I recommend that you read Nouwen’s book *Sabbath, Way of the Heart*.

I feel sure that many of us have beautiful icons in our homes for decoration. I encourage you to get to know these icons better. Look to them and see what you find. You may just find that peace that passes all understanding.

Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons,” which includes meditations for praying with four icons. He explains it much better than I ever could.)

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Dear Abbey

By Dr. Bill Goodson, a Member of the Nativity in Huntsville

God doesn’t hide from us. Just ask Abraham, Moses, and a few other notables. Scouting parties are generally not necessary to search for the Almighty lurking behind boulders, like a posse chasing the cattle rustler. Yet I’d venture that at least 90 percent of us have come upon some special place, our very own Mount Zion or Mecca or Calvary, where we sense the Presence more acutely, where we feel the Hand touching our hearts, where, by remembering the place, we might get a catch in the throat. If I’m not mistaken, you could easily name one or two quicker than I can finish this sentence. Perhaps a mountain or lake retreat, or, since odds are you are Episcopalian, then Camp McDowell, Sewanee, Kamesha, or your home parish are likely contenders for MVP (Most Valued Place).

I found mine in a Trappist monastery in Kentucky. The whole thing developed something like this: Making rounds on the alcohol treatment unit one morning, I was talking religion with a patient I knew to be Roman Catholic. “I’ve been reading Henri Nouwen’s *Genesee Diary,*” I told him. “He makes mention of a monastery where Thomas Merton was a monk. You know where that is?”

“Sure. It’s near Bardstown, Kentucky. Abbey of Gethsemani.”

“Bardstown? Isn’t that the bourbon capital of the world?”

He tucked his chin and grinned. “Yeah, I’m vaguely familiar with that.”

I asked if he’d like to go there sometime, and he endorsed the idea. That was 1988. After an unanticipated interruption with surgery and cancer treatment, I made good on that promise. In January 1990, Loch Neely, John Dobkins, and I did a weekend retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani. My patient never joined me, but, coming up on 20 years and 40 retreats later, I am grateful for his encouragement.

Before I ever arrived at the Abbey, I had prejudged and pulled diagnoses from my psychiatrist’s manual. Surely, I thought, those monks must be a raggedy bunch of schizoid misfits, tucked away from the real world that had rejected them. I couldn’t have been more wrong. Friendly, composed, good sense of humor—all of those traits adding to their search for Jesus the light touch of humanity that makes you think the unthinkable—that you could be one of them.

On that first visit, we were encouraged to take in “The Statues” located on a secluded, wooded hill about a quarter of a mile from the abbey. A frigid trek took us to the place where there are two life-size bronze sculptures—one of the three sleeping disciples and the other of a praying Jesus—depicting the scene in the Garden of Gethsemani taken from scripture. Nearby we found a plaque explaining that these works were commissioned in honor of Jonathan Daniels, the martyred Episcopal seminarian. That took me by surprise. An Episcopalian thus memorialized at a Catholic monastery? I had never heard of Daniels at that time, but the serendipitous connection led me to learn more and has nurtured my appreciation for our diocese’s annual Jonathan Daniels pilgrimages to Hayneville.

Loch, John, and I also were directed to Thomas Merton’s gravesite in the monks’ cemetery. I was expecting some monument to the memory of this literary and spiritual icon of the 20th century. Instead we found a simple white marker no different from the dozens of others inscribed with his monastic name, “Father Louis Merton, Died December 10, 1968.” It took me barely a moment to see how fitting that was.

In keeping with Benedictine tradition, guests are always welcome, but we have found the place so popular that reservations must be made well ahead of time. A modernized guesthouse provides us with three meals plus snacks, a private room with bath, sheets, and towels, and all that for whatever donation we choose to leave. Our retreats are not organized. In fact, the monastery doesn’t offer much in the way of structure. It’s every man for himself, except for a couple of times we get together for a walk or gather in one of the “talking areas” for sharing of thoughts. If one of us pulled an agenda from his pocket, he’d have to endure blank stares.

Of course, you could structure your time around the seven daily offices of the monastic schedule. A rigorous attempt would find you arising at 3 a.m. for Lauds and ending with Compline at 7 p.m. My fleeting notions of becoming a monk haven’t taken me that far. You are allowed to chant along with the choir if you wish, but I find that I capture the reverence easier by simply listening. Our group is treated usually to an informal meeting/chat with Brother Luke, a multitalented monk whom we have come to know and love. He keeps us up to date on happenings at the abbey. Other opportunities include visiting the well-stocked guest library (my eye will catch a title I’ve been meaning to read for years), and off I go to a quiet place—a sequoia chair outside in warm weather or my room, where a nap might interrupt good intentions), walking the Stations of the Cross arrayed in the garden area of the guesthouse, easy uphill walks to a statue of St. Joseph overlooking the grounds or a cross on the other side of the highway, visiting the new, well-appointed visitors center, where you can watch a video introduction to the abbey and browse through the gift shop (among other items, they sell the products that keep their coffers filled—cheese, fudge, and fruitcake; *The Wall Street Journal* once proclaimed theirs the Best Fruitage in the country, and they do a land office Christmas business). With all of that said, it’s really mostly about silence.

Would you believe that four or five guys travel north from Huntsville for four hours to find silence? No television or radios, silent meals in the guesthouse dining room, and only certain rooms and areas designated for speaking. Notices to that effect are posted conspicuously. The monks have abandoned the sign language demands of yesteryear, but they ration their words with each other. In the writings of saints and contemplatives we are reminded repeatedly of the signal importance of silence in their search for connectedness with God. A few days of practicing silent meditation in the monastery confirms that wisdom for me.

I would be guilty of a major omission if I didn’t highlight, in addition to silence, the companionship fostered by these retreats. Sharing the experience with friends creates a bond that would be hard to find elsewhere. And it’s not only the time spent at the abbey. Four-hour rides back and forth provide further opportunity to learn more about each other.

The final seal I would place on the monastic visit is, simply, inspiration. If you were an artist studying the chiaroscuro of an original Rembrandt, you would be inspired. If you were a gardener walking the grounds of a chateau in the Loire valley, likewise. And if you were, like me, a wandering soul in search of its depths and you were kneeling in the upper gallery of the abbey church, watching the monks file devoutly into their choir stalls and then...
listening to their prayerful chants, you would be inspired—
inspired and dedicated to a more reverent, contemplative walk with God.

Transporting that inspiration all the way down I-65 and back to everyday life is the challenge. Sometimes as I see the highway miles rolling up behind me and I pass through Ardmore and into Madison County, I can almost palpably feel the tug of the next week’s schedule and the opposing desire to maintain connectedness with the abbey that I’ve left behind. When I allow myself silent time for Centering Prayer, either at home or at church, the sacred images of Gethsemane are with me; alive and well.

Here are thoughts from two of the other men who have retreated to the abbey with us.

A Reflection from Bill Case, a First-Time Retreatant
My personal perspective is that the monastic experience allows you to exist for an extended period (more than a few seconds) without supporting your “story,” and that allows a centering where you can fully occupy the moment with only your spirit. After the retreat I had a strange moment when I saw this “story” I carried as a fundamental problem and my return to those past city I called home for 20 years, places I benefited from his guidance and support, and his failing eye be healed? Dare he speak for himself, risking fatal pride?

“Before I die,” he said in homily, after Compline, “I hope to claim at least one act of pure love for God.” Perhaps a life of endless compassion is enough. His tears wash the world, so helpless is he in God’s will.

A Poem by Carter Martin, a Regular Retreatant
For years, Father Matthew Kelty delivered a homily for the guests each evening after Compline, enchanting us with his poetry readings, good humor, and spiritual depth.

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ENDLESS TEARS ARE NOT ENOUGH
Father Kelty, eighty-five, Morton’s confessor in Kentucky Weeps all day from a drooping left eyelid. He wipes his cheek to spread and dry his salty fluid, Annoyed that his aging body interferes with his life.

But his vocation is to cry for those who suffer, To pray for them, trusting God to intercede.

Can he also supplicate that his failing eye be healed? Dare he speak for himself, risking fatal pride?

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The Labyrinth—A Pilgrimage Home

By the Rev Robert C. Wineserski Jr., Rector of St. John's in Montgomery

Walking the labyrinth at St. John’s in Montgomery can be a pilgrimage tool. There is the anticipation prior to the walking, curiosity, knowing that the walk has meant something to people for many centuries. There is the meandering path itself, which leads us, turns us in different directions, teases us a bit with varying degrees of proximity to the center. There is the arrival at the center. Then there is the exit along the very same path, eventually taking us precisely to where we began yet with a new experience.

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Father Kelty, eighty-five, Morton’s confessor in Kentucky Weeps all day from a drooping left eyelid. He wipes his cheek to spread and dry his salty fluid, Annoyed that his aging body interferes with his life.

But his vocation is to cry for those who suffer, To pray for them, trusting God to intercede.

Can he also supplicate that his failing eye be healed? Dare he speak for himself, risking fatal pride?

“Before I die,” he said in homily, after Compline, “I hope to claim at least one act of pure love for God.” Perhaps a life of endless compassion is enough. His tears wash the world, so helpless is he in God’s will.

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In 2004, with a three-month sabbatical and a financial grant from the Lilly Foundation, I researched and wrote Places of Secret Prayer: Pilgrimage in Alabama. Writing that book was the culmination of several years of reading about pilgrimage and traveling as a pilgrim to various sacred places around the world as well as in Alabama. My pilgrimage experience helped me better understand the value of connecting physical pilgrimage with my spiritual journey.

I also learned that I don’t need to travel halfway around the world to discover places of sacred prayer, “thin places” where the holy and the worldly are very close together. As Sister Cintra Pemberton, an Episcopal nun, writes in Soulfaring, “Pilgrimage can be to any holy place, anywhere in the world. Most of the time, pilgrims seek out those places that have been made holy by others before us. Still, we need to be open to the fact that holy places may emerge at any time—we never know.” It is not too much to believe that pilgrimage sites as places of secret prayer can and do surround us right here in “home sweet home, Alabama.”

All the major world religions have a reverence for traveling to sacred places to connect with the holy and remember what transpired at and around such places. Early Christians, however, did not go on pilgrimage, at least not until around the time of Constantine in the early 4th century. When Constantine declared Christianity to be the unifying faith tradition for the Roman Empire, it was his mother, Helena, who traveled to Jerusalem to pray at the acknowledged sites of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It was also Helena who began a major construction program to build large basilicas in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, on the Mount of Olives, and in Nazareth at the sites where Jesus had walked, prayed, and was crucified. During the Byzantine-era, European Christian pilgrims went by the boatload to the Holy Land of Jesus. At the same time, places of martyrdom in Rome as well as Ephesus and Damascus associated with the lives of the apostles John and Paul grew in significance.

During the Middle Ages, European pilgrims traveled to the shrines of saints and holy wells, which by design were penitential places, to pray for forgiveness of their sins and seek healing from diseases. Ireland alone had more than 3,000 holy wells, and Canterbury in England, Rome and Assisi in Italy, and Santiago de Compostela in Spain, together with hundreds of lesser sites throughout Europe, attracted hundreds of thousands of common people all walking the pilgrim roads seeking relief from disease or absolution from the threat of damnation placed upon them by the medieval European Church. It was not surprising that many of the Church reformers of the 16th century, including Martin Luther, condemned the medieval notion of pilgrimage as excessive. “All pilgrimage shall be stopped,” declared Luther, calling for sites in Germany and throughout Europe to be shut.

Beginning in the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, we have seen an ecumenical acknowledgment by all Christians of the beneficial need for and value of sacred pilgrimage. This renewal of interest in sacred pilgrimage is a reflection of a healthy desire for interacting with the holy in an age when many sacred symbols have lost much of their spiritual power. We simply do not know our spiritual family history, and we do not have a connection with the holy ground and sacred home sites from ages past. The renewed interest in sacred pilgrimage by all Christians, and especially Anglicans, Lutherans, and Protestants, is one sign of a deepening spirituality emerging from within the Church universal.

Pilgrimage helps us rediscover our spiritual roots, which we must nurture to be spiritually whole and complete. In his book Mystico and Zen Masters, American Trappist monk Thomas Merton spoke of the necessity of physical pilgrimage to balance and connect with the spiritual dimension of who we are and who we seek to be. “Mere sitting at home and meditating on the divine presence is not enough for our time… Our pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre [in Jerusalem] is our pilgrimage to the stranger who is Christ, our fellow pilgrim and our brother.” Spiritual pilgrimage thus helps us rediscover our faith family roots and those “thin” places where our ancestors prayed and worked and cared for the sick and the poor.

While we Americans know a great deal about how to travel as tourists to Disney World, Graceland in Memphis, the Las Vegas strip, and Florida beaches, we have little experience traveling as pilgrims to holy ground or places where our spiritual ancestors wrestled with God and angels, as Jacob did by the river Jabbok in the land beyond the Jordan River (modern-day nation of Jordan) or where important natural crossing points became sacred places. Sister Cintra Pemberton points out that Clonmacnois, a 6th-century Celtic monastery in central Ireland, “is situated where the main east-west ancient trackway across Ireland reaches a fording place on the Shannon River, the main north-south navigational artery. Clonmacnois is thus situated at what was in its time the most important crossroads in all Ireland.” In the same manner, Kinlock Rock Shelter, the ancient Mississippian and later Cherokee sacred cave in Lawrence County, is very near the Old Buffalo Trail running north-south from around Moundville north to Cahokia in Illinois (just east of St. Louis) and the High Town Path running east from Georgia and west to Mississippi also used by ancient native people. Kinlock is thus also situated at an important

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discovered by people of faith. That was when I began of secret prayer in Great Britain alone just waiting to be prayer came to me as I was reading Tom Davies’s book The idea of pilgrimage relating to places of secret prayer and healing for more than 300 years? Its dirt healing Sanctuario de Esquipulas in Chimayo, New Mexico, with 11, 2001; or the small Roman Catholic chapel of El York’s twin World Trade Towers destroyed on September or St. Paul’s Episcopal Chapel two blocks from New any of those places, but they are indeed sacred places of Church in Birmingham or the old Cash Grocery Store in Hayneville? Perhaps we have never thought to go to any of those places, but they are indeed sacred places of modern-day martyrdom or places of prayerful reflection. If Alabama can be known for its Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, why can’t we also come to know and appreciate a spiritual trail of places of secret prayer in Alabama? And what about understanding as pilgrimage sites the National Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul in Washington, D.C.; or St. Paul’s Episcopal Chapel two blocks from New York’s twin World Trade Towers destroyed on September 11, 2001; or the small Roman Catholic chapel of El Sanctuario de Esquipulas in Chimayo, New Mexico, with its dirt healing posito, or sacred well, that has been a place of prayer and healing for more than 300 years? The idea of pilgrimage relating to places of secret prayer came to me as I was reading Tom Davies’s book Landscapes of Glory: An English Pilgrimage while I was in residence at Canterbury Cathedral in 2004. Davies writes that there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of places of secret prayer in Great Britain alone just waiting to be discovered by people of faith. That was when I began searching for such places in Alabama and have since written about 13 sacred places right here at home— but there are also possibly hundreds of other local sacred places waiting to be discovered by those wishing to seek out and celebrate holy ground. Over the past few years, I have done a lot of poking around, looking through thin slits that separate heaven and earth. I have discovered a new way of entering sacred space as the way of the pilgrim who prays with his or her feet, walking on holy ground, listening, and looking around to slowly uncover hidden places that have always been there but are so easily overlooked as we hurry by on our way to who knows where. Besides poking around and looking through thin places both at home and around the world, I have discovered the pilgrimage tradition of carrying small stones from one place to another and placing them on the stack of stones already in place. Cairns are stacks of large stones that often provide an entrance to a burial chamber or mark a sacred place such as a river crossing, high ground, a sacred well where baptisms took place, or a gathering place for an ancient tribe. The placement of a small stone is an outward sign of a prayer offered by a pilgrim. As Joyce Rupp records in Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from the Camino, “when we passed a cairn we would pause, find a stone, and stand for a moment in silence remembering someone before adding another stone to the stack.” Prayer is an essential part of pilgrimage, and it distinguishes a pilgrimage from a vacation or holiday travel. Over the centuries pilgrims have written hundreds of prayers. Here are three of the pilgrimage prayers I have written in recent years.

“Places of Secret Prayer”
Written at Moundville in 2004
CIRCLE Me, O God, with your divine presence as I step into secret places of prayer in my home state.

SELECTED RESOURCES ON PILGRIMAGE

Phil Cousineau, The Art of Pilgrimage, Conari Press, 1998
William Dalrymple, From the Holy Mountain, Henry Holt and Companyn, 1997
Albert Holtz, Pilgrim Road: A Benedictine Journey through Laos, Morehouse, 2006
Peter Gold, Tibetan Pilgrimage, Snow Lion Publications, 1988
Cintra Pemberton, O.S.F., Soulfaring, Morehouse and SPCK, 1999
Joyce Rupp, Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from the Camino, Orbis, 2005

Also visit the Alabama Pilgrimage Web site maintained by the Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence at Samford University, www.samford.edu/groups/rcpe/pilgrimage.


Help me to see your presence at home
Help me to see your presence
Help me to see you
Help me to see
Help me
Circle me, O God. Amen.

“A Short Pilgrim’s Prayer”
Written in Birmingham in 2004
For the love of God, creator
For the love of God, redeemer Jesus
For the love of God, Spirit
I begin (continue) the pilgrim’s way today. Amen.

“For the love of God, creator
For the love of God, redeemer Jesus
For the love of God, Spirit
I begin (continue) the pilgrim’s way today. Amen.

“On the Way to Iona”
Written on Iona, Scotland, in 2009
It is not easy to arrive on Iona either by ancient coracle or modern coach. Water and waves surround the island and frequent visitors are sheets of wind and rain. But pilgrims come to walk and pray and remember and sing the hymns for spiritual gifts they seek to gain. I watch the sheep clamber up the steep hillsides to their sentinel perch as if they are island watchmen announcing the arrival of pilgrims yet on the way. And thus I give thanks and praise to God for coming to this thin place of Columba and Aiden whose spirits now join with me as I make my way to Iona on this day.

We can all be pilgrims, seeking the sacred in places we travel. Each of us has roads we have traveled and roads just waiting for us to discover. Some such roads lead us back into the history and story of our spiritual ancestors waiting our rediscovery of our past, and some roads lead us to future places just waiting for that one additional stone to be placed on the stack that will raise it above the ground level and into the sight of others as a place of prayer and healing. The pilgrim roads we choose are for each of us to discover and travel, praying prayers of hope and celebration as we walk.
Enhancing Your Prayers with an Anglican Rosary

“Since the earliest of time, people have used various items such as pebbles or knots to keep track of prayers offered to God,” notes Sabrina Evans, Director of Children’s Christian Formation at St. John’s in Montgomery. Various forms of prayer beads can be found in virtually every major religious tradition in the world. The Anglican Rosary, which blends an Orthodox Prayer Rope and a Roman Catholic Rosary, is a form of contemplative prayer.

The Anglican Rosary is a loop of strung beads, with the circle of the prayer beads symbolizing the wheel of time. “Praying with your ‘hands’ as you move around the circle of beads represents a pilgrimage. The cross is the beginning or entry way into the rosary,” the Invitatory Bead invites you into the process of prayer. Next you will find 33 smaller beads divided into four groups of seven called a decade; these “weeks” are separated by a larger single bead known as a Cruciform. There are numerous symbols seen in the number of the Cruciform beads including the four Gospels and the four directions of the compass (north, south, east, and west), a symbolic representation of the Good News going out into all four directions.

“Using the Anglican Rosary is a tactile experience,” Sabrina explains. “Saying the repetitive prayers allows you to relax and feel the beads in your fingers, which helps you focus on the prayers. Using the beads is a way to keep your mind from ‘floating away’ or wandering.

Centering Prayer: Listening with the Heart

By Louise Meredith, a Member of St. Stephen’s in Birmingham

I began practicing Centering Prayer about five years ago. This form of prayer is a natural fit for my personality and complements my passionate work and devotion for my hobby, calligraphy. I offer it as a perfect answer to anyone seeking a fulfilling approach to prayer.

Throughout my life, I have felt uncertain and unclear about my passion for prayer. Throughout my life, I have felt uncertain and unclear about my passion for prayer. Perhaps it has to do with the tension in my head, shoulders, chest, and legs—we usually do not realize how we hold our muscles tightly, even while we are sitting supposedly relaxed. Breathe in and out fully, filling your lungs with God’s life-giving breath, holding it briefly, and exhaling completely.

Be silent. Let your spirit be receptive to a word like Jesus, silence, peace, joy, or love; perhaps a word will “come to you.” This word is called a sacred word, and it represents your intention to sit in silence for 20 minutes. When plans for vacation or errands to be done or people you are thinking of all drift into your mind, repeat your sacred word to remind yourself of your intention. You are not trying to empty your mind—you are simply being open and receptive to the Spirit of God, which is already present within you but you are not open to it.

Centering Prayer groups meet weekly in the Birmingham area; for more information please visit www.bham.net/cobweb or www.contemplativeoutreach.org (choose southern region links). Sharon Clay uses semi-precious stones, sterling silver, and freshwater pearls to create her Anglican Rosaries, and no two are alike; you can see some of her creations at the Episcopal Book Store (205 6th Avenue North in Birmingham; 205/323-2959; www.episcobooks.com) and on her Web site (www.sharonclaydesigns.com). For more information about the history and use of the Anglican Rosary and appropriate prayers, please contact Sabrina Evans at sabrina@stjohnsmontgomery.org or search the Internet for “Anglican Prayer Beads.”

Sharon Clay’s experience with the Anglican Rosary began when the Rev. Jennifer Riddle, her rector at the Epiphany in Guntersville, suggested she use it to enhance her prayers and meditations. “When she handed me a rosary, I assured her that I could make some that looked better than that one!” recalls Sharon, who is a talented artisan. “So she challenged me to do just that.”

“The project started haphazardly,” Sharon continues. “I researched the actual conformation and significance of the beads, and that moved me deeply. Then as I started making the prayer beads, I continued to be drawn into a deeper level of communion with God. I began to pray that the recipient of each rosary would find the comfort and joy I had found in creating it.”

Sharon Clay

www.bham.net/cobweb or www.contemplativeoutreach.org (choose southern region links).

Each year Contemplative Outreach of Birmingham (COB) sponsors a conference featuring guest speakers who present sessions on prayer and contemplation.
Cursillo—Experiencing a New Way “To See”

By Lisa Gruner, a Member of St. Stephen’s in Huntsville

Circles have held special meaning to me for several years. I can find them all around me—from the cup holding my morning coffee to my favorite polka-dotted sweater and my treasured Celtic cross given to me as a gift from a circle of wonderful friends.

Yes, I see the people in my life as circles. Think about it—there are so many ways to think about the different communities of people around each of us. My family is a circle. My parish family is one. My colleagues at work and the guards at the gate to the building where I work are more circles, as are my ECW friends, my Facebook friends, my mother’s nursing classmates who hold a reunion every year—even after 50 years, my fellow members at the Keel Mountain Volunteer Fire Department...the list is endless. The most fascinating part to me is how these circles overlap and change each other. Do you remember as a child drawing a circle with a blue crayon and then drawing a red one that overlapped the first one? Do you remember being amazed that you “created” purple where the circles met? Applying that to my life, all the circles made up of all the wonderful people in my life, whether I know you or not, are part of creating those beautiful colors in each of our lives.

This rich but different way of looking at the world around me comes from my experiences with Cursillo, a Spanish word meaning “short course.” I attended a Cursillo Weekend a number of years ago and as a result have been an active part of the Cursillo servant community (yes, another circle!). The weekend that I attended Cursillo was a pivotal, transforming moment in my life. No joke! I went to Camp McDowell a single mother of two small children and came home a member of a parish family with a renewed vision of community. I found myself surrounded by an enlarged family circle in my parish and loved and encouraged by new friends. I began to see the colors changing, like blue and red making purple!

Cursillo is one of the methods of renewal in the Episcopal Church. Its purpose is to help people understand their individual callings to be Christian leaders and exercise their leadership in work situations, in their family and social life and everyday activities, and within their parish and our diocese. A few years ago when I heard Kenneth Boone speak at diocesan convention, he asked for a show of hands of those who had been to Cursillo, and an overwhelming majority of hands went up! Many lay leaders in our diocese have started in, around, and at Cursillo.

The Cursillo movement has been a vital part of our diocese for about 30 years, although it’s been around since the early 1940s. The first Cursillo Weekends were developed in the Roman Catholic Church in Majorca, Spain, which explains the many Spanish words. Almost 7,000 Pilgrims have made their Cursillo journey in our diocese, which makes a wonderful large family circle! And each of us is part of helping the Cursillo movement continue through our gifts of time and contributions. Each Pilgrim attends the three-day weekend as a gift from all of us who’ve been there, the Cursillistas—it doesn’t cost the Pilgrim anything to attend a weekend. Each of us knows the impact Cursillo has had on our life, and we want to make sure that others have the opportunity too. Besides that, leading up to and during each and every Cursillo Weekend, we offer prayers for the Pilgrims and the weekend’s staff members.

During a three-day Cursillo Weekend, the Pilgrims experience presentations and discussion mixed with doses of quiet, worship, and unconditional love. A team of laypersons and clergy serve as the staff for the weekend and give a series of talks covering the basics of Christianity and centering on prayer, study, and action. The teaching and care given during a Cursillo Weekend cause many people to feel like newly made Christians with a purpose AND with support. There is a tremendous sense of being part of a worldwide loving Christian community during the weekend, not to mention lots of singing, good food, and fellowship!

Once Pilgrims attend the three-day weekend, they enter the “Fourth Day,” the period that comprises the rest of their lives living out their Baptismal Covenant in the life of the Church. Each person is encouraged to live the life of grace through the support of a Group Reunion, a small group of friends who meet weekly for mutual encouragement and support in the life of grace holding each other accountable for their individual spiritual journeys. Each person is also encouraged to participate in a periodically scheduled larger meeting for support and building of community spirit within the movement called an Ultreya, a Spanish word that means “Onward!” Through these two supporting groups we find ourselves strengthened and encouraged to “Keep the Faith.” Since I made my Cursillo in 1987, my closest friends have been within and around Cursillo whether in my Reunion Group, at Ultreys, or as my fellow weekend staff members. I’ve been on three Cursillo staffs over the years, and I continue to praise God for the opportunity to serve as well as the friends I’ve made in and around each weekend.

Christians attending a Cursillo Weekend often find a new dimension in their Christianity: it is a time to take another look at their relationship with God and who the person of Jesus Christ is in their lives, and it’s a time to grow in the midst of a loving Christian community. The basic atmosphere of a Cursillo is one of joy and Christian fellowship at its best. It is a three-day experience that can be made only once in a lifetime. Cursillo is simply a re-stating of things you have heard and talked about for years...grace, the sacraments, piety, personal growth, and love. I’ve seen the impact Cursillo has on Pilgrims from the perspective of serving on staff, and being able to share the journey with people who have become fellow travelers is always a joyful and awe-inspiring experience.

Want to know more? Some people have been told by Cursillistas that they cannot tell you what Cursillo is all about or what goes on during a weekend. That’s absolutely not correct! Everything that goes on during the weekend may be told to anyone. Cursillo literature is available to anyone who wishes to read or purchase the materials, and you can also check out www.alabamacursillo.org.

Want to attend a Cursillo Weekend? Tell your parish priest that you’re interested in knowing more. Or just ask around your parish—I bet that if you talk with the lay leaders, most of them have made their Cursillo and would love to share what that experience has meant in their spiritual journey. Or contact me at lgruner@bellsouth.net—I’d love to add you to my circle of friends! Like the words of one of my favorite songs sung by Harry Chapin, “All my life’s a circle.”

More About Cursillo

If you are interested in attending a Cursillo Weekend (for adults) or a Happening Weekend (for high-schoolers), please talk with your rector or priest. For more about the Cursillo renewal movement in our diocese, please visit www.alabamacursillo.org or contact Cursillo Secretariat President Becky Bonham at beckybonham@bellsouth.net or 256/735-0207.

Upcoming Cursillo Events

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<td>March 11-14</td>
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Walking the Way of Christ in Namibia

By the Rev. Jeremy Lucas

Penny and I get asked sometimes what life in Namibia is like, and that is a really difficult question to answer. Through the following words and the photos on these pages, I hope you will have a better understanding of what our life is like and the ministries we are involved with here.

We live in the capital city of Windhoek, the largest city in the country with about 300,000 residents. We live in a house next door to the cathedral, the smallest cathedral in the Anglican Communion, where I serve as the associate dean and rector. We make very little money by U.S. standards, but by Namibian standards we are extremely rich. Our money comes from a combination of gracious donations from you in Alabama and other supporters in Namibia.

More than 65 percent of the people in this country live on less than $2 U.S. a day. We shop at Western-style grocery stores and shops, and we can get just about anything we need. Most of the city, however, does not live like we do. More than half of the residents of Windhoek live in shacks and don’t have a reliable source of drinking water. Outside of a few cities, Namibia is populated by rural, subsistence farmers whose life depends on good rain and a good harvest. If you look around, statistics say that every fifth person you meet is HIV positive. Malaria, tuberculosis, and meningitis are just a few of the other diseases that plague the country.

We came to Namibia to work on a clergy training project. Our goal is to work with the diocese here to help develop and implement a three-year training program for new clergy. So far it is going really well. We have 50 students, mostly from the northern part of the country, who are highly motivated and are working very hard.

I also run the cathedral, sort of—sometimes it feels like it is running me. I am the main clergy presence for the approximately 400 parishioners, and in addition I am the chaplain for the 700-student diocesan school. To say that days are full would be a great understatement. Penny works on various projects including after-school programs and organizing clergy spouse conferences. She has also started presenting at workshops on hospice and the dying process. We work hard and support one another when times are difficult.

We have made friends and met lovely people all across this country. We try to spend some time every week away from work with our friends, which usually means leaving our house because we are about 30 feet from the cathedral and are always “on duty.” Staying healthy is one of our main priorities. I have taken up squash, (the game, not the vegetable) and try to get to the gym a few days a week. I have a standing squash game with several Americans from the embassy every weekend. I wake up at 5 a.m. every Sunday morning and try to catch the end of Saturday night’s college football game on the Internet. ESPN shows one college football game that begins about 4 a.m. Sunday our time, and they show Sportscenter USA at noon on Sunday.

Our days in Namibia go up and down. Sometimes I feel like we are being taken down into the waters, that our “lifeboat” has capsized and we are swimming for our lives. I have been trying to find an appropriate prayer to say for what we are experiencing. I was recently reminded of a prayer that was prayed by the desert monks of the 3rd and 4th centuries and is still prayed each day in monasteries around the world. It is the opening
of Psalm 70: “Oh God, make speed to save us; Oh Lord, make haste to help us.” Many days it seems like the only appropriate thing to say.

A few weeks ago the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams, gave a sermon on mission that was quite good. “Mission is most truly itself when it walks along the same road as those who are suffering in body or spirit,” he said. “Only then does it walk the way of Christ . . . to stand with and walk with those who are forgotten or despised, the poor in city and country, women who have suffered violence, children and migrants. Walking in this way will not guarantee success or safety, but it will be a true fellowship with Jesus; without that true fellowship with him, there will be no true reaching out in love to others, and without reaching out to others there is no fellowship with him.”

We are trying to understand what it means to “walk along the same road as those who are suffering in body or spirit.” We know that our privilege means we will never be on the same road. Even if we are walking together side by side, we can never truly know the suffering the people of Namibia live with. We can be present to it and we can be a witness to it, but we will never really know it. These are nice words and what we are supposed to say about mission, but there will always be something that keeps us from knowing truly and fully what the people here experience.

We keep trying, however, to go out and walk that same road. In August we did a lot of traveling. At the beginning of the month we went north for eight days. First we had a week of the clergy training program at Onekweya, and then we went to Odibo for a three-day clergy spouses conference. Almost 30 spouses came from all over the diocese to participate in the conference. It was an amazing time. We thank the ECW of Alabama for contributing to this conference and helping make it such a success.

After spending the next few days at home in Windhoek, we traveled south to visit several parishes and outstations without clergy. It was a trip so full of the Holy Spirit that words fail to adequately express our feelings. Penny and I decided to try to use our Fourth Day reflection and each share our moment closest to Christ.

My moment came in the town of Noordoewer. On Friday morning we went to the home of Tate Enoch, a lay minister for the Anglicans who meet there. We sat in chairs and on logs in front of his modest home made of sheets of tin and reeds and under a shade made of net and reeds. As we spoke it became apparent that this was a place for us to celebrate Eucharist. On the outside wall of his home was the hand-painted sign “The Congregation of Enoch.” We were told that since they were not a church, Tate did not feel comfortable giving his home a church name, but he wanted people to know where to come for Anglican worship. As we sat and talked, more and more people gathered around, and the excitement grew as we prepared a small, folding table to be our altar. Close to 60 men, women, and children gathered for communion and blessings. Just as the service was ending, Tate asked to say a few words and came to put 50 cents (Namibia) on the altar. After the service he told me he wanted us to have the money for our continued work in the south. As I looked around I think I know now how the disciples felt in Mark 12:41 when the widow came to give her offering. Jesus says to them “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” I humbly accepted Tate Enoch’s offering to God and committed to putting it to use in our continued ministry to the southern part of Namibia.

Penny described her moment as follows. Throughout our trip to the south, I was overcome by a deep feeling of humility. It is hard to describe because it takes time for me to process all the emotions I felt. If there was one moment I could point to it, it would be standing and sharing communion with the people in Noordoewer and Aussenkehr. It felt like a true communion. We were sharing in something that brought us together. It touched me in a deep way that people who have almost nothing in common and come from such different worlds can be brought to a different understanding of who they are before God by standing side by side and sharing in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We were connected in our common humanity, and it is humbling to remember that connection.

To remember that people are more than what they have, or where they work, or where they live. As Christians we are not defined by these things. We are defined by a common Creator and Savior who loves each one of us. Although we went to the south to take communion, I realized that true communion was already there, and by going I found it.

Most of you will be reading this article in Alabama in December. Christmas decorations will be up, and celebrations will be in full swing. It is right to give thanks and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, but we all know that our celebrations become less and less about Jesus every year. We get so wrapped in stress and tinsel that we miss the meaning—the meaning of that Child Savior born poor in an animal kraal and his call to us to serve others.

For the past several months I have been reading over and over the Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky’s poem “The More You Tear Off, the More You Keep.” Two of the most beautiful stanzas are these:

Give all at once, make gifts of yourself and forgiving;

having but one ruble, give someone a thousand!

The water in living wells does not stagnate;

the more you tear from your heart the more of it you keep.

This is my hope for our mission service, and it is a lesson for each one of us in our home or our parish. When we give, we do not have less—we have more. This may be a difficult concept for some to comprehend, but here at Christmastime it becomes all the more clear that what we are being asked to give is not stuff, it is our life. We are asked to tear from our heart and know it will hurt, but it is the only way to keep it.

I ask that as you read this you make the choice to tear from your heart and give it away. Penny and I thank everyone who has graciously supported us in prayer and through donations, and we ask that you continue to share your gifts with the people of Namibia and keep us in your prayers as we continue our work on your behalf.

You can support Jeremy and Penny Lucas’s work by sending a donation of any amount designated for Mission Namibia to the Diocese of Alabama, 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-2682.
A few years ago I was buzzing around the burnout flame. I had been trying to care for my young family as well as manage the end-of-life care nonprofit I had started after my best friend died of breast cancer. Frequently I would collapse at the end of the day with little thought for prayer or reflection. I used to joke, “This end-of-life care business is killing me.”

When the nonprofit hired Mary Matthews Brantley, a gifted psychotherapist, to facilitate Wisdom Circles, I had never heard of them. It was suggested that Wisdom Circles would be an ideal format for creating community-wide dialogue around the issues of dying, death, and grief. I chose to participate in the inaugural circle as an executive director with little care for how it might impact me personally.

The guidelines for Wisdom Circles are simple. Although the size of the group may vary, groups of 6 to 12 are ideal. During the circle, only one person speaks at a time (usually this person will hold an object that is passed around as each participant speaks). The speaker is encouraged to speak from the heart and be “lean of expression.” Anyone may choose to “pass” or sit in silence. When another is speaking, listeners are instructed to listen devously. There is no “fixing,” helping, or trying to change another in the circle—we simply listen to one another, and allow each other to speak uninterrupted. Finally, all sharing in the circle is kept confidential. Circles may be facilitated by one individual, or the group can rotate that responsibility.

During the circle each member of the group will address a question (or series of questions) posed by the facilitator or mutually decided upon by the group. In that first circle years ago, Mary explained the guidelines, placed a broken shell on the table as the object to be held by the “speaker,” and then asked, “What was your first experience with death and how did it impact you?” A period of pregnant silence followed, and then a middle-aged woman reached forward for the shell and began speaking. Often we will begin our time together with a practice such as Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, walking meditation, or simply breathing deeply—imagining the dance of creativity that can revolutionize our lives.

The mind and thoughts are the ballast for ongoing trust. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to balance managing the physical and emotional space while participating fully. This is not a hierarchical model.

The Wisdom Circle is flexible and lends itself for delving deeply into a variety of topics. I have participated in circles that have explored prayer, sharing our gifts, aging, becoming a blessing, love, life purpose, stress, community, self-love, and countless other themes. Two groups have read books together . . . each group uniquely reflects the spirit of the participants.

Recently The 1917 Clinic at UAB has begun a monthly gathering focusing on spirituality. Patients and professional caregivers impacted by HIV/AIDS share experiences and reflect on music and poetry related to the weekly theme. At some point, we conduct a Wisdom Circle. As the sacred object is passed around, each participant shares a personal reflection related to that week’s theme. It is good medicine for nurses, social workers, and patients to be in the same circle, meeting on that common ground-human experience.

Although each Wisdom Circle is unique, there are a few themes that I have observed. Choosing to listen devously changes us for the better. It is in listening to life that we open to God working in us and through us. When we listen devously we become a partner with the other in our mutual need for connection. Listening is a lost art.

Most of us crave meaning in our lives, but we unconsciously make choices that pull us away from what is most important to us. Mindless busyness is the enemy of living meaningfully. Taking time to be in community, to breathe a few collective breaths, and reflect . . . this kind of time is the friend meaning. Sometimes in the Wisdom Circle, I have felt as if the Spirit, which is always dancing among us, takes center stage, whirling a few gaudy piñatas.

The intention of Wisdom Circles is for participants to take the “spirit of the circle” out into the world, supporting one another in personal and collective transformation. Ideally participating in Wisdom Circles helps us grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The best explanation I have heard for Wisdom Circles came from a woman who told me, “My experience of God expands with every circle.”

Mary Bea Sullivan is an author, retreat leader, and workshop facilitator. She will be offering “Praying with Beads: A Contemplative Morning” at Grace Church in Cullman on December 12; for details please visit www.marybeasullivan.com. Her upcoming book Living AWAKE—Forty Days toward Renewal will incorporate a facilitator’s guide for small groups to gather and support each other in Living AWAKE circles.
The Ministry of Spiritual Direction

By Bunny Cox, a Member of Our Diocesan Commission on Spirituality

In response to requests for assistance from people who are seeking a spiritual direction relationship, our diocesan Commission on Spirituality has developed a list of spiritual directors within our diocese. If you would like help finding a spiritual director or if you are a spiritual director and would like to be included on this list, please contact Bunny Cox at sambunny@bellsouth.net or 205/752-1692. Bunny, who is a member of Christ Church in Tuscaloosa, is a certified spiritual director and retreat leader. She is a graduate of the Spiritual Guidance and Leading Contemplative Prayer and Retreats programs of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation.

What Is the Ministry of Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual Direction refers to an ongoing, one-to-one relationship with a director who assists another grow in intimacy with God and discerning God's presence, activity, and invitations in his or her life. Sometimes called a spiritual companion or spiritual guide, a spiritual director honors a fellow seeker with a time and place to explore their experience of God and offers companionship and support for that process. The focus of direction is the directee's relationship with God as it is reflected and challenged by all aspects of that person's life. The primary responsibilities of the spiritual director are prayer for the directee and openness to the Holy Spirit, who is in fact the real spiritual director.

It is important to make the distinction that spiritual direction is not counseling or therapy. In general, therapy and counseling deal primarily with problem areas of one's life and attempt to bring healthy change. Spiritual direction is concerned with finding and responding to God in the midst of pain or disorder as well as in the rest of life. Problem/situation solving is not the primary focus of spiritual direction.

Who Comes for Spiritual Direction?

Anyone who seeks a deeper relationship with God. A person coming for direction is trying to be serious about some form of intentional prayer and reflection on the God-currents in his or her everyday life and prayer. Although all aspects of a person's life are part of the spiritual journey, some people seek direction with nothing more specific than a desire to grow and move beyond the spiritual place where they are to a deeper and richer place. Others have sought spiritual direction when facing tough decisions, seeking Christian growth and balance in delicate personal relationships, desiring to begin or deepen a life of prayer, when facing a serious illness, or during a life transition.

What Gifts and Qualities Should a Spiritual Director Have?

Spiritual direction is a ministry of presence, hospitality, holy listening to another's sacred story, and confidentiality. It is important that there be a mutual sense of the rightness of the relationship and a concern for openness, honest, clear communication. The following are some thoughts for consideration when seeking a potential spiritual director and in deciding, with God's guidance, if a relationship of trust and wisdom can be formed.

* Is he or she a person of prayer who is attentive to his or her own spiritual life?
* Does he or she have the capacity to love? Love is exhibited in numerous ways: the ability to listen with attention and interest, without judgment; respect for another recognizing individual autonomy; and the ability to provide an environment where another feels safe. Love is exhibited in care and hospitality and also in the ability to confront others when confrontation is needed.
* Is he or she an affirming person who can see the image of God in every human being?
* Is he or she willing to journey with another through joy as well as sorrow?
* Is he or she honest and authentic and able to be themselves? Does he or she recognize his or her own role

Our Commission on Spirituality

Chair
Nikki Chenault
(nikkichenault@bellsouth.net, 205/752-2068) and the Rev. J.D. Barnes (therevjbarnes@bellsouth.net, 334/289-3363)

Diocesan Staff
Sarah Sartain, Deputy for Youth Ministries and Christian Formation (sartain@dioala.org, 205/715-2060 ext.314)

Members
Bunny Cox, the Rev. Deacon Mary Groff, Lark Howell, Beverly Hurley-Hill, Billie James, Tora Johnson, Philip Lauter, the Rev. Jamie McAdams, Anna Smith, and Amanda Vaughan

Our Diocesan Outreach Summit: Spirituality in Action

By Judy Quick, Chair, Department of Mission and Outreach

“There was not a needy person among them . . .”
—Acts 4:34

The Department of Mission and Outreach announces its first Outreach Summit to be held at All Saints’ in Birmingham (Homewood) on Saturday, January 16, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with registration beginning at 9 a.m. The purpose of the Outreach Summit is threefold: to spark a renewed energy for outreach in our diocese, to offer a networking opportunity for all laypeople and clergy who have a passion for mission and outreach, and to provide practical tips on implementing and sustaining outreach activities.

The Rev. Becca Stevens, chaplain of St. Augustine’s Chapel at Vanderbilt and our keynote speaker, will capture your heart as she recounts her ministry of Magdalene, a residential community for women who have survived lives of prostitution and drug abuse, that she founded in 1997. “I have always been concerned with the practical nature of any ministry,” Becca affirms. Indeed, she recognizes the need for economic well-being as well as spiritual guidance. In 2001 she founded Thistle Farms, the nonprofit business of Magdalene, in which the women make and sell natural bath and body products to support their community. Two women from Magdalene will join us at the Outreach Summit to tell their stories and sell their homemade products. Also for sale will be a selection of Becca’s books of homilies and spiritual inspiration including Sanctuary and Hither & Yon: A Guide for the Spiritual Journey.

The morning workshops will focus on Discover Your Outreach Identity for small, medium, and large parishes. There will be panel leaders and a facilitator to encourage dialog and discussion among the participants and the panel. The afternoon workshops will offer Best Practices: How To Implement Outreach Programs for a variety of ministries, such as food and medical outreach, inner city ministries, welcoming the non-English speaking stranger, youth outreach, social justice, and foreign mission. For the complete event schedule and to register, please visit www.dioala.org and click on the “Outreach Summit” link. We look forward to seeing you there!

The registration fee of $15 will include lunch. Please send your registration check, designated Outreach Summit, to Carpenter House, 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-2682. For additional information, please contact me at jgquick@bellsouth.net or 205/669-6862.
From Dee Buzby, ECW President

The 2009 Fall Conference held at St. Matthew’s in Madison was delightful. The women of the Tennessee Valley Convocation, under the guidance of Coordinator Joan East, provided us with a delightful wine-and-cheese party, delicious meals and snacks, and goodie bags. They surprised us all with the beautiful spirituals sung by the Huntsville Spiritual Chorale. Thank you to Joan East, the Tennessee Valley Convocation, the women of St. Matthew’s, and the Rev. Steve Gruman for making the 2009 Fall Conference so enjoyable.

Our speaker, Katerina Katsarka Whitley, left us spellbound as she told the story of St. Anne and several women of the Bible in what could have been their own words. Bishop Parsley said in his homily that Katerina put the “flesh” on these women and made them human. Katerina was so warm and friendly, and she easily became one of us.

We are always pleased when Bishop Parsley joins us, and we were delighted that he could be with us Thursday evening and Friday morning. He thanked the women of our diocese for all we do and the out-going ECW Board for a job well done. He also commissioned the new ECW Board during the Eucharist.

I would also like to thank Bishop Sloan for joining us Wednesday night for the Out-going and In-coming ECW Board Dinner. We are very grateful for the support that Bishop Parsley and Bishop Sloan give the ECW.

While my husband and I were in Vancouver recently, we attended an Anglican church where we heard a sermon on the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: “The only thing that counts is faith working through love.” St. Paul’s words caused me to immediately think of the women of our diocese. You express your faith through the love you have of the Lord by helping others. You do all this work with such love. How else could you be so successful?

As my term as your diocesan ECW President comes to an end, I thank you for this great privilege to serve. These last two years have been a joy. You have welcomed me into your parishes and convocation meetings, supported the ECW Board at various events, raised funds toward our ACTS2 Pledge, donated large amounts to UTO, supported the ECW College Scholarship, and attended PITE workshops, all the while working tirelessly for your own parishes, our diocese, and beyond. I know there are no finer women than the women of the Diocese of Alabama. Again, thank you.

Best wishes to Gethryn Giles and her 2010-2011 ECW Board when they take over in January. I know Gethryn will be as blessed with your support and love as I have been. I also thank the women who came together to form the ECW Board. What a special group! They worked hard at their responsibilities, and through their dedication and passion they make the decisions that will lead us forward.

In fact, a decision was made at the September board meeting to cease responsibility for Women’s Weekend due to low attendance and an occasional financial difficulty over the last few years that cost the board funds that were not budgeted.

However, this board decision does not in any way discourage ECWs or other groups of women from organizing a Women’s Weekend. Another decision of the board continues Constant Contact, an online service that will send information to those who have registered their e-mail addresses on our ECW Web site, www.alabamaecw.org. This is a wonderful tool to inform the women of our diocese of your upcoming events, fundraisers, and meetings. If you have not already registered, please do so and you will have all the current information on diocesan and convocation news. Board decisions, the Treasurer’s Report, the minutes, and other reports can be found on our Web site.

In November we learned that St. Anne is the Patron of Women because of her special skill in care for women. The December calendar speaks of the birth of Christ and the joy St. Anne felt becoming the grandmother of our Savior.

I give a very heartfelt thank you to Gethryn Giles, Brenda Mayhall, Anne Kinney, Nancy Thompson, Marilyn Atkins, Carolyn Woodson, the Rev. Deacon Katy Smith, Tor Johnson, Fiona Watts, Barbara Carpenter, Alleen Cater, Sally Sinclair, Fran Lowe, Sallie Lowe, Cathy Blackney, Lisa Gruner, Andi Silberman, Jane Dickson, Valerie Burns, Alyce Smith, Liz Ensey, Bea Strong, Linda George, Tara Branch, Cheri Blair, and Joan East. I also thank each of you again for your support. The women of our diocese will always have a special place in my heart.

Wishing you a beautiful Advent and many blessings!

From Gethryn S. Giles, Incoming ECW President

Having been commissioned by Bishop Parsley during the closing Eucharist of the ECW Fall Conference, your new ECW Board members are ready to begin work using the 2010 theme “Serving Others in Christ: Mission and Ministries in the Diocese of Alabama.” The new diocesan ECW officers include President-Elect Fiona Watts from St. Stephen’s in Birmingham, Secretary Nancy Thompson from the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Treasurer Jill Whitten from St. Joseph’s in Monteval and UTO Chair Brenda Mayhall from Christ Church in Albertville.

Copies of the calendar/handbook were distributed to the parishes at the conference; if your parish did not receive a calendar/handbook, please contact your convocation coordinator to receive your two free copies. You can find the names of the convocation coordinators on our ECW Web site, www.alabamaecw.org.

Your diocesan ECW Board members are available to work with parishes on their missions and ministries. Our emphasis during 2010 will be on helping establish ECW groups in parishes that do not have one, helping fledging ECWs grow stronger, and learning from established ECWs about what works best. Every woman in a parish is an Episcopal Church Woman, and each parish is urged to send a representative to the organizational convocation meeting that will be arranged by your new conviction coordinator in January. I encourage you to be there to share your ideas so that with God’s help we can work together to care for our church families as well as others.

The clergy spouses have asked our ECW Board to assist them and other groups on a project for the schoolchildren and teachers in Haiti, our companion diocese. In addition to this project, which you will hear more about later, our emphasis during the coming year will be on completing our diocesan ECW pledge to the ACTS2 capital campaign.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the spring convocation meetings! Blessings to each of you.
District Days: A Look Back

TOTAL CORNFUSION!
By Wil Benton, Montgomery District Representative
The Montgomery District Day was splendidly fantastic!

We began by playing a few icebreakers to get to know one another, and then we went into serious mode and told about the upcoming Youth Department (YD) events. Afterward we dismissed the youth and their youth ministers to go off and play for an hour and a half. They participated in activities like “Cornfusion” (aka the corn maze), the Cow Train (a tractor pulling emptied out gasoline barrels cut out and painted to look like cows), the Play Arena (a bunch of inflatable things such as the slide and moon bounce), Bales of Fun (almost 50 giant bales of hay stacked up near each other so we could play on them), the Petting Zoo (rabbits, cows, horses, donkey, and pigs), AND my personal favorite, the Corn Box (three separate sandboxes filled to the peak with corn) in which I was buried in for 30 minutes. Later we all loaded up for a hayride and filled to the peek with corn in which I was buried in for a perfect day outside USA (Union Springs, Alabama).

A CROWN FIT FOR A KING AND QUEEN
By RJ Garcia, YD Member-at-Large
Tennessee Valley District Day was incredible! From the beginning, I knew it was going to be a blast. We saw familiar faces as well as brand-new ones. We began the evening by registering and making nametags out of Burger King Crowns, which were a huge hit. Then we went outside to play some exciting icebreakers—and trust me, the ice broke. Afterward the fun moved inside, and the YD members present explained what the YD is and why it is important. Next we talked about the upcoming events that the YD is going to put on for the youth around our diocese. To supplement our discussion, we showed a video made by the YD that included hilarious commercials giving all the details about our work with a comedic twist. At the end of our information session, we silently moved into the chapel, where we participated in an excellent youth-led service. At the conclusion of our worship, we chowed-down on pizza and talked with each other. Sadly the night had to end, and we said our good-byes. Not for long though—Christmas Conference is coming up soon!

DID I JUST HEAR A LION?
By Saunders McElroy, YD Member-at-Large
The Birmingham District of our diocesan Youth Department kicked off the year with its third annual District Day on November 1 at Oak Mountain State Park. With our own designated space in the park, the Sandpiper Pavilion, we set up snacks and drinks, along with a registration table where everyone designed their own nametag. After about 30 minutes of mingling and meet-and-greets, the group headed to the large game area where a few YD members discussed the purpose and importance of the YD members jobs, followed by two fantastic icebreakers (let’s just say there was a lot of running, and the activities included a variety of animal noises). Smaller groups then split up to play several different games ranging from an intense football match up to “extreme coloring.” When all the activities began to die down, everyone returned to the pavilion, and the participants learned about all the exciting upcoming events the YD has planned for the year. A worship service concluded the day, and the praise music even had strangers at the park dancing. The energy of our youth community really resonated throughout the event and foreshadowed much more excitement to come!

To find out more or register for an upcoming Youth Department event, please visit our web site, www.dioala.org/ministries/youth_upcoming_events.html. To learn about the Youth Department including its role, members, and how it functions, please visit www.dioala.org/ministries/youth-department.html. For brochures or to speak to someone about an upcoming event, please call Leslie Manning at Carpenter House, 205/715-2060 ext. 325, or e-mail lmanning@dioala.org.

Give the Gift of Sawyerville!

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”
—Luke 2:10

A very special Christmas card is now available to help raise awareness of the Sawyerville Day Camp. For each $10 gift to the camp, we will send the Sawyerville Day Camp documentary DVD to the recipient of your choice along with a festive Christmas message telling the recipient that a gift was made in his or her honor to the camp. What a wonderful way to tell your family and friends about this very special camp and give the gift of swimming, laughter, singing, arts and crafts and Christ-centered relationships!

Sawyerville Day Camp is a weekend Christian summer day camp in Hale County, Alabama sponsored by our diocese. Campers come to camp at no cost, and there is no staff fee! In 2010 the camp will move to full two sessions. This is an exciting next step! The staff is made up of high-schoolers, college students, and adults from across our diocese and Hale County. Our goals are to serve the Church through outreach, to improve race relations in Alabama, and to broaden the horizons of both the campers and staff members.

To donate to the camp and participate in this special Christmas card opportunity, please download an order form from the Sawyerville Web site, www.sawyervilleworkproject.org; click on the Christmas Effort link. Please mail the order form and your payment to the Sawyerville Day Camp, 521 20th Street North, Birmingham, AL 35203. You can also make a donation online through our Facebook Cause; you can e-mail your recipient’s information to Leslie Manning at lmanning@dioala.org. For more information please contact Leslie at 205/715-2060 ext. 325.

Christmas Conference at Camp McDowell
It’s that time again—time to register for Christmas Conference!
December 28-30
9th-12th grade youth
Sponsored by our Youth Department

“Getting Back to the Basics”
Come explore who we are as Christians by exploring the foundations of our faith. Our program director is the Rev. Chip Broadfoot, and our Chaplain is Jonathan Chesney, both from the Ascension in Montgomery. In addition to our program time, we will also go on hikes, sing songs, play games, meet new people, and reconnect with old friends. Christmas Conference is always a wonderful event, so sign up today! For more info or to register visit www.dioala.org/996.html or contact Leslie Manning at lmanning@dioala.org or 205/715-2060 ext. 325.
**Come Enjoy Creativity and Camaraderie at the Folk School**

*By Danielle Dunbar, Director*

My first year as director of the Alabama Folk School has zipped by! Thinking back to my first session in November 2008, we had a cozy group of five in our Soaps and Candle-Making class. Small as our session was, we were delighted with the new craft and by the camaraderie we developed over the weekend. The creative spirit was alive and well in each of us—we just had to remember how to call it forth!

As the holidays passed we launched our first large gathering, Sample the Arts, held in February. More than 55 people came to try various music and art classes, including carpentry (building the foundation for Clare’s Cottage), photography, pottery, fiddle, banjo, bass, and more. The excitement was palpable! Where else could you take a carpentry class in the morning and a bass class in the afternoon? (What is a bass?!) Old McDowell friends reconnected, and new friendships were formed.

Over the summer we held two sessions that were also filled with traditional crafts and music. The warm evenings and enthusiastic teachers made a great combination. We finished our year with another bursting session of 65 in November that featured two Alabama masters, Bettye Kimbrell teaching trapunto quilting and James Bryan teaching advanced fiddle. Other highly talented instructors taught basketry, Appalachian brooms, banjo, and more. Stough Lodge was filled with lively, community-building music each night, and we closed our session with circle and square dances called by Joyce Cauthen.

The unifying thread that I see running through each of our unique sessions is a warm community that grows in fullness each day and a love of creativity and the beauty that surrounds us at Camp McDowell. These hallmarks of our unique sessions are a warm community that grows in fullness each day and a love of creativity and the beauty that surrounds us at Camp McDowell. These hallmarks of Camp McDowell, community and the quiet presence of God, are alive and well at the Folk School. We'd love to have you join us in 2010!

*Please visit our Web site, www.campmcdowell.com/folkschool, to see our schedule and registration forms. Also feel free to contact me at folkschool@campmcdowell.com or 205/563-9990.*

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**Rekindling a Love for Learning and Teaching**

*By Jennifer Kopnicky, MEC Program Coordinator*

The staff members of the McDowell Environmental Center (MEC) are genuinely blessed with the opportunity to meet new children in each class we teach. Every year, nearly 6,000 students come to enjoy the beauty of Camp McDowell. That is 6,000 lives we can potentially change, and 12,000 eyes we can open to a whole new world of glorious forest, canyons, and streams. As instructors we usually take the role of helping others open their eyes. Fortunately every once in a while we are the ones who get the chance to see things in a new light. Such a unique experience happened to me when the children from the Alabama School for the Blind came to visit.

A very tight-knit group of 10 students and 2 teachers provided me with the best Survival Skills class I have ever had. In the small amount of time we got to spend together, we learned so much from one another. They showed me how they “see” the natural world around them. Using only their hands and each others’ voices as guides, we discovered the woods in our “survival” area of camp. We discussed the important contents of a survival kit, and then we gave the children the chance to reach their hands into a backpack, pull out an item, and describe to how they would use it if they were lost in the wilderness. Some of them were extremely aware of how to utilize these tools, thanks to new television shows like *Survivor Man* and *Man vs. Wild*. They expressed that while those shows were entertaining, they loved being able to actually try out some of these skills in a mock-survival situation.

They shared some great stories with me about how different it feels to be in the woods alone and rely only on your hearing and internal instincts to find your way. I loved having the chance to see this class from a completely different perspective. Toward the end of the session, the students built a great debris survival shelter out of logs, sticks, and leaves, and they got to feel their way into it and get comfortable and cozy. They were so excited to be able to build something so unique with their bare hands. I watched in delight as numerous proud faces climbed in and out of that shelter.

Through this group of brilliant, enthusiastic students and teachers, I successfully rekindled my love for learning about new people and creative ways to teach a class. I had a truly amazing few hours with these children, and I hope to have inspired them half as much as they inspired me. Through their kindness, caring, and gentle manner, they have truly warmed my heart. As it is with most jobs, we occasionally forget why it is we do what we do. This group of children certainly helped me to remember and see everything a little bit more clearly.

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**Camp McDowell Summer Camp Schedule**

It’s not too early to think Summer Camp at Wonderful, Wonderful Camp McDowell! Online Registration will open January 1 at www.campmcdowell.com, and you will also be able to download applications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Grades</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 28-30</td>
<td>Primary I (entering 1st and 2nd graders with a parent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2-5</td>
<td>Elementary I (entering 3rd and 4th graders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 8-17</td>
<td>Senior Camp (entering entering 10th through 12th graders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 22-27</td>
<td>Junior High I (entering entering 6th and 7th graders)</td>
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<td>June 28-July 5</td>
<td>Special Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 6-13</td>
<td>Sophomore Camp (entering 8th and 9th graders)</td>
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<td>July 16-21</td>
<td>Middler Camp (entering 5th and 6th graders)</td>
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<td>July 23-30</td>
<td>Junior High II (entering 7th and 8th graders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1-5</td>
<td>Elementary II (entering 4th and 5th graders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 6-8</td>
<td>Primary II (entering 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders with a parent)</td>
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Two years ago a committee of faithful members of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Prattville began to contemplate how best to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the congregation and the 100th anniversary of the church building. Quite a task, considering the rich heritage of St. Mark’s! After much deliberation and prayer, the committee decided on three principal events to occur in 2009.

The first was a grand procession from the church through downtown Prattville to Pratt Park. Bishop Sloan rode, in the style of 1859, in a horse-drawn carriage just behind the clergy, lay ministers, laity, choir, and acolytes. Bishop Sloan spoke to the congregation and friends during the picnic, while gospel music from local choirs filled the air. The day was emceed by Larry Owens, a longtime parishioner. Sandra Fowler, chair of the sesquicentennial committee, said that the procession was the perfect beginning to the year’s events in that Episcopalians love processions and walking through the streets of downtown Prattville on St. Mark’s Day, April 25, was a reminder of the close connection the church has always maintained with the community.

The second event was a monthlong food drive in June for the Autauga Interfaith Care Center, a food bank and emergency-need organization started by St. Mark’s, our diocese, and other Prattville congregations back in 1998. More than 3,000 pounds of food and other necessary items werecollected at various distribution locations throughout the city. Jackie Williams and Erika Wilson headed the project and have even discussed possibilities of future summer collections. Summertime is especially difficult for struggling families as their children are no longer being fed meals in the school system.

On October 18, the actual anniversary of the church, the yearlong celebration came to a climax with a service from the 1789 Book of Common Prayer and a banquet at the Marriott in Prattville. Bishop Parsley celebrated the Eucharist, complete with hymns popular in 1859, and the Very Rev. William Stafford, dean of the School of Theology at Sewanee, gave the keynote address at the banquet.

The Rev. Scott Arnold, rector of the 400-plus member church, said that he was amazed at the scope of all three events. “I’m particularly happy that the church planned and ran a significant outreach program as part of our celebration. We weren’t just congratulating ourselves for 150 years, we were doing what St. Mark’s has always done best-reaching out to those in need in the name of Jesus.”

Sandra Fowler echoed Scott’s comments. “During the last 150 years, St. Mark’s has been very active in outreach programs that serve our community. This will not change during the next 150 years.”
Provincial Christian Formation Steering Committee Meeting

By Our Diocesan Staff with contributions from the Rev Debo Dykes

Two members of our diocese joined their counterparts on the Province IV Christian Formation Steering Committee in late October to address the special needs and concerns of Christian educators. Sarah Sartain, our diocesan Deputy for Youth Ministries and Christian Formation, and Sabrina Evans, the Director of Children’s Christian Formation at St. John’s in Montgomery, participated in the two-and-a-half day planning meeting at the Duncan Gray Episcopal Camp and Center in Mississippi.

“It was a very productive session,” Sarah reports. “We discussed ways in which we might provide training opportunities, teaching resources, and networking with other Christian educators throughout Province IV through workshops, newsletters, and online opportunities. Each of us on the committee is available to assist Christian education leaders with program ideas that integrate the changing needs of contemporary society with the unchanging truth of God’s Word.”

Province IV is the largest of the Provinces of the Episcopal Church, consisting of 20 dioceses in nine Southeastern states, whose congregations and challenges are broad and diverse. The mission of the nine-member committee is to offer training and support to diocesan and congregational leaders who provide Christian Formation ministry to their parishes. The committee is a professional and diverse group that represents the varied views or methods of teaching Christian education, including the contemplative-reflective approach, pragmatic participatory approach, media-driven active-engagement approach, and an instructional-analytic approach.

For more information please contact Sarah Sartain at ssartain@diaoala.org or 205/715-2060 ext. 314 and Sabrina Evans at sabrina@stjohnsmontgomery.org.

St. Michael’s Celebrates 40th Anniversary and Honors the Lowes

St. Michael’s in Fayette hosted a grand 40th anniversary celebration on September 27. More than 100 members, former members, and priests gathered on the deck of Gunner’s House for a continental breakfast prior to the morning worship service. After the service, guests from as far away as California along with those from Tennessee, Mississippi, and all parts of our diocese mingled with parishioners during the wonderful lunch prepared and served by members of the parish’s ECW.

The Rev. Timothy Hoff, rector of the parish, conducted the worship service, and the Rev. Mark Johnston, one of the parish’s former rectors, gave the sermon. The Rev. David Kearley, another former rector, and his wife, Marian, came from Sewanee especially for this special day, and the Rev. Jim Woodson and his wife, Abby, also joined in the festivities. All four priests participated in the Eucharist.

During the worship service Timothy and Mark presented a plaque to Frances and Herb Lowe in recognition of their continued ministries in the parish and the key role they played in building a bridge and new trail at Camp McDowell. Herb did much of the clearing and digging for the trail from Stough Lodge to Miller Commons, and St. Michael’s helped raise the money for the bridge on the trail.

Lynn Hendricks To Serve As NAGA Treasurer

By Nancy Terrell

Lynn Hendricks, a member of All Saints’ in Birmingham, will begin serving a three-year term as the newly elected treasurer of the National Altar Guild Association (NAGA) in January. This office seems to be the perfect continuation of service in one of her two favorite ministries, altar guild and music.

Born in Edmonton, Canada, Lynn is a “cradle” Anglican, baptized and confirmed in the cathedral where in her teenage years she was active in youth ministries. When she met Peter, her husband of 48 years, they became members of the Episcopal Church, and they have been actively involved ever since. While Peter served in the Navy for 20 years, Lynn found herself a member of many different parishes. Since moving to Birmingham in the fall of 1981, she has served at All Saints’ as treasurer and president of the parish ECW, worked in homeless ministries where she cooked meals at the Firehouse Shelter, and was clerk of the vestry for eight years. She also began her work with the altar guild and served as parish directress for eight years.

Service at the altar continued for Lynn when she became chairman of our diocesan altar guild. For the last six years she has served simultaneously as the Hospitality Chair of the Province IV Altar Guild and the Endowment Chair for NAGA.

The other true calling for Lynn has been her love of music. She has been a member of the All Saints’ choir for 30 years and since 2000 has served as the chair of our diocesan Committee of Liturgy and Music. Making a “joyful noise unto the Lord” and working at the altar has allowed Lynn to offer the gift of herself to the worship service, which has brought her to a deepened spirituality.

Outside of church, Lynn volunteers at the McWane Science Center and St. Vincent’s East Hospital. Sewing, reading, scuba diving, skiing, and traveling with Peter are among other things she likes to do. Lynn and Peter have three children and eight grandchildren who all live in different states, but their dog, Maverick, still shares their home.

When asked about her plans as she continues to work with NAGA, Lynn comments that “membership is always a vital issue for us. We need to be more proactive in getting out the word about the National Altar Guild and that we are always available for programs.”

Look for Lynn at our diocesan PLTE (Parish Leadership Training Event) in March, when she will lead a workshop Power Point presentation on “The Liberation of Change at the Altar.”
St. Alban’s Celebrates a New Sister Relationship

By the Rev. Deacon Mary Vandagriff

Many parishioners of St. Alban’s, in Birmingham, and numerous guests, gathered on October 14 to celebrate their new sister relationship with St. Alban’s at Crochu, Haiti. Deacon postulant C.J. Ross and Deacon Gerri Aston shared their experiences from recent mission trips to Haiti.

Dinner included delicious dishes prepared using recipes from Haiti with ingredients indigenous to that land. The meal was accompanied by typical Haitian music.

The highlight of the evening was a slide show of C.J.'s recent mission trip to Crochu. It was moving to see the poverty-stricken families carrying their water and eking out an existence from the mountainous ground. We saw the nutrition clinicians giving shots and distributing nutrition packets for young children. C.J. also showed us slides of the worshiping community standing on the bare slab, which is all that remains of St. Alban’s in Crochu after last year’s hurricanes.

After the slide show, St. Alban’s senior warden, Mike McCravy, gave C.J. a presentation check indicating the generous donation the church recently made to our diocese to be used to purchase land for the new Crochu clinic.

Meagan Collier Serving in Hong Kong

This story is taken from a November 9, 2009, Episcopal News Service report by Margaret S. Larom

Young Adult Service Corps volunteer Meagan Collier, a member of St. Dunstan’s and an Auburn graduate, is working at Bethune House in Hong Kong as part of her year’s commitment to the ministry for migrant workers at the city’s Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. Meagan recently joined women and men from around the Anglican Communion in a consultation that focused on the horrors of the billion-dollar trade in children. The 40 participants learned that even though the trafficking of human beings is banned by international and national laws, it is still flourishing. They faced a barrage of statistics gathered by experts and listened with broken hearts to stories shared by wounded healers.

The consultation, organized by the Office of Anglican United Nations Observer Hellen Grace Akwii-Wangusa, was funded by a grant from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the generosity of Archbishop Paul Kwong of Hong Kong. Delegates to the consultation included Anglicans from 12 Provinces—Korea, Japan, the Philippines, England, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Kenya, North India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Hong Kong. A significant number of the participants were young women who have attended meetings of the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, thanks to the efforts of the AUNO, AWE (Anglican Women’s Empowerment), and the Episcopal Church. They and others delivered country reports utilizing research in the U.S. State Department’s TIP (Trafficking in Persons) reports and additional sources.

Christ Church Choirs Offer Special Music Events

Submitted by Frances Tucker

The fall and winter seasons bring special musical events to Christ Episcopal Church in Tuscaloosa. First, an All Saints’ Day evensong was offered on Sunday evening, November 1. Music for the service was presented by Christ Church’s adult choir, made up of parishioners and University of Alabama students, and the St. Cecilia Singers, which include young people in grades 3–6.

On December 6, the Adult Choir celebrated the Advent season by presenting the Festival Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. “Each year our adult choir sings a selection of chants and anthems to introduce the season of Advent,” notes music director Karen Nicolson. “Advent, a time of prayer and preparation looking forward to the birth of Christ, begins four weeks before the Festival of Christmas.” For almost 100 years, the service of Lessons and Carols has been sung on Christmas Eve at King’s College in Cambridge. This English tradition is marked by the decoration of the church with winter greenery and the ceremony of the lighting of the candles in the Advent wreath.

In addition, the Alabama Choir School will present its 25th annual winter concerts on Friday and Saturday, December 11 and 12, at the Moody Concert Hall. The Children’s Chorus, the Alabama Boychoir, the Alabama Resident Girls’ Chorus, and the Alabama Girls Chorus, as well as the high-school Alabama Chamber Choir will perform. The performances will include traditional holiday music as well as other classical choral repertoire, folk songs from around the world, patriotic music, spirituals and more. Some of the music being sung will be “Alleluia” by Mozart, “O Hear the Joyful Music” by Banchieri, “Silent Night” by Franz Gruber, “Wexford Carol,” “Shepherd’s Pipe Carol” and “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”

For more information about the choirs and performances, please call 205/758-0927 or e-mail frantuck@charter.net.
the amazing ministries of Episcopal Relief & Development, Catalog. 5129. And it is not too late to order from the online at www.er-d.org, or by calling 800/334-7626 ext. fulfill the wish of this prayer. You can make a contribution to Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen through Episcopal Relief & Development. Set us at tasks responding to the needs, hope, and concerns of the world with their abundance and pray that many other may join them in their tasks. We thank you for the many generous souls who give of their resources of money, skills, and person to alleviate poverty, famine, and disaster. what we are called to do in responding and making available what we can to build the kingdom of God. Grant that we may know who we must be as the arms of Christ in the world today, so that we shall do what we are called to do in responding and making available resources of money, skills, and person to alleviate poverty, famine, and disaster. We thank you for the many generous souls who give of their abundance and pray that many other may join them in responding to the needs, hope, and concerns of the world through Episcopal Relief & Development. Set us at tasks to risk the Gospel in all places where you lead us, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR EPISCOPAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

By Judy Quick, Our Diocesan ERD Representative

Each Sunday as we offer the Prayers of the People, we remember those who suffer. I encourage everyone to also pray this prayer for Episcopal Relief & Development, written by the Rt. Rev. Robert Gould Tharp:

Almighty God, give to Episcopal Relief & Development the vision of Jesus whose compassion failed not, that following His example we may be a ministry of the whole Church for the whole world.

Grant that we may know who we must be as the arms and legs of Christ in the world today, so that we shall do what we are called to do in responding and making available resources of money, skills, and person to alleviate poverty, famine, and disaster.

We thank you for the many generous souls who give of their abundance and pray that many other may join them in responding to the needs, hope, and concerns of the world through Episcopal Relief & Development. Set us at tasks to risk the Gospel in all places where you lead us, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Our donations to Episcopal Relief & Development can fulfill the wish of this prayer. You can make a contribution online at www.er-d.org, or by calling 800/334-7626 ext. 5129. And it is not too late to order from the Gifts for Life Catalog.

For more information on how you can participate in the amazing ministries of Episcopal Relief & Development, please contact me at jjquick@bellsouth.net or 205/669-6862.

2010 CLAYPOOL LECTURE SERIES

St. Luke’s in Birmingham announces that Ron Hall and Denver Moore, coauthors of Same Kind of Different As Me are the speakers for the 2010 Claypool Lecture Series, which will be held on January 22 at the Wright Center at Samford University. The doors will open at 5 p.m., and the lecture begins at 6 p.m.

A New York Times Bestseller, Same Kind of Different As Me is the true, compelling tale of how Ron Hall, a successful art dealer, and Denver Moore, a homeless man, became friends even though their lives were worlds apart. The story is told with humor and heartfelt emotion as each man teaches the other about life and faith.

The Claypool Lecture Series, which is sponsored by St. Luke’s, was created to honor the service of the Rt. Rev. Robert Gould Tharp:

By Judy Quick, Our Diocesan ERD Representative

December 12, Saturday
6 p.m.  Bishop Sloan, Iglesia Episcopal de la Gracia, Birmingham

December 13, Sunday
9 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, St. Stephen’s, Birmingham
11:15 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, Trinity, Bessemer
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, Trinity, Bessemer

December 20, Sunday
10 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, St. Mary’s, Jasper
10 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, St. Stephen’s, Eutaw

December 24, Thursday
11 p.m.  Bishop Sloan, Advent, Birmingham

January 3, Sunday
9:30 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, St. Mary’s, Childersburg

January 6, Wednesday
5:30 p.m.  Bishop Sloan, Epiphany, Leeds
6 p.m.  Bishop Parsley, St. Matthias’, Tuscaloosa

January 10, Sunday
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, Epiphany, Guntersville
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, Grace, Anniston

January 17, Sunday
10 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, St. Wilfrid’s, Marion
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, Grace, Mt. Meigs

January 20, Wednesday
6:30 p.m.  Bishop Parsley, Christ Church, Albertville

January 24, Sunday
10 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, Holy Trinity, Auburn
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, All Saints’, Montgomery
6 p.m.  Bishop Sloan, St. Dunstan’s, Auburn

January 31, Sunday
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Parsley, Trinity, Florence
10:30 a.m.  Bishop Sloan, Epiphany, Talladega

Bishops’ Visitation Schedule

OUR DIOCESE WILL HOST A PARTNER SITE FOR TRINITY INSTITUTE’S CONFERENCE

Carpenter House in Birmingham will serve as one of nearly 100 partner sites presenting Trinity Institute’s 40th annual conference Building an Ethical Economy: Theology and the Marketplace via video Web link on January 28-29.

The conference will bring together leading theologians and economists to talk about the relationship between economics and Christian belief and action, understand why financial systems sometimes become belief systems rather than neutral mechanisms for exchange, discuss constructive alternatives to present models of economics and consumerism, and envision ways to build an economy that is both ethical and just. The conference will be held January 28-29 at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. For more information please contact Kay Donnellan at KDonnellan@sterneagee.com or 205/414-3326.

For more information please contact Dr. Faythe Freese, School of Music, Box 870366, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0366 or faythe@faythe@earthlink.net or visit www.music.ua.edu/department/organ/events/.

2010 CHURCH MUSIC CONFERENCE

The 7th Annual Church Music Conference will be held January 29-30 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. This year’s conference features renowned organist Stephen Tharp. In addition to a wide variety of workshops, the event includes an organ scholarship competition.

For more information please contact Dr. Faythe Freese, School of Music, Box 870366, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0366 or faythe@earthlink.net or visit www.music.ua.edu/department/organ/events/.

Clergy News

The Rev. Joan Henrick began serving as the rector of Holy Comforter in Gadsden on November 1. Joan previously served as rector of Holy Cross/St. Christopher’s in Huntsville.

The Rev. Ted Koelln retired as rector of the Good Shepherd in Decatur in November. Ted and his wife, Pat, are moving to Florida, where Ted will serve a parish part-time.

The Rev. Lee Shafer began serving as rector of Grace Church in Anniston on December 3. Lee previously served as priest in charge of the parish.

The Rev. Frank Young retired as rector of the South Talladega Episcopal Ministries (Trinity in Alpine, St. Mary’s in Childersburg, and St. Andrew’s in Sylacauga) at the end of November.

The Rev. Milt Glor, who was serving as interim rector of St. Bartholomew’s in Florence and priest associate at St. John’s in Decatur, died unexpectedly on October 22.
Diocesan Convention February 11–13 in the Shoals area
Cursillo Weekends #171 March 11–14, #172 April 15–18, #173 June 10–13, #174 September 16–19, #175 October 14–17
Diocesan Ultreya January 29–31
EYC Convention (9th-12th graders) April 16–18
Happening (10th-12th graders) March 5–7
Spring Break Conference (9th-12th graders) March 12–14
Winter Weekend (9th-12th graders) January 15–18
Youth Ministers Gatherings December 10, January 7, February 18, March 25, and May 13
Youth Ministers Retreat April 29–May 1

Countertfei t Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters by Timothy Keller
Success, money, true love, and the life you’ve always wanted—many of us have placed our faith in these things, believing that they hold the key to our happiness, but the recent economic meltdown has cast a harsh new light on these pursuits. Within just a few months fortune, marriages, careers, and a secure retirement have disappeared for millions of people. No matter how much material things mean to you, the truth is that we made counterfeit gods of these good things—gods that can’t give us what we really need. There is only one God who can wholly satisfy our cravings, and Timothy Keller invites you to meet Him again (or for the first time).

December 18 Midday Musical Menu featuring Sursum Corda, Birmingham’s premiere vocal ensemble, directed by Lester Seigel at 12:30 p.m. at the Advent in Birmingham. For more information please contact Music Associate Charles M. Kennedy at 205/226-3505 or kennedy@cathedralsadvent.com.

December 30-January 1 “New Year’s Mindfulness Retreat: The Practice of Peace” retreat presented by the Rev. Gordon Peerman and Kathy Woods at St. Mary’s Sewanee Center for Spiritual Development in Sewanee, Tennessee. For more information please visit www.stmaryssewanee.org/programs/Dec30.shtml, e-mail smaryssewaneeinfo@bellouth.net, or contact Jean Hastings at jeanhastings@comcast.net or 615/585-4287.

January 2 Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop led by the Rev. Tom Ward at St. Mary’s Sewanee Center for Spiritual Development in Sewanee, Tennessee. For more information please visit www.stmaryssewanee.org/programs/Jan.2.shtml, e-mail smaryssewaneeinfo@bellouth.net, or contact Jean Hastings at jeanhastings@comcast.net or 615/585-4287.

January 3-10 5-Day Centering Prayer Retreat Intensive and Post-Intensive Tracks led by the Rev. Tom Ward at St. Mary’s Sewanee Center for Spiritual Development in Sewanee, Tennessee. For more information please visit www.stmaryssewanee.org/programs/Jan.3.shtml, e-mail smaryssewaneeinfo@bellouth.net, or contact Jean Hastings at jeanhastings@comcast.net or 615/585-4287.

January 29 Midday Musical Menu featuring the Ambassador Brass Quintet and organist Stephen G. Schaeffer at 12:30 p.m. at the Advent in Birmingham. For more information please contact Music Associate Charles M. Kennedy at 205/226-3505 or kennedy@cathedralsadvent.com.

January 31-Introduction to Centering Prayer Weekend Retreat at the Benedictine Sisters’ Monastery in Cullman. For more information please call the retreat center at 256/734-8302 or email retreats@sbhmon.org.

The Practice of Peace
By Timothy Keller
The recent economic meltdown has cast a harsh new light on these pursuits. Within just a few months fortune, marriages, careers, and a secure retirement have disappeared for millions of people. No matter how much material things mean to you, the truth is that we made counterfeit gods of these good things—gods that can’t give us what we really need. There is only one God who can wholly satisfy our cravings, and Timothy Keller invites you to meet Him again (or for the first time).

The Legend of the Candy Cane
by Lori Wallburg
The traditional candy cane was created more than 350 years ago, and the red stripe was added to it at the turn of the 20th century. Some sources say that a candymaker in Indiana developed the candy cane as a witness to Christ’s love. This book tells about the miracle of Christ’s birth, the misery of his death, and the mercy of his love through the symbol of the candy cane.

The Christmas Story
by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York
The timeless story of Christmas is beautifully retold through paintings by some of the world’s greatest artists. Borrowing from the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s extensive and rich collection, The Christmas Story depicts the Nativity through visual narration with the aid of paintings by, among others, Peter Christus, Gerard David, and Hans Memling. Gold accents on the book jacket and interior pages make this a glorious and lush book. The artworks, sensitively coupled with excerpts from the King James Version of the Bible, create a book that will be treasured by your entire family for years to come.

For more information about these and other books or to have a staff member research and special order a particular book, please contact the Episcopal Book Store, 2015 Sixth Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35203; 205/323-2959; e-mail ebsinfo@episcopbooks.com. You can also visit the bookstore online at www.episcopbooks.com. The bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. It will also be open from 5:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, December 12 and 19.
Three Priests To Be Ordained

Bishop Parsley and Bishop Sloan will ordain John (Jack) Thomas Alvey Jr., Catherine Hudson Collier, and Eric Arthur Stelle to the Sacred Order of Priests in our diocese on Tuesday, December 15, at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham. Everyone is cordially invited to the service, which will begin at 5:30 p.m., and the reception after the service. Clergy are invited to vest; the festal color is red.

Jack and Eric are currently serving at All Saints’ in Birmingham. Catherine Collier is currently serving at Christ Church in Tuscaloosa.

As Christmastime approaches, please consider giving gifts that contribute to the ministries of Camp McDowell.

**Camp McDowell Christmas Cards**
We will send a card to whomever you choose letting them know of your donation to the Camp McDowell Scholarship Fund.

**Camp McDowell Brick Campaign**
By purchasing an engraved paver in someone’s honor, you will help complete the construction of the Chapel of St. Francis.

**Camp McDowell Music CD**
The purchase of this wonderful, wonderful CD of camp songs benefits the Camp McDowell Scholarship Fund.

To place an order for any of these gift ideas, please visit our website at www.campmcdowell.com or contact Michael Goldsmith at 205-387-1806 or michael@campmcdowell.org.

The Alabama Episcopalian

The Alabama Episcopalian is published six times a year (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December). For the most current news about recent and upcoming events, please visit our diocesan Web site, www.dioala.org.

Please send stories and photographs (color, if available) to Editor Norma McKittrick at apostledit@aol.com or 2156 Kent Way, Birmingham, AL 35226; the submission deadline for each issue is the 1st of the month prior to publication. Postmaster, parishes, and individuals, please send all address changes or additions to Circulation Secretary Denise Servant at dservant@dioala.org or Carpenter House, 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203–2682.