Rare snow blankets Alabama Parishes

Photo by Allison Kendrick
Diocese holds third outreach summit, packages 20,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now

By Wayne Laney

The Department of Missions and Outreach hosted the Diocese of Alabama’s third outreach summit Saturday, Jan. 25, at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Birmingham.

After a warm welcome by the Rt. Rev. Santosh Murray, Alabama’s assistant bishop, the 60 participants heard a presentation from Delois H. Smith, vice-president for Diversity at University of Alabama, Huntsville. Smith challenged her listeners to recognize differences of race, culture, and religion, and presented ways to acknowledge and accommodate those differences in group interactions.

The second presentation of the morning was from Tracy Hipps, executive director, Christian Service Mission. Hipps told the story of his personal journey and how that led to the outreach work he is currently directing.

Following those sessions, participants chose to attend one of two breakout sessions. One, led by Hipps, discussed recognizing and addressing cultural inhibitors to partnership efforts in outreach ministry. The other, led by Smith, discussed issues in ministry partnerships with members of non-Christian faiths. The morning concluded with another set of breakout sessions. The Rev. Rob Iler, rector of St. James in Alexander City, facilitated a discussion on the Christian’s charge to convey the Gospel during outreach ministry efforts and the Rev. Matthew Graninfeld, rector of All Saints’ Church in Montgomery, moderated conversation on the roles of context and ethos in mutual ministries.

As a celebratory conclusion to the summit, a Stop Hunger Now meal packing event was held in St. Stephen’s parish hall. Stop Hunger Now distributes food and other life-saving aid to vulnerable children and families around the world, and works to help end world hunger.

Over the course of a couple of hours, the summit participants, joined by family and friends, packaged twenty thousand meals. The room was filled with smiling, laughing people of all ages, wearing hairnets, dancing to party music, and joyfully doing good work.
From Bishop Sloan

Bishop Sloan’s Address to Diocesan Convention

S

tir up your power, O Lord, and with great
might come among us; and, because we are
sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful
grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you
and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and
for ever. Amen.

My mother would tear up at the drop of a hat, a
characteristic I have apparently inherited; and my father
laughed easily, so I think I got that from him. I have
been known to laugh when I know I shouldn’t – it was
one of the things I was most concerned about when I
went to seminary. Still I was a little surprised a few
weeks ago that I was almost overtaken by giggles reading
the Collect of the Day for the Third Sunday of Advent,
when a stray thought came unbidden. What I said was
“Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come
among us” but what I thought was “But just leave us the
way we’ve always been.”

The theme of the 184th Convention of the
Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama is
Transform, the last of a three year cycle of themes:
“Invite, Inspire, Transform.” “Stir up your power, O Lord,
and with great might come among us” to transform us,
to transform your Church, so we can transform your world.

It’s always an honor to stand before the Convention
of the Diocese, to give the Address. It drives me a little
crazy, because I have to write it all out and then try to
not just read it, but it’s an honor anyway. I think I prefer
to talk when I don’t actually know how it’s going to end,
so I can wonder with you where this might be going.

This will be my fourth Convention Address as your
diocesan bishop. To put myself in the mood to write this
one, I read the first three, and I have to say – y’all are

some patient people. Especially last year; 5,410 words!
You’ll be nearly as relieved as I am to hear that this year’s
address will be only 3,553 words. (We’re at 363 right
now, if you want to count along …)

I noticed when I read through previous addresses that
I spend a lot of time thanking people. At first I thought if I’m
going to make this address shorter, I need to cut back on
thanking folks. But then I realized that is almost exactly
wrong. Probably one of the most important things I can do
in this Address is to thank the people that do so much of the
work in this part of God’s Church. It’s something I think
we all need to do more often. So, far too concisely, I
want to thank:

Tina Sloan, the true and only love of my life, for all
of her honesty and support
Santhosh Murray, my colleague, confidant and friend
Sarah Sartain, a large part of the soul of this diocese
– 25 years! So you’ve been working for the diocese since
you were fourteen
Rob Morpeth, much more than just numbers and
spreadsheets
Dave Drachlis, gently and steadily introducing us to
the world of 21st Century communications
Peggy Turner, my assistant who retired at the end of
August, but who got me somewhat organized before she
left,

Judy Hall, who took over for Peggy and is doing a
great job, and who is still trying to get me organized
And finally Denise Servant, who has worked for us
even longer than Sarah – since she was twelve – and who
continually inspires the rest of us just by being her sweet
cheerful loving faithful self.

We are well served by these people, and all the rest of
the diocesan staff that I introduced and we thanked
yesterday. We are well served by people on all those
departments and committees. Our Lord is well
represented by our young people and college students
and all the people who work with them, by the
incredible work done at Camp McDowell and in the
Sawyerville Day Camp, by the people who work for our
Lord in outreach ministries near and far. I think I say this
every year: We don’t know how lucky we are to be part
of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama, and
I am honored and humbled to serve as your bishop.

One of the blessings we have enjoyed is our
Companion Diocese relationship with the Diocese of
Haiti, which comes to a formal end at the end of this
year. We’ll begin a new Companion Diocese relationship
at our next Convention. But that doesn’t mean that we
just walk away from our friends in Haiti. People from
this diocese will continue relationships with people in
Haiti, and programs and ministries there will continue to
have support from us. Krik Krak will continue to feed
mothers and children in Crochu. The formal relationship
comes to an end, but the love we’ve given and received
to our brothers and sisters there goes on.

We continue to be blessed by a strong and lively
Cursillo community, and are looking forward to Alabama
Cursillo 200 coming up soon. In the Diocese of Alabama
Cursillo is part of the Episcopal Church and not
apart from it, and serves, as it should, to bring people
together in the joy of Christ, and the renewal of the Holy
Spirit.

In past years we’ve used the Bishop’s Address to
introduce some new ideas, programs and ministries. We
talked about reimagining our
vocational discernment process, and starting a program
for training priests locally, which we’ll also use to train
deacons and lay people, now called the Alabama Iona
Ministry School. I want to thank Russell Kendrick and
the people on the Commission on Ministry, who’ve
worked long and hard to make these changes, and Anna
Brawley, the Dean of our new School, which will start
next January. I want to thank Virginia Hillhouse and Jon
Blankenship, as their service on the Commission on
Ministry comes to an end.

We talked about an idea to start a new ministry in a
coffee shop; The Abbey will have the Dedication service
next Sunday, thanks to a lot of good hard work by Katie
Nakamura Rengers, and Kelley Hudlow, and to a lot of
generous and adventurous support, especially from St.

We talked about the vision for Bethany Village, now
becoming reality, with the Dedication scheduled for June

March/April 2015
20th, the last day of our first Special Session at Bethany Village this summer. There are way too many people to thank, but I would surely be amiss if I didn’t thank Mark Johnston, our Executive Director at Camp McDowell, and Danielle Dunbar, our Development Officer both for Camp and for the Diocese, and Ricky Bronberg and Rich Webster, the campaign co-chairs. And I want to thank all of you who have been so generous in your gifts and pledges – the response has been amazing! Thank you, thank you all.

We’re not done, either raising money or building, but we’re getting there. My concern now is not so much whether we’re going to be able to do this, but making sure that everybody has the opportunity to be a part of it. I believe this is going to be something we’re proud of for a long, long time, and that we will all want to be able to say to our grandchildren and their children that we helped build Bethany Village.

It’s taken a while, but this is a dream coming true. Somewhere in the middle of all that dreaming and drawing on paper towels and yellow sheets of legal pad paper, Mark and I realized that we were going to change the world, and I believe we will. It sounded radical the first time he said it, but the more I’ve thought about it, the more it seems right – I believe that’s what the Church is supposed to be doing. We are Going to Change the World.

In last year’s Address I talked about forming a Commission to help write a policy to authorize same sex blessings in congregations that believe this is a good way for us to extend the love of God in a sensitive, pastoral way, while at the same time taking care to not exclude those who disagree. I am deeply grateful to those who served on this Commission, and to those who came to the seven Convocation Conversations. This is a controversial issue that has the potential to divide us into factions; there are some who think we should not do this ever or that we’re going too slowly or not far enough. The truth is that we are not of one mind about this in the Diocese of Alabama, but we are united in Christ: “one Body and one Spirit; one hope in God’s call to us; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; one God and Father of all.”

We don’t all agree about this, but I believe the policy that we’ve set forth respects the differences in our theological assumptions. I believe this is the right thing for us to do, and the right time and the right way for us to do it.

The policy of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama for the blessing of same sex unions goes into effect now. It is intentionally a long and probably tedious process, which involves the vestry and the rector working with the congregation to determine if this is the best thing for the parish, and then if they agree that it is, asking the Bishop to authorize the parish to bless same sex unions. Then priest will then need to write for permission to bless the union between specific couples. No parish or member of the clergy will be compelled or required to celebrate the rite. The intention of your bishops and the Bishops’ Commission on Generous Pastoral Response has been to widen God’s tent to bring all of us together, even when we disagree.

This year in the Bishop’s Address there are no new initiatives, no big controversy. I won’t be introducing any new programs or ministries. We’ll have more conventions in years to come for new ideas, new challenges for another day. For right now, it seems like a good time for us to absorb what we’re doing and let some of the dust settle. For right now, it’s more than enough for me to tell you that our diocese is doing very well, thanks in large part to your good leadership, and your generosity, patience and support.

This year’s Address isn’t about new things coming up. But it is about transformation, being transformed, so that we can transform the Church, so that we can transform the world.

(… that’s 1,814 words so far, just 1,739 to go …)

Most of you have heard me talk about Special Sessions at Camp, and you know how much I have been formed and shaped by these summer camp sessions for people who are mentally and physically challenged. This summer we’ll have our 18th Special Session at Camp McDowell, our first at Bethany Village. Most of the campers are repeat customers – some have come every year!

In 2003 Alberta came for the first time. (Her name’s not really Alberta, but I don’t want to use her real name, and Alberta fits in with the song later in the story.) We started being scared of her before we met her, when we read her application, which described her as being occasionally aggressive, sometimes combative and always difficult. The application said that she “gets hysterical and enjoys the attention,” and that “she may get in fights.”

We put her with one of our more experienced counselors, and told her to be loving but firm. We told her that Alberta was likely to find things to fight about. And sure enough, Alberta was a tough customer. She got into a fight before the end of the first day of the session – nothing physical, but a lot of loud unpleasant drama. We couldn’t get her to go to the cabin, we couldn’t convince her to be quiet; she sat down on the floor at Eppes and would not budge. Finally I told her I would send her home the next day if she didn’t get up and go to the cabin. She looked at me hard, and I suppose she decided she didn’t want to go home – she got up and went to her cabin, veteran counselor in tow.

She had a scowl that kept us all at a distance; we all learned quickly that the best thing was to stay out of her way. Her counselor did a great job, and did what we had asked her to do: keep Alberta out of fights, encourage her to have a good time, and don’t let her run over you.

Alberta came back the next year and the year after that, and I don’t think I ever caught her having a good time. She was in the ‘melt-down’ scene every year, usually when the whole camp was in the same place: at the Dance, in the Talent Show. We did what we do best – we adapted and made the best of things.

...
One summer when we assigned Alberta and her seasoned counselor into one of the cabins, we talked about the fact that another young woman, a sweet first-time counselor who seemed especially nervous and scared was also in that same cabin. There was some concern that Big Bad Alberta might intimidate the young counselor, but we all agreed that it was the right combination of campers in that cabin, and agreed to keep our eyes on the situation.

Then the campers arrived, with the inevitable chaos following close behind, as it does every year. Alberta stepped out of the van that brought her to Camp with the same scowl she had when she left Camp the year before. I said hello, she ignored me – it looked like business as usual.

Now the magic of the Special Session is that we are a community gathered in the love that God has for all people, no matter what our abilities and disabilities are. We talk about that a lot in the training session before the campers arrive – we talk about treating people with dignity and respect because they are all children of God. Most of the counselors really hear that, and we live in that community for a few precious days. So I shouldn’t be surprised, but sometimes I am.

Apparently the nervous scared first-time counselor didn’t know who Big Bad Alberta was. Nobody told her she was supposed to be afraid; nobody warned her to keep her distance … so she didn’t. After they all went back to their cabins the first night of the session, this young lady talked to Alberta, just like she was a person. Alberta’s counselor watched carefully, concerned at first but then with growing disbelief, as the young counselor treated Alberta with respect and dignity, just like we’d told her to. I think Alberta saw the opportunity to step out of the role we had assigned her, and talked to the girl, not with a scowl, with no drama or conflict, but returning the respect she was given.

The next morning at breakfast the young counselor came up holding Alberta’s hand! I said Good Morning, not really expecting a reply from Alberta – after all, she’d never spoken to me before. But Alberta said, “Good morning, dahling!” You could have knocked me over with a ping-pong ball.

Transformation is a funny business. I think about it every time I see Alberta getting off the van when the campers come. The scowl, no longer needed, is gone, replaced by a big wide smile. Every year now she comes right up to me and gives me a hug. She calls me dahling. And at almost every opportunity, I sing her the song. It’s an old blues tune; I know the version by Eric Clapton:

“And I ain’t had no lovin’ since you been gone.”

“Alberta, Alberta, where you been so long? Alberta, Alberta, where you been so long? I ain’t had no lovin’ since you been gone.”

And she laughs, and says, “Oh hush up, dahling.” It’s one of my favorite things at Camp.

She was transformed, I think, by the fearless audacious innocence of a young woman who believed what we told her, who didn’t know to be afraid. And I was transformed, too, by both of them – delivered from my assessments and assumptions about two children of God that I was not treating with much dignity or respect at all. I shouldn’t be surprised, but sometimes I am surprised by how narrow-minded and heartbroken I can be, by the spiritual magic we take for granted at Camp, by the power of community, by the courage of our young people, by God’s phenomenal grace.

I think maybe we won’t be able to transform the world unless and until we transform the Church, at least this little part of it that we are stewards of. And I think we won’t really be able to transform the Church unless and until we are willing to be transformed ourselves.

The mission of the Church as defined in the Outline of the Faith in the back of our Book of Common Prayer is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”

It is not the mission of the Church to keep everything the way it’s always been. It is not the mission of the Church to be a little island of stability where we can be safe from the storms of change. It is not the mission of the Church to hunker down behind our walls and hope the world will pass us by and leave us alone. How can we restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ if we keep doing only what we’ve always done? How can we sing the Lord’s song if we’re only singing to ourselves? If the mission of the Church is to bring all people into unity with God, and with each other, and if what we’ve been doing isn’t working for all people, we need to change, or at least add to what we’re doing.

I love this part of God’s Church. We have so much to offer; we’ve been given such great gifts and graces that the world around us needs. It’s not enough for us to just survive, or to do only what’s most comfortable or convenient for us. We need to be about God’s mission, reconciling ourselves and others to one another and to our gracious God through his Son Jesus Christ. We need to proclaim the Good News of God’s love in ways that people who need to hear it and know it can and will. We can change the world, but we won’t without going through some change ourselves.

So we have some changes underway: a new process to discern vocations, a new school to train people for ministry, Bethany Village, a new way of being church in the Abbey; a policy for blessing same sex unions. If God listens to our prayers, and stirs up the power of the Holy Spirit to come among us with great might, who knows what might happen next? Let’s listen, look ahead, and trust God.

This summer, after General Convention, I’m planning to take a sabbatical. Some of the time I intend to goof off; some of the time I’m going to do whatever Miss Tina wants to do; some of the time I want to work on another book. And I want to use some of the sabbatical to talk to people who have studied and written about where the world is going, and how the Church can continue to be about God’s mission. I want to think about how we can anticipate and embrace what is coming, rather than following our usual pattern of grumbling about changes other people introduce and then fighting among ourselves until we finally accept them grudgingly. I wonder what the world and the Church will be like in 20 years, or 30, and I wonder what we should be doing now to prepare.

“Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us …” Stir up your power to help us be who you created us to be. Come among us with great might to deliver us from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, and give us grace and strength and courage to be transformed in your likeness in Jesus Christ our Lord, to transform your Church to be an open door to invite and inspire all of your children to come into your Kingdom, and to transform your world so that all people are recognized as sisters and brothers, and are treated with the dignity and respect that your children deserve. Challenge us, O Lord, to become more and more fully servants of Jesus Christ and stewards of your amazing grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.
Invite, Inspire and Transform

Three years ago the Diocese of Alabama adopted a new way of talking about what this Convention is all about. At that time, the planners of Convention selected three words to serve as the themes for three succeeding Conventions. And these words come from The Episcopal Church Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation — Invite, Inspire and Transform.

Invite the Church to gather in one place; Inspire all members of the Church to recognize and proclaim the mighty acts that God has done. Transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit with the vision and energy to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ. Transform is set against the overarching theme of this year’s convention: I will with God’s help.

I will with God’s help. That’s what we say every time we repeat the words of our baptismal covenant. As followers of Jesus we understand that these words are much more that a magic trick, some sleight of hand. But this is really the opposite of what true Christian transformation is...which is, of course, why we need to ask for God’s help.

The truth of the matter is that only God can satisfy the inner longing for change and inner transformation. The work of transformation is a long haul, more like a long journey; it is seldom swift or superficial.

Christian Spirituality; a subject that occupies and transfixes so many including myself, is a journey into the mystery of Triune God. Many people have their own definitions of spirituality. One that I particularly like is by Elizabeth Dreyer. She writes that Christian spirituality, is, “the daily, communal, lived expression of one’s ultimate beliefs characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbor, and world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit”.

My own layman’s definition over the years resonates with Dreyer, ‘being formed and transformed for Christ by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit’. It is important for Christians to understand that, as much as we might want to, we can’t be transformed by our own efforts. It may come as a surprise that we can’t do it ourselves when we live in a culture that is obsessed with taking “selfies” and seeking for “self-realization”. But, mature Christians understand that we can only be made whole by the work of the Spirit that comes from God who is in the business of intentionally pursuing us with unmitigated unconditional love.

God Pursues Us:

God relentlessly pursues us even when we aren’t even paying attention, or are preoccupied with so many convergent issues, and distracted by concerns that compete for our attention. But in John’s gospel Jesus conveys God’s purpose for coming, “I came that they may live, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus comes to transform the Word into life with God. Through him, the Spirit invites us to seek out a deeper and more intimate relationship with God to the extent of that which existed before the Fall (Genesis 3).

You might well ask, “Why would God be interested in the condition of my life enough to pursue me so diligently?” The author, Henri Nouwen, in his provocative book, “Life of the Beloved” reminds us of Jesus’ baptism when the Spirit descended. The voice of God was heard, “You are my beloved son; with whom I am well pleased” (St. Luke 3:22). This simple declaration of belovedness expresses the most intimate truth about all Christians, as Nouwen said, “Christians are co-heirs, brothers and sisters of Christ and the children of God”.

And so, we come full circle to our baptism... or more correctly to our shared baptismal life. This is where we were first incorporated into the fullness of Christ grace and redemption. This is the ideal starting place to begin understanding of a transformed life that we are to live with God’s help. We are not perfect. Sin and failure continue to plague the community of faith as we are called out to live baptismal promises. But these are only a temporary interruption to the full life in Christ toward which we journey.

Companionship:

So the question remains. What is the motivation to integrate the unconditional love of God more fully into our own lives? Dr. Gareth Jones, Principal of the College and Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Anglican Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, was one of the speakers at the recently held House of Bishops Fall Meeting in Taiwan. I had met Professor Jones when I was Bishop of Seychelles. We were, as a province, working together on strengthening the course curriculum at the provincial seminary in Madagascar.

Dr. Jones related one of his experiences in Africa during the Anglican Communion’s “Bible in the World Project.” He remarked that, “when westerners read the story of the fall in Genesis 3, we immediately think of sin and evil” (that debilitating plague in the human condition). He explained, “in his experience in Africa, he discovered at a bible study gathering that his African friends see this as the story of God coming into the garden, to seek out Adam. This is viewed in light of a beloved Creator seeking his children for companionship, as much as westerners may interpret this confrontation as God’s condemnation of sin.”

Beloved, this view from a different cultural and geographical context redeems earlier assumptions of an uncaring God who is always out to get us. This alternative motif in the Fall narrative showed me a whole new dimension of the story, that is, God created humans for companionship. And, that perfection in the symbol of the garden was lost through human disobedience. What the all-knowing God was seeking to elicit from Adam was confession, the heart of humility and font of reconciliation.

However, in his show of contempt, Adam went as far as to make the Creator culpable, by criticizing God for giving him the woman. Augustine of Hippo contended that, “Adam reached out for what he was not, and lost what he was”.

When we sold-out to Satan in the Fall, we traded-in our call to be God’s companions, Humanity’s greediness to be in charge, and our pride led us to reject our invitation to become co-creators, co-partakers, co-partners and companions with God and each other. Our bent for independence and self-gratification hadn’t helped our cause. Despite all this, God has relentlessly pursued us to get us back to that place of complete obedience to God’s will, and in perfect harmony, to be the fullness of God’s image. That’s why God called God’s people into covenant throughout the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, God incarnates our human flesh...
in the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. God comes personally to indwell companionship, to enter partnership with humans by taking on the same flesh and, through it, reveal God's eternal love.

This is my motivation to recapture the companionship motif and through that continue my quest for personal transformation. Incarnation and transformation must be linked in our lives. When we experience transformation it is natural to want to be laborers with God in the mission field. You see Christians don’t necessarily have a mission, nor does the Church as an embodiment of the baptized community of faith. It is God who has the mission and God calls his Church to live into his mission. Thus, to be transformed is to feel a natural compulsion to be as Christ to the world (Latin: ‘alter Christos’). We act mirrors both reflecting Christ and deflecting his presence to the world. As Saint Paul reminded the Galatians, God did not redeem us to show the world what wonderful people we are, rather, that we may reveal Christ to the world (Galatians 1:16).

Homeless Jesus:
In the summer of 2013, my wife and I visited some friends, a retired clergy couple who live in Davidson, North Carolina. Their parish church, St. Alban Episcopal Church, had recently added a new member to its congregation—a life size sculpture of a homeless man asleep on a bench. The sculpture was designed by a Canadian artist, Timothy Schmalz. And, as I said, it is life-sized. The face of the figure is covered with a blanket, but the holes on its feet resemble the wounds of Jesus. Ah, you say, a homeless Jesus! The sculpture was placed on church property facing the street. According to the rector, The Reverend David Buck, the placement was chosen to maximize public reaction.

The arrival of this sculpture proved to be highly sensitive issue for the residents of the town and for the church members. And, the rector began to receive comments. Among the more positive comments was an email from a self professed atheist, “Hello Reverend Buck, I’m an atheist. I don’t believe in any of that religious stuff but you know what? You folks finally got something right.” It seems that the sculpture hit a nerve. It forced people to confront an issue they don’t want to deal with. The rector said, “It’s a good reminder to us of what ultimately matters and that is concern, care, and work with and for the marginalized.”

One of the things that evoked most comment was the way the sculptor had covered with a blanket the figure’s face. This adds to its appeal. It encourages people to create their own image of Christ. It is not a person of any specific race, neither European nor African nor Asian, instead does it become everyone. The Homeless Jesus remains a provocative icon on church property. I must confess that I sat next to it on the bench never realizing that it will become such a popular figure as it has become today. According to the creator, there are plans to install similar sculptures in downtown London and Ireland.

Critics of Homeless Jesus:
The irony of all this is that many Christians have turned out to be the most vocal about how they are offended by the Jesus that it shows. We all recall that when Jesus walked the earth there were those who wanted to make him king, and he always wiggled out of their attempts. Maybe, we are not too different today. We don’t object to beautiful icons and statues of the ascended Jesus or as ruler. However, we often prefer the cross to be empty, not depicting Jesus as tortured or wounded. And we want Jesus to be safely tucked away inside the building, not homeless on a street corner. The reality is that this Jesus keeps wiggling out of our preferred stereotypes. But it is just this “wounded” Jesus that transforms us. Our lives are broken as they are, but they are beautiful to the One who pursues us out of love. And through the cross of Jesus, and through his blood, we are transformed into wholeness.

Parishes in Transformation:
There is a familiar refrain going around and one that I vehemently opposed to, that is, that the Church is generally and more specifically The Episcopal Church is dying. This is God’s Church. “Did Jesus die in vain?” “Have the words the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16: 18), lost their meaning?” or, “has God gone back on God’s promise?” Not so for someone who strongly believes that a risen savior is incompatible with a dying Church! The Church for me is “sheding skin”, and it’s doing so in order to produce a more agile, more nimble and rigorously missional; and less burden with structure and bureaucratic governance.

Let me assure this 184th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama all God’s churches in this diocese are vibrant witnesses to the mission of God, and continue to be vital parishes to their neighborhood and beyond. As I travel around the diocese, here are five samples to support my observation from parishes that have recently ordained clergy that aren’t benefiting from supervision and mentorship by experienced rectors. Three of the Clergy were sent to parishes in some sort of crisis right out of seminary; and one parish that’s been living with interim spiritual leadership for some time.

The Rev. Jeff Evans, St. Timothy’s Church, Athens, is striving to live intentionally into what God is calling the church to be part of. There are healthy signs of reaching into the community and giving leadership. The Rev. Michael Goldsmith, Church of the Resurrection, Rainbow City, is showing impressive signs of growth especially with its work among the young people. The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan, Holy Spirit, Albaster, is engaged in the life of the community and showing stability, and desire to be the neighborhood church. The Rev. Blake Hudson, Church of the Holy Apostles, Hoover, is focused on stewardship and hospitality that is transformative and attractive to new comers. St. Joseph Episcopal Church, Mentone, has been very involved with the hurts and needs that are evident in the mountain. The response of the congregation is changing lives. This parish has lived in interim pastoral leadership for a long time. The current Interim Rector is The Rev. Bill Winters.

Conclusion:
You see my beloved friends, we have only one task as Christians. That one task we undertake with God’s help. We are called to bring Christ to the world each day. To do that, we must allow Christ to live in us. All those who love Jesus offer themselves as his earthly home. The Virgin Mary testified to that second life living in her long even before the wombed Christ could be perceived directly by others. John the Baptist responded to the presence of this Jesus still hidden as he jumped for joy in Elizabeth’s womb (Luke: 1:39-45).

That’s the way that we should make Jesus visible even to those who are not ready to see. We do not need great talent or eloquence to proclaim God’s word. We simply need great hearts. God invites and pursues human beings who are willing to say “yes” to God’s call, and be firmly committed and unwavering in their yes. And yes, we will do it with God’s help.

3. Donald X. Burt, Day by Day with Saint Augustine, p. 205.
Transformation is theme for 184th convention of the diocese

by The Rev. Michael Rich

The 184th Convention of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama, held in Tuscaloosa, wrapped up business Saturday, Feb. 7, with youth leading delegates in Hank Williams’ “I Saw the Light.” It was a joy-filled end to a gathering that was the third in a three-convention theme of “Invite, Inspire, Transform.”

Transformation of ourselves, the church, and of the world was a theme of Bishop Kee Sloan’s address. He described Bethany Village, the project that is doubling Camp McDowell’s capacity and will offer an incredible new array of ministries and educational programs. He said it began as talk of a dream for ministry shared by him and the Rev. Mark Johnston, director of Camp McDowell.

“Somewhere in the middle of all that dreaming and drawing on paper towels and yellow sheets of legal pad paper, Mark and I realized that we were going to change the world, and I believe we will,” he said. “I believe that’s what the Church is supposed to do, and I believe we are. We are going to change the world.”

Assistant Bishop Santosh Marray, preaching at Friday night’s convention Eucharist, said that he and Bishop Sloan see evidence of that change as they travel around the Diocese.

“People say the church is dying,” he said. “Dying? Baloney! A risen savior is incompatible with a dying church.”

Marray pointed to examples of parishes throughout the diocese that are growing and are participating in innovative ministries because, as he said, their first-time rectors had neglected to learn the lesson that the church is supposed to be dying.

Convention delegates approved a proposal for a triangular companion diocese relationship with Alaska and the Virgin Islands, to begin in 2016. That proposal is up for approval in the other two dioceses later this year. This is the final year of Alabama’s official relationship with the Diocese of Haiti, which has existed for more than six years. Mission trips and other connections between Alabama and Haiti will continue after the official relationship ends, said the Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, who chairs the New Companion Diocese Discernment Team.

Three new worshiping communities were recognized by convention: The Abbey, a coffee shop and congregation in the Avondale neighborhood of Birmingham; St. Martin’s in the Pines, a retirement community and nursing home in Birmingham; and Christ the Redeemer, a church re-start in Montgomery.

St. Dunstan’s, the church at Auburn University, is the fourth worshipping community in the Diocese and was re-approved by convention. Convention also approved the closing of St. Columba in the Cove of Huntsville.

Bishop Sloan announced that the new policy on Blessings of Same-Sex Relationship is now in effect. Interested parishes are invited to begin the structured conversations that may lead to permission to hold such ceremonies.

In other business, delegates approved a resolution urging prison reform in the state. The resolution, sponsored by Trinity Church in Clanton, urges measures that “can reduce our reliance on incarceration as a solution to crime.” It also recognizes the importance of Episcopal participation in programs such as Kairos Ministries in prisons, to family members outside prisons, and for youthful offenders.

Delegates, bishops, and staff were limber and awake for the road home after an “energizer” dance led by members of the Youth Department. Youth involvement in worship and activities at convention represented in a hands-on way the bishops’ emphasis on growing energy and life in the Diocese.

This year’s convention was webcast live in high definition on the diocesan website, and convention delegates, visitors, and those watching on the web were invited to join the conversation via Twitter. Video coverage of convention — including worship, the bishop’s address, and a variety of reports — is available online at: https://vimeo.com/dioala/videos

Convention was hosted by Christ Episcopal Church of Tuscaloosa and was held Feb. 6-7 at the Bryant Conference Center on the campus of the University of Alabama. Next year’s convention is scheduled to be held at Camp McDowell, with meetings in the new Doug Carpenter Hall.

**Elected to serve**

The following members of the diocese were elected to serve on Diocesan Council Standing Committee and the Disciplinary Board during the 2015 convention.

**Diocesan Council**
- Northern District – The Rev. Seth Olson (3 year term)
- Middle District – The Rev. Deborah Leighton (3 year term)
- Southern District – The Rev. Candice Frazer (1 year term)
- Southern District – The Rev. David Peeples (3 year term)

**Standing Committee**
- Clergy Order - The Rev. Lee Shafer (4 year term)
- Lay Order – Bingham Edwards (4 year term)

**Disciplinary Board**
- Clergy Order – Liston Garfield
- Lay Order – Chris Gonzales

**New clergy introduced at convention**

During our 184th Convention of the Diocese of Alabama, Bishop Sloan and the deans of our convocations introduced members of the clergy, including newly ordained priests and deacons as well as priests called with the past year from other parts of the Church.

Sawyerville Day Camp seeks prayer partners

By Linda Kennedy, Prayer Partner Coordinator

Join the fun this year at the Sawyerville Day Camp by being a prayer partner. It is a simple way to participate if you cannot be at camp and it reminds our staff how much we appreciate what they do everyday at camp.

You will be asked to write four notes of encouragement. Themes and suggestions for the letters are included in the instructions given to you ahead of time. We have more than 300 staffs so the need is tremendous. Please consider joining this important ministry today by contacting me, at linda.kennedy17@gmail.com.

If you’ve been a prayer partner before and want to help recruit more or be a team leader at your church for prayer partners, please let me know. This is a wonderful opportunity for DOK groups, Cursillo reunion groups, the Great 50 Days of Easter, Children and Church's children and youth ministries. All ages are invited to participate. For smaller children, ‘notes’ can be drawings.

Thank you for your support of this ministry!

Being a prayer partner lets you be involved in the other half of camp. We are all there for the kids, and sometimes we forget how tired the staff gets. But being a prayer partner not only gives encouragement to the exhausted staff, but let’s you participate in a camp session or in someone else’s life that you may not have had the opportunity to before. – Paige Goldschmidt, long-time staff member, coordinator & prayer partner

Prayer partners are a hidden foundation of ministry, the continuous lifting up of this Gospel work in thanksgiving for and requesting God’s grace on this project of service, relationship, and reconciliation.

Beyond the critical gifts and donations that individuals and parishes across the diocese make, this offering to prayerfully support one person “on the ground” at camp each day connects the day-to-day work to the larger community and grounds it in what all Christians work must be grounded in, the relationship of God and God’s people in the world. Plenty of prayer and worship is going on at Sawyerville Day Camp as well, but the Prayer Partner Ministry places SDC in the context of all the prayer, worship, and work of our diocesan family and beyond, and so places in the context of the heavenly hosts and community of saints. – Rev. Jonathan Cheney, long-time staff member, Assistant Rector at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Auburn.

25 Sawyerville Day Campers to participate in this year’s Yellowhammer Literacy Project

By Andrew Cotten, Design Team Chair, Birmingham Educator

Two years ago, I served as the Journal Room Coordinator for 9- to 11- year-old campers at Sawyerville Day Camp (SDC). While leading lessons and observing the campers work, I noticed many kids struggling with reading simple sentences aloud, enumerating multisyllable words, and writing basic sentences. Naturally, I was shocked. More importantly, I was heartbroken.

The campers we serve at SDC have become more than just random kids at a distant summer camp. They have become light shining through despair, smiles in spite of struggle, and sparks that ignite an understanding of purpose and God’s plan. This understanding—that the children we have grown to love and care for are struggling in school and falling behind at a startling rate—became clear to many of the leaders of SDC. Once this need for an academic component at SDC was identified, it could not be ignored.

During the summer months, low-income students lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains (The National Summer Learning Association).

More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (The National Summer Learning Association).

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The YLP will work toward this mission by hosting a multi-week summer reading program in which students will participate in reading intervention, engage in creative writing, and strengthen their literacy skills. Additionally, the YLP is invested in helping students grow as scholars and citizens through participation in academic field trips, community engagement, character building, and other enrichment opportunities.

This summer, 25 rising 5th graders, who have proven, through state or school assessments, to be at least a grade-level behind their peers, will attend the five-week program. By the end of the summer, they will have participated in upwards of 45 hours of traditional academic lessons and 45 hours of enrichment.

One of the most exciting things about this year’s program is the incorporation of weekly themes. The themes, in order of succession, are ‘Journalism’, ‘Superheroes’, and ‘Stranger than Fiction’. During the ‘Journalism’ program, campers will write news articles, interview community members, hear from renowned journalists, and read interesting and pertinent nonfiction pieces.

During the ‘Superheroes’ program, participants will learn what a traditional hero is, what it takes to be a hero, and identify character traits that they can adopt and exemplify in their own lives; and yes, there will be lo

Finally, during the ‘Stranger than Fiction’ program, campers will read about all the weird and crazy real-life facts that shock and awe us, such as ruminants, deep space, the depths of the ocean, cool bugs, and unsolved mysteries.

Our staff for this summer consists of one YLP coordinator, two lead teachers per program, and eight small group leaders. Our YLP coordinator, an intern for SDC, will manage all the logistical and organizational needs of the YLP. The lead teachers, all of whom are certified teachers, will teach lessons and monitor student progress through purposeful evaluation. Each small group leader will be responsible for one group of three campers and ensure that these kids are not only learning, focusing, and trying hard, but also having lots of fun.

The enrichment opportunities we are offering in the afternoon will range from inviting speakers to share their wisdom or passion with the kids, traveling to interesting places, working in the community, and participating in extended-lesson activities such as photojournalism, making comic books, and building a time capsule.

I hope you’ll keep this new ministry in your prayers. As we move deeper into this project, I know there will be more ways in which friends of SDC can help. We’ll make those needs known as soon as they are discerned. In the meantime, if this project inspires you, please consider how you might contribute your time, talent, or treasure.

It’s all for the kids!

Find out more at: http://www.sawyervilledaycamp.org/yellowhammer-literacy-project.html

Sawyerville Day Camp announces 2015 summer interns

Sawyerville Day Camp has announced the selection of 10 summer interns—nine to serve camp, and one to serve as the Yellowhammer Literacy Project (YLP) coordinator.

The 2015 interns are:
- Liz Allison – Camper Registrar
- Sarah Reeves – Camper Registrar
- Logan Oakes – Assistant Staff Coordinator
- Bety Cobb – Lower Camp Coordinator
- Emma Kingsley – Middle Camp Coordinator
- Tim Callahan – Middle Camp Coordinator
- Liza Lee Tweedy – Upper Camp Coordinator
- Jessica Lingle – Special Events/Communications
- Doug Logan – Yellowhammer Literacy Project Coordinator
- *Indicates returning intern

*The list of interns includes 2013 interns who joined the team.

A total of 25 applications were submitted. “We were overwhelmed by the quality of interns applicants,” said Crystal Jones, Assistant Camp Director for Staff and Summer Logistics.

To provide a consistency of leadership and an opportunity to develop new camp leaders, selected applicants include both interns serving for the first time, and returning interns. The selection group also identified seven YLP small group leaders—tutors—from the applicants. Each will lead a group of three participants ensuring they are not only learning, but also having fun. Once all the YLP leadership has been accepted and confirmed, the group will convene and make the necessary group adjustments.

For more information about the camp or to find ways to support or donate to the camp visit: www.sawyervilledaycamp.org, or Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/sawyervilledaycamp

March/April 2015

Around Our Diocese
Folk School to offer summer youth workshops

by Sarah Mills Nee, Director, Alabama Folk School

The Alabama Folk School is thrilled to be involved in uncharted territory this summer. For the eight years since its founding, the folk school has focused on providing arts and music classes for adults. However, we have long hoped to also provide programming in art and music education to children. Bethany Village and its new facilities have now made that a possibility.

This summer, the folk school will offer three youth folk school workshops, each focusing on one subject. The workshops will last three days and two nights. Each day, students will spend time in class as well as time participating in traditional summer camp activities, like swimming, canoeing and hiking. Our intention is to combine the fun and play of summer camp with the creativity and educational engagement of the folk school.

In June, students entering grades three through twelve are welcome to register for the Youth Fiddle Workshop June 4 -6. This workshop is designed for students with violin playing experience that wish to expand and learn about Old Time fiddling. We have two talented instructors, Tim Avalon and Nikkos Pappas, who will lead the children in the exploration of fiddling techniques.

In July, there will be two youth folk school workshops open to students entering grades nine through twelve. Our blacksmithing camp will be July 9 – 11. Blacksmith Lee McKee will guide students as they learn about the art of metal casting and the methods of moving metal through blacksmithing. Finally, we will have a guitar camp for students with at least some guitar playing experience. Two very talented musicians, Jimmy Gauld and Laine Poole, will provide basic instruction as well as helping students learn how to “jam” together in a group.

The Alabama Folk School is thrilled to be involved in the education and ministry of children with our folk school workshops this summer. For more information or to register, visit our website at www.alfolkschool.com.

Foothills Day Camp seeks staff members for 2015 session

This year’s Foothills Day Camp has openings for 35 youth and young adult staff members age 15 and older and 15 counselors in training ages 13 and 14. Modeled after Sawyerville Day Camp, Foothills provides a summer day camp opportunity for children ages 6-10 who might not have that opportunity otherwise, and helps build bridges in the community. The camp in the Cheaha region of the diocese takes place at Camp Lee in Anniston. Each day offers a variety of camp activities, along with a program, games, and crafts.

Camp staff training is July 19 and camp begins July 20 and ends July 24.

Online staff applications are available at www.foothillsdaycamp.org/staff.html.

The deadline to apply is May 15. Staff applicants ages 13 and 19 should fill out the adult staff application. Staff members need not be Episcopalians.

Foothills Day Camp is sponsored by Grace Episcopal Church, Camp Lee, and other local parishes. Foothills is free of cost for both the campers and staff.

For more information about Foothills Day Camp, and how to become involved, visit the website at www.foothillsdaycamp.org. Contact Emmy Faison, Youth Staff Coordinator, faisoea0@sewanee.edu; 256-606-0648 or Ellie Fisher, jnellsfisher@att.net; 256-238-1122.

Youth presence energizes convention

Thirty-five youth from around the diocese participated in the 184th Convention of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama in February.

The group gathered with members of the youth department and advisors at Christ Church in Tuscaloosa Friday evening Feb. 6 for a convention lock-in.

On Saturday, the youth attended portions of the convention, choreographed and led an intricate energizer dance that got delegates moving following lunch, and led the convention’s closing worship service.

Youth delegates to this year’s convention were Jackson Massey, a member of the Church of the Ascension in Montgomery and the youth department representative from the Montgomery District; and Hailey Smith, a youth department member-at-large, and member of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Birmingham. The delegates reflect on their experience below:

I thought it was really awesome to see the different things the Episcopal Church is involved in and how passionate we are about those things. One of the most amazing realizations I had at convention, was seeing how respected the youth are in this diocese. We aren’t just teenagers, but we are full members of the church and to me that is so beautiful. Jackson Massey, youth delegate

The Alabama diocesan convention was a great opportunity that I was blessed to have been a part of. I learned so much about how much work goes on behind the scenes of our regular Sunday morning visits to our parishes. Also, I realized how supported the youth are by the rest our diocese. We are blessed to be in such a diocese that realizes the importance of a strong youth and supports our programs. Everyone truly cares about what goes on in and around our churches. It was inspiring to witness first hand the passion that fuels everything we, as Episcopalians, do to change the world. Hailey Smith, youth delegate

For more information about Foothills Day Camp, and how to become involved, visit the website at www.foothillsdaycamp.org or contact Emmy Faison, Youth Staff Coordinator, faisoea0@sewanee.edu; 256-606-0648 or Ellie Fisher, jnellsfisher@att.net; 256-238-1122.
Young adults weekend retreat set for camp May 1-3

Young adults, ages 23 and up, are invited to a spiritual weekend retreat at Camp McDowell May 1 – 3. The program, “Sabbath: To Rest or Resist,” will be presented by the Rev. Sharon Hiers, senior associate rector at Epiphany Episcopal Church in Atlanta.

“This weekend, we will explore what Sabbath means to us and practice how we might find this call to observe a day of rest in a society that demands our productivity,” said Austin Cook, event coordinator. “Somewhere between ‘God rested on the seventh day’ and ‘could you not wait one hour?’ we will explore how we might incorporate Sabbath living in our daily lives.”

There will also be lots of free time on Saturday to hike, canoe and relax in the great outdoors. The event will begin Friday evening at 8:00 p.m. and will end Sunday after lunch. Cost for the weekend is $55.00 per person. For those who can’t make the entire weekend, participants are also welcome to come up Saturday during the day. The cost for Saturday is $20 per person, which includes meals, programs, & activities.

Applications are available online at: http://bit.ly/1Flz1g0 The application deadline is April 20.

For more information contact Austin Cook by phone at 334-207-4505 or by email at austinkendrickcook@gmail.com.

Holy Comforter EYC conducts Meals for Ministries fundraiser

Members of the EYC at Church of the Holy Comforter in Gadsden hosted Meals for Ministries in February to raise funds for the parish’s Brown Bag Beans & Race, and youth ministries.

The theme for the event was “All You Need is Love,” and included gourmet pizzas, Italian salad, and a dessert table assembled by the youth. The event also included a photo booth, and the screening of Casablanca.

“Winners of the table centerpiece received a vase of roses, a compilation CD of eclectic love songs, hug coupons and candy,” according to Kevin Yates, parish EYC director.

CREATE offers work week for rising 9th & 10th graders

All rising 9th-10th graders are invited to join CREATE June 23 - 27, for a work week in God’s Backyard, which just got a whole lot bigger with the addition of Bethany!

Based on last year’s success, participants will spend a significant amount of time working at a variety of jobs. Different projects will be offered and campers will be able choose the area in which they would like to work. A wood shop will be set up where benches and tables and other woodworking projects for Bethany will be built. There will be opportunities to design and create some permanent art projects for different areas of camp. And there will be plenty of work to do at the farm.

Not only will we be doing manual work with our hands, but we will also have program and worship for the inner work of the Spirit and there is always time set aside each day for typical fun camp activities and community building. We hope you will join us to exercise your body, mind, and spirit at CREATE!

Registration: http://www.dioala.org/ministries/youth-summer-opportunities.html
Cost: $225 for participants and CIT’s
Event Coordinator: Caitlin Gilliam, Event Coordinator caitling@stjohnsmontgomery.org
Deadline to register: June 8

Young People Paint Birmingham July 6-10, 2015

YPPB is a local mission project for rising 7th-9th graders. Participants are offered a one of a kind experience scraping and painting houses for economically disadvantaged community members in Birmingham’s West End neighborhood. The youth will also participate in programming to educate them about poverty, homelessness, and our call as Christians to be better stewards of our resources for ourselves and our world.

There are also eight openings for Counselors in Training (CIT’s) to serve as helpers in leadership and the ministry of this event. Rising 11th-12th graders, as well as recent high school graduates, are eligible to apply as CIT’s.

Cost: $280 with scholarship assistance available
Staff Applications: http://www.dioala.org/ministries/youth-summer-opportunities.html
Event Coordinator: Susan Oakes, Diocesan Youth Ministries Coordinator, soakes@dioala.org
Deadline to register: June 8
About 20 years ago we had a Camp McDowell tee shirt that said “This hug is for you”. Camp has always been a place of hugs. When new guests come to camp they usually extend a hand of greeting and I try to respond with a hug. Hugs are who we are. Hugs are us. For me, hugs at Camp McDowell are an outward and visible sign of our faith that God is constantly enfolding us in arms of love. The knowledge that I am enfolded in those arms is so hopeful. Hugs are a sacramental expression of hope. Even though we are constantly embraced by Jesus, often it is not recognized, sensed, understood, or remembered.

Camp McDowell is still a center of hope in many ways. As a place set apart we strive to be an outward and visible sign of hope not only through hugs but also through our programs/ministries, our way of life, and our vision of the future. Summer camp and Cursillo are both excellent examples of ministries of hope. Both become hugfests as people of God learn grace, love, and hopefulness in that hopeful Christian community known as Camp McDowell.

Did you know that when Camp McDowell found its present home shortly after World War II, that the federal government had asked religious denominations to establish camps as centers of hope? Yes, our founding was part of an effort to restore hope after so much death and tragedy had been a part of the family of God. The world still craves the message of hope. Even though we are constantly embraced by Jesus, often it is not recognized, sensed, understood, or remembered.

Camp McDowell is still a center of hope in many ways. As a place set apart we strive to be an outward and visible sign of hope not only through hugs but also through our programs/ministries, our way of life, and our vision of the future. Summer camp and Cursillo are both excellent examples of ministries of hope. Both become hugfests as people of God learn grace, love, and hopefulness in that hopeful Christian community known as Camp McDowell.

Our everyday way of life at McDowell is a sacrament of hope. A guest at camp does not receive a key to their room and everyone has a key to their room. It is the way the world should be, and Camp McDowell expresses that camp is also a place that can be. Join us and believe that the world can be a hopeful place of trust. We do not even know where the key to the office might be. No locks are being put on the doors in Bethany. We never lock our chapel. We are hopeful that the world will respect our trust. We are a place set apart expressing the way the world can be.

Polls often show that people are not hopeful about the future of the world. Many Episcopalians around the world are not hopeful about their denomination. So what does the Episcopal family in the Diocese of Alabama do? Why we double the size of our camp and conference center to prepare for our growth and ministry in this next century and we call it Bethany. We strive
to strengthen those established McDowell ministries such as summer camp and Cursillo, and we strive to seek new ways to express hope to a frightened and broken world. Through the McDowell Environmental Center we teach the importance of being good stewards of the creation to thousands of children and adults every year so that we might be hopeful. We are starting the Cahaba Environmental Center with the Presbyterian Church in order to teach thousands more. The McDowell Farm School is teaching people where their food comes from, the importance of nutrition, and the need for food security. Our Folk School offers outstanding Christian community and seeks to enhance that spiritually creative side of all of us and to fill the world with art and music. Our Diocesan family is building a camp that is accessible for everyone so that those with disabilities can have hope to live like everyone else. At Camp McDowell we have plans to create our own clean renewable energy as a sign of hope in a world that is dependent on shrinking resources. Is all of this folly? Heck no! We are hopeful people living in the knowledge that we are constantly enfolded in the arms of God’s love.

The results of Camp McDowell being a center of hope are hopeful in themselves. We are a magnet for young adults who want to live out their faith in a hopeful manner. More people are coming to camp than ever before and they are becoming hopeful huggers. A most common question I hear at Camp McDowell is, “What are you going to do next?” In a way I do not know, but in another way I am certain. I am certain it will be a sacramental expression of hope.

Don’t Take it For Granted

By the Rt. Rev. John McKeel Sloan

My mother made her own bread for much of the first part of my life—delicious bread we always took for granted. We all thought that was just how bread was, and never understood why other people made such a fuss about it. It was just there, as it was supposed to be. Recently much of our attention when we think about wonderful, wonderful Camp McDowell is focused on Bethany Village, as perhaps it should be—it’s a very exciting thing we’re doing there. But I wonder sometimes if we don’t take for granted what other people have done for us in the past at Camp. I’m not the right person to make a list of names of the men and women who made Camp the way it is, but I know we’re grateful for their commitment and their far-seeing vision of a place where we come to stay, worship, work and play” as the song goes. We’re grateful to those who gave and served to expand the vision and our facilities first in Stough Lodge, then in Miller Commons, and most recently in the Chapel of St. Francis. And now, with Bethany Village becoming reality thanks to your generosity and commitment to our Lord and this part of God’s Church, we’re grateful again.

I talk with other bishops who serve dioceses that don’t have a camp, or don’t use it much; where the camp is a liability, or a pain in the bishop’s neck. And I realize that I take our own Camp for granted—it’s just there, as it’s supposed to be. It’s hard to imagine how we could be a diocese without this bit of common ground to hold us together. And it’s getting better.

Those who come after us will long remember that in our generation we took our part to further God’s Kingdom at Camp. They may not remember our names, but the vision of a place for all people to come and be welcomed, for all of God’s people to have a place to come together and be invited to realize that they are cherished and redeemed, will continue to bring us together as a diocese, and continue to share the Good News of God’s love for all.

I say this a lot, and here I am saying it again: We don’t know how lucky we are to be the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama. I’m grateful for those who went before, and those who are generously giving so that we can continue and expand the work they began. I really do believe that our best days are before us. Thank you all for all of your support.
Grace House

By Danielle Dunbar

When I think of “grace,” I think of redemption, forgiveness, blessings, and hope. By definition it means “unmerited favor.” Paul says God’s grace “is able to build you up.” It isn’t surprising that I should find churches named, “Grace” so fitting and right. (Although, all church names are good ones.) There are five Grace Episcopal Churches in our Diocese and it makes me understand that I am probably not alone in finding it a comforting and desirable church name. There is also now a structure at Bethany called Grace House.

Three of our Grace Churches: Cullman, Anniston, and Pike Road are helping to build this comforting and desirable staff house. Several farm school instructors live in this house of grace, coming home to it after they work hard each day to teach school groups about the Creation—about where food comes from and how to grow it, care for it, prepare it, and eat it shared in community.

The fundraising goal to name Grace House was $200,000. How did they do it? These parishes all had an event where Bishop Kee and Mark Johnston came to talk about the vision for Bethany at Camp McDowell. They hosted very different events—one was a farm-to-table supper in the parish hall, one was at the local country club, and one was a parish outing at Lake Martin. Pledges and gifts are still coming in. Thank you! (If you haven’t yet, don’t miss your opportunity!)

As Development Director, I’m available to help your parish plan an event and begin to raise funds for another structure at Bethany. Please contact me for a list of naming opportunities to see what might be right for your parish. Reach me at danielle@campmcdowell.com or 205.563.9990. God’s grace and peace be with you.
Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

A New Market Tax Credit transaction is allowing us to quickly build all of the facilities at Bethany in 18 months. A loan was issued and it has helped us see the vision come to life as well as helped donors know that their money is being spent doing exactly what they intended. Efforts to raise funds for all of our project needs, which total $10.5 million, will continue. All parishes and individuals will be invited to participate!

We are so grateful for each and every donor. Listed below are all donors since the last publication in the November/December edition. A cumulative list will be printed at the end of the campaign. To see past editions of the newsletter please go to www.BethanyAtCamp.com.

The Rev. Mary Catherine Akamatsu
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The Rev. & Mrs. Harold Alfred, Jr.
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Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Allen
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Allen
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Mrs. Sydney Cummings
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Mr. & Mrs. Richard Dabbs
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Mr. & Mrs. James Davis
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Mr. & Mrs. John Dunbar
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Mr. & Mrs. Jeh Wilkinson
Lt. Col. Jane Wood
Mr. & Mrs. William Wyatt
Mr. Jesse Yeates, III
Dr. & Mrs. Allen Yeilding
Mr. & Mrs. Roger Yonker, Jr.
Ms. Nelda Ziegler

For more information, please contact Development Director Danielle Dunbar at danielle@campmcdowell.com, 205/358-9234, the Rev. Mark Johnston at mark@campmcdowell.com, or the camp office at 205/387-1806. [www.BethanyAtCamp.com, instagram account, CampMcDowell, or Facebook page, Camp McDowell (official)]
Holy Spirit partners with local nonprofit to host health-screening clinic

By Glenda Jones, Holy Spirit Vestry Member

The Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit in Alabaster is helping make quality healthcare available to those who might otherwise not have access. On Sunday, Feb. 1, the parish partnered with Cahaba Valley Health Care (CVHC) to host a health-screening clinic at the church.

CVHC is a nonprofit organization based in central Alabama dedicated to providing access to quality healthcare for the underserved, primarily Hispanic, communities in Jefferson and Shelby Counties. The organization provides vision and dental screenings at churches throughout the area.

Holy Spirit parishioners helped publicize the clinic by providing flyers promoting the screenings through the Alabaster school system with excellent results.

Screenings were scheduled to begin after church at 1:00 p.m., however patients began arriving much earlier. The first patient arrived in time to attend Christian Education with parish members. By noon half of the anticipated group were congregated in the parish hall and by 1:15 p.m. all 60 of the examination slots were filled.

As people arrived, they were greeted by Holy Spirit volunteers, and briefed by Edwina Taylor, CVHC’s executive director. As Taylor handled administrative details, volunteers prepared and distributed bags containing water, fruit and granola bars.

“We knew they could be waiting a long time and the parishioners wanted to make sure they would be as comfortable as possible,” explained the Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan, Holy Spirit’s rector. “I am so proud of this community and its generous spirit and commitment to hospitality.”

Other parishioners served as translators for those who did not speak English, and the parish youth provided dental education.

Emma Nash, a sophomore at Thompson High School reflected upon her experience as a volunteer. “I really enjoyed the clinic because I like helping people. It showed me how sometimes I am ungrateful and forget that other people are not as well off as I am. I will think twice before believing life isn’t fair. I liked talking to the people and hearing their stories.”

Stations were set up in the parish hall for enrollment, dental education, and other assistance. A classroom served as a dental exam room and the narthex and nave were converted into a vision clinic.

Volunteers from UAB and Samford University, dentists and doctors from the community performed examinations, and assisted with completing forms and interpretation. As dental and vision needs were identified, individuals were referred to professionals and organizations in the community who will perform services at reduced rates.

By 5:30 p.m. the last exam was completed, the church and parish hall were arranged for the next Sunday’s worship.

Hosting the clinic was a meaningful experience for parishioners and was in keeping with the church’s focus on being a community resource center. Holy Spirit has committed to be a CVHC partner next year. “We are excited to partner with a church who shares our heart for the poor,” said Taylor.
The Sacred Gaze –
A book review
by Janet C. Nail

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ome eight hundred years ago, Clare of Assisi, in writing
to Agnes of Prague, advised her to gaze into the mirror
of the crucified Christ in order to see her own face.

Many of us wonder what this means; we probably don’t
remember that sociologist Charles Horton Cooley said that
we can know our self only as it is reflected to us by others. If
we combine the two statements, we understand that our best
self can only be seen as it is reflected by Christ.

THE SACRED GAZE: CONTEMPLATION AND
THE HEALING OF SELF by Susan Pitchford (Order of St.
Benedict, 2014) helps us to see how we can see ourselves in
this mirror.

First of all, let us admit that we mostly have a somewhat
superficial relationship with Christ. Oh, we know the Bible;
we go to church regularly and we can probably follow the
Eucharist and/or Morning Prayer without opening our
prayer book. We can even sing most of the hymns by heart.
But do we really ever sit down and visit with Jesus? Really?
Not often—as least that is my own experience.

So how do we get to know Christ, to look at Him and
return His gaze of love?

It may help to understand the word “gaze.” I can re-
member when my children were born I could not tear my
eyes away from them. I could sit, holding my son, and gaze
at him, totally enveloped in love. I look at people, I look at
the world around me, but I gaze at this child.

Can I do this with Christ? Can I bring my wounded,
broken, imperfect self before Him and gaze at Him, and in
gazing find that I can be whole?

Pitchford admits that it isn’t easy. The only way to do
this is through contemplation; yes, contemplative prayer!
But she assures us that contemplation is not a procedure,
not something you achieve or master. It is simply allowing
yourself to sit in the presence of God.

She also warns us that we have to learn this kind of
intimacy. She compares the good old American way of “I’ll
master this by putting in fifteen minutes a day in contempla-
tion” to meeting someone, shaking hands and then jumping
into bed. There is no communication, there is only pretense.

Things will get in the way. First of all, though you want
to sit in the presence of God, there is all those people out
there. What do they think about you? Is your hair all right?
Maybe you noticed that your pants were a little snug this
morning; is it time to try another diet? Did that woman
yawning while you were doing your presentation mean that
you were boring? See! You have shifted your gaze to the
people around you. It’s all right; just come back.

This book will become a close companion, I think.
You will refer to it, re-read it, meditate on it. In fact, it may
become your own path to the sacred gaze.

Editor’s note: Janet Nail is a member of St. Wilfrid’s Episcopal
Church in Marion, AL. She is also a member of God’s Joyful
Fools, the Alabama-Mississippi fellowship of the Third Order of
the Society of St. Francis. The group is currently reading and discuss-
ing this book. For more information on the Third Order, contact
Janet at grandmastruck1994@yahoo.com or Elizabeth Baker at
baker194@centurytel.net.

Archdeacon Steps Down After a Decade of Service

After a decade of service, the Venerable Dr. Louise
Thibodaux has stepped down as the Diocese of
Alabama’s archdeacon. The Venerable Marti Holmes
is the new diocesan archdeacon.

The Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, diocesan bishop, made the
announcement during the 184th convention of the dio-
ce Feb. 7, and the transition became effective following
the close of the convention.

Bishop Sloan said, “We have been blessed by the
Venerable Lou in her time as our archdeacon, and we’re
grateful for her service. The order of deacons has become
an important part of the life of our diocese, due in part to
Lou’s faithful coordination and witness. Marti will step in
and continue the work Lou has started, and at the same
time put her own stamp on the office. We’re grateful to
both of these good servants for sharing the gifts they’ve
been given.

In the Diocese of Alabama the archdeacon oversees
the work of the 38 vocational deacons serving through-
out diocese, providing continuing education and support,
and consults with the bishops and diocesan staff on mat-
ters related to the diaconate.

The Venerable Dr. Louise Thibodaux was ordained to the diaconate in
November 2002 and continues to serve as deacon at St.
Thomas Episcopal Church in Birmingham. She also
serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Fund
for the Diacanonate of the Episcopal Church. The fund
exists to assist working, retired, or disabled deacons who
have insufficient funds to pay for their needs.

Thibodaux is a member of the Advisory Board
and Executive Committee of the Blackburn Institute
(University of Alabama). The Institute’s mission is to
shape the future of the State of Alabama by forming lead-
ers dedicated to facilitating to diversity of opinion, ad-
vancing the State through civic engagement, networking
across generations and generating lifetime commitment to
the State and all its people.

During the previous three General Conventions of
the Episcopal Church, Thibodaux served as the “deacon
master” for all of the gathering’s official liturgies. She is a
member of the Association for Episcopal Deacons.

Holmes was ordained in October 2011 and serves
as deacon at Holy Apostles in Hoover. She is manager
of Jeremiah’s Hope Academy, housed at St. Vincent’s
in Birmingham. Jeremiah’s Hope prepares students for
entry-level careers in allied health fields. She is the former
director of the Interfaith Hospitality House for Families
in Birmingham. She is a member of the Association for
Episcopal Deacons.
Water To drink...

“…but there was no water for the people to drink.” (Exodus 17:1)

by The Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, diocesan coordinator for Episcopal Relief & Development

I believe that everyone should have access to clean water.

The 2015 Lenten Meditations from Episcopal Relief & Development have a number of reflections on this belief, for the Old and New Testament overflow with water images.

In Exodus, the Israelites grumbled to Moses that they were thirsty. God commanded Moses to strike the rock and water satisfied their thirst.

“…You lead me beside the still waters, you restore my soul….” (Psalm 23) Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well that He is Living Water.

Water is life. Water renews and refreshes.

In many developing nations, women make the water walk to gather water for their family and village. Women around the world spend over 200 million hours a year collecting water. A young girl asked Bishop Parsley on his first visit to Haiti if he would provide a well for her village. The well at Thomazeau is now flowing.

March 22 is World Water Day, a day to remember the importance of clean water in the lives of all persons. Clean water is a priority, as contaminated water carries disease and death. Several Millennium Development Goals relate directly to water:

- MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality
- MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health
- MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Stability
- MDG 8: Develop partnerships for water-related goals

Bishop Sloan chose the “Carry the Water” theme in remembrance of the 75th Anniversary of Episcopal Relief & Development. His visits to Honduras brought home the powerful reality of those who struggle to find clean water.

We can all support the belief that everyone should have access to this life-giving water. Our gifts to Episcopal Relief & Development can help improve hygiene, sanitation and overall health by building water systems to ensure communities can access this crucial natural resource.

Our gifts to Episcopal Relief & Development also address the Millennium Development Goals noted above. Learn more online at: http://bit.ly/1yXwPvw. Continue to pray for the work of Episcopal Relief & Development, and consider doing your part to uphold the belief that everyone should have access to clean water.

For more information on Episcopal Relief & Development in the Diocese of Alabama, contact the Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, diocesan coordinator for Episcopal Relief & Development, jgquick@bellsouth.net, 205-669-6862 (home); 770-366-4034 (cell).

ECW now accepting scholarship applications

The Alabama ECW Scholarship Committee is accepting applications for its scholarship programs:

The College Scholarship Program and the Women of the Well Program.

The College Scholarship Program is open to any communicant of the diocese who meets the eligibility requirements and is based on need, church involvement and merit. The Women of the Well Scholarship is available to women, both lay and clergy, seeking refreshment. The deadline for the College Scholarship application is April 30, 2015. Women of the Well Scholarship applications may be submitted at any time.

Information on the application process is available at http://www.alabamaecw.org/#/c1ux8.

To be eligible for a college scholarship, an applicant must be a communicant in good standing with the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama; accepted or enrolled in an academic institution of college rank; pursuing professional certification or a degree from an accredited institution; able to show financial need; and a recipient of no more than one previous ECW scholarship.

Last year, the committee awarded 12 scholarships ranging from $500 to $1500. The ECW has awarded over $150,000 in college scholarships.

All college scholarships are based on need (40%), church involvement and activities (40%) and merit (20%). Applicants should be able to document information regarding their family’s financial status (Form 1040). An application for college scholarship may be made any year a student is in college; however, an award to any one person is limited to a maximum of two years. Awards will be announced in June. Granted funds will be sent directly to the registrar’s office of the college of the recipient’s choice.

Application packets for college scholarships must be complete and must arrive by April 30. Each application form must be accompanied by a transcript, a digital photograph, and a short essay; along with a church involvement survey completed by the applicant’s parish priest (or senior warden when there is a vacancy), or college chaplain. The application form, church involvement survey and instructions for completing the application process can be found on the ECW website or by request from the Committee Chair, Theresa Hester, at hester.theresa@yahoo.com or via phone at 205-451-9806.

To be eligible for a Women of the Well Scholarship, an applicant must be a lay or clergy women who is a communicant good standing with the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama; accepted or enrolled in a spiritual or religious program or lecture, and a recipient of no more than one previous ECW scholarship. Each recipient of this program may receive no more than $400. Instructions for completing the application process can be found on the ECW website. An application for this program may be completed at any time.

ECW scholarships are made possible by the very generous donations of persons who have taken to heart the education of our members. Named scholarships are listed on our website. Contributions may be sent to: ECW, Diocese of Alabama, 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-2611 with “ECW College Scholarship Fund” in the memo line.

Deborah Leighton installed as DOK chaplain

The Rev. Canon Deborah Leighton, Canon Missioner and Director of Women’s Ministries at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham was installed as the Chaplain of the Order of the Daughters of the King (DOK) of Alabama in October.

The Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama installed Leighton during the Daughters of the King Fall Executive Board Retreat and
Rare snowfall blankets diocesan parishes
Approximately 400 visitors dropped by to help celebrate the grand opening of The Abbey in the Avondale neighborhood of Birmingham Saturday, Feb. 14.

A church with a coffee shop or a coffee shop with a church, The Abbey is a place where one can get a great cup of coffee, espresso, tea, baked goods, and light lunches. It is also a place to hang out, a place of community, and a comfortable space to explore issues of faith and spirituality.

The daylong grand opening drew a mix of Episcopalians and Avondale neighbors. Visitors enjoyed food, beverages, music, and hospitality.

The Abbey’s vicar, the Rev. Katie Nakamura Rengers, and The Abbey’s deacon, the Rev. Kelley Hudlow, were on hand to greet visitors, who also got to meet Abbey baristas, Walker Cole, Leah Desiderio, Giorgio Fareira, and Zach Price, as well as Carrie Black, manager, and Jamie Logan, assistant manager.

In the afternoon the shop was filled with the sounds of The Cargile Creek Catfish, a bluegrass group led by Bailey Hill.

The celebration continued on Sunday with a visit by the Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, diocesan bishop. With 62 people gathered, and the sounds of coffee grinders and espresso machines in the background, Sloan presided and preached at The Abbey’s weekly Eucharist. During the service, Sloan dedicated an altar, which was built for, and given to, The Abbey by member Conway Brooks. Sloan also confirmed Ashley Adams, a member of The Abbey worshipping community.

During his sermon, Sloan described The Abbey as a place that “will be transfigured to become what God intended it to be, a community of worship. A place to come together for a good cup of coffee and a good conversation, and a clearer recognition of the Spirit of God in our midst.”

The Grand Opening of The Abbey was the culmination of more than a year’s work. The Abbey is a project of the Diocese of Alabama and has received a First Mark of Mission grant through the Episcopal Church Center. The Abbey also has received generous support from St. Luke’s Birmingham, and from parishes and individuals throughout the Diocese. The Abbey is a coffee shop and is open to everyone. It is designed to serve as a meeting place, a place to study, and a living room for the Diocese. Sloan designated The Abbey a worshipping community in the diocese at the annual convention of the diocese in February.

Frequently asked what people can do to support The Abbey, the vicar’s answer is simple: “Come to The Abbey. Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. Eat breakfast or lunch. Invite others to come too.”
2015 Global Mission Conference
- “Proclaiming God’s Peace Through Mission”

by The Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, Global Mission Roundtable chair

Global Episcopal Mission Network

Proclaim, Inspire, Ignite the Joy of God’s Mission

“I believe that’s what the Church is supposed to be doing, and I believe we are. We are going to change the world.” (The Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, addressing the 184th diocesan convention)

At our diocesan convention this year, Bishop Sloan affirmed that we are called to transform ourselves, the Church, and the world. As we deepen our relationship with Christ, our transformation leads us to proclaim Christ’s redeeming love and inspires us to serve others, to become Christ in our broken world.

We live in a divided country, where the fear of the “other” is a subtle undercurrent. We live in an interconnected world, where events far away can touch us at home.

Come to the 2015 GEMN Global Mission Conference to engage in conversations on how we can proclaim God’s peace through mission:

May 6-8, Atlanta, hosted by All Saints’ Episcopal Church.

What can you expect to gain from this conference?

• Practical information concerning mission, global and domestic
• Inspiration and stories of God’s power in the midst of struggle
• Tangible resources on how to be the change through peace, justice, and reconciliation ministries
• Connection with mission partners around the world

Keynote speakers include:

• The Rev. Canon Dr. Titus Presler, pastor, scholar, former missionary to Zimbabwe and Principal-in-Exile of Edwardes College, Peshawar, Pakistan, where he built an interfaith community amid Taliban violence. Presler’s books on global mission, notably the Horizons of Mission and Going Global with God, have inspired numerous global missioners for their journey.
• The Rt. Rev. Gayle Harris, bishop suffragan for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, who has a strong relationship with the Diocese of Jerusalem and is a powerful advocate for global reconciliation and social justice throughout the Anglican Communion.
• The Rt. Rev. Santosh Marray, our very own assistant bishop whose passion is the transformative power of mission and is also a strong advocate for the gospel of reconciliation and God’s love and salvation for all persons.

Reconciling Mission in a World of Difference

Here’s a sampling of the workshops:
Preparing a Team for Mission, Mission Finances, Asset Based Community Development, Sustainability, Global Mission in Your Backyard, Refugee Resettlement, the Colorado Haiti Project, and Mission in a Muslim Society.

Participants will also visit the Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change. Of course, there will be ample time to socialize throughout the conference and a reception on Thursday evening will honor GEMN’s 20th Anniversary.

For those who want to delve more deeply into global mission, consider the Global Mission Formation Program, which will be held on Tuesday, May 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The cost of the program is $65.

Register now for the GEMN Global Mission Conference at www.gemn.org. Discover the joy of God’s mission!

For more information on the Global Mission Roundtable, contact the Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, (jgquick@bellsouth.net) or consult www.divala.org/globalmission Learn more about the resources of GEMN, including registration for the Global Mission Conference, at www.gemn.org.

Our Location
The Abbey is located in the Avondale neighborhood of Birmingham at 131A 41st South, Birmingham, Alabama 35222. It is right down the street from the Avondale Brewery.

Our Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Thursday 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Friday 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Our Food and Prices
The Abbey serves fresh baked goods, such as cookies, muffins, and scones, and bagels. The Abbey serves panini sandwiches and soups, which the selection changes regularly.

Baked good items range from $2.00 to $3.00. Lunch items such as soups and sandwiches range from $3.50 for a cup of soup to $8.50 for a sandwich and fresh vegetables.

The Abbey works with Alabama suppliers, including serving coffee from Red Bike Coffee in Irondale and tea from Piper & Leaf in Huntsville. Leslie Teardo is The Abbey’s baker, and makes fresh baked items such as cookies, scones, and muffins. In addition to the baked good items baked on site, The Abbey also serves bagels and bread from Crestline Bagel Company in Mountain Brook.

Our Worship Service and More
Each Sunday at 4 p.m., The Abbey worshiping community gathers for Eucharist. This service is held at the coffee shop. The services are relaxed in order to offer worship that is inclusive, engaging, and conversational.

There are also other offerings during the week, such as Java + Jesus and Coffee + Compline. More information about these offerings and when they will meet can be found on The Abbey Facebook page.

Call, Email, or Find Us Online
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Web: www.theabbeybham.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/theabbeybham
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Baked good items range from $2.00 to $3.00. Lunch items such as soups and sandwiches range from $3.50 for a cup of soup to $8.50 for a sandwich and fresh vegetables.

The Abbey works with Alabama suppliers, including serving coffee from Red Bike Coffee in Irondale and tea from Piper & Leaf in Huntsville. Leslie Teardo is The Abbey’s baker, and makes fresh baked items such as cookies, scones, and muffins. In addition to the baked good items baked on site, The Abbey also serves bagels and bread from Crestline Bagel Company in Mountain Brook.

Our Worship Service and More
Each Sunday at 4 p.m., The Abbey worshiping community gathers for Eucharist. This service is held at the coffee shop. The services are relaxed in order to offer worship that is inclusive, engaging, and conversational.

There are also other offerings during the week, such as Java + Jesus and Coffee + Compline. More information about these offerings and when they will meet can be found on The Abbey Facebook page.

Call, Email, or Find Us Online
Phone: (205) 703-9538
Email: info@theabbeybham.com
Web: www.theabbeybham.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/theabbeybham
Twitter: www.twitter.com/theabbeybham
Instagram: www.instagram.com/theabbeybham

“Our Location
The Abbey is located in the Avondale neighborhood of Birmingham at 131A 41st South, Birmingham, Alabama 35222. It is right down the street from the Avondale Brewery.

Our Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Thursday 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Friday 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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Episcopal Place Gumbo Gala to celebrate 10th anniversary at Regions Park

This year marks 10th anniversary of the Gumbo Gala, benefiting Episcopal Place. The event started as a backyard party in Caldwell Park for the residence’s of Episcopal Place, but soon found that the event was more popular than they had ever imagined. After out-growing Caldwell Park, the event was moved to Sloss Furnaces in 2011. “Gumbo Gala was such a huge success last year we felt we needed to find a venue that was more accessible and had more space to accommodate the many competing teams. This year we are extremely excited to be moving the Gumbo Gala to Regions Field to celebrate our 10th anniversary,” said Tim Blanton, the executive director of Episcopal Place.

This year’s event is scheduled for April 18 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The Gumbo Gala involves over 40 teams competing for 14 awards while handing out gumbo for event guests to sample. Guests also will enjoy live music by Rollin’ in the Hay, gumbo cooking demonstrations, family entertainment, theme-related arts, crafts and fun for the whole family.

Annual Valentine’s coffee & luncheon raises $4,000 for food bank ministry

More than 100 people attended the 38th Annual Valentine’s Coffee and Luncheon hosted by the Episcopal Church Women (ECW) of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in Jasper on Feb. 13. The event raised more than $4,000 for the St. Mary’s Food Bank Pantry.

The event featured traditional homemade food and pastries. St. Mary’s ECW and members of the parish donated all food, supplies and services for the luncheon. All proceeds went toward feeding the poor and disadvantaged in the Walker/Winston County community. Patricia McClendon and Becky Nelson organized this year’s event.

Applications for Parish Based Outreach Grants now being accepted

Applicants for Episcopal Diocese of Alabama Parish Based Outreach Grants are now being accepted.

The purpose of these grants is to enable parishes to engage in new and creative ways of being Christ’s presence in Alabama. The grants are designed to provide start-up funds to launch outreach projects that will become self-sustaining within three years. An Evaluation Summary Report must be submitted at the end of the funding period. The maximum amount that can be awarded per grant is $2,000. The deadline to submit applications is May 1.

These grants are for parish-based outreach and cannot be used for pass-through monies to other agencies or groups that do not directly involve parishes or parishioners.

For additional information, contact Sarah Sartain ssartain@dioala.org
Academy for Spiritual Formation offers ‘Psalms for Life: Praying Together & Praying Alone’

The 5-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation is offering “Psalms for Life: Praying Together and Praying Alone,” May 4—9, 2015 at Camp Sumatanga, Gallant, AL.

During this year’s retreat, Dr. Roberta Bondi, a popular and longtime faculty member of The Upper Room’s Academy for Spiritual Formation, will focus on the many ways the Psalms can be used as a tool in Christian formation and prayer. She will guide participants in a greater understanding of the Psalms and how to use the prayerbook of our forbearers to deepen their prayer life and their walk with God.

The Rev. Dr. Don E. Saliers, a United Methodist pastor, Academy for Spiritual Formation faculty, musician, theologian and teacher specializing in homiletics and liturgics, will focus on using the Psalms in corporate settings including worship and small groups. His lectures and worship leadership will explore this in a number of ways, and invite participants to bring their own lives and communities of care and ministry to the Psalms throughout the week.

A program of Upper Room Ministries, the 5-Day Academy provides an opportunity for clergy and laity to deepen their relationship with God through a daily rhythm of prayer, worship, learning and reflection. Each day includes teachings by gifted spiritual leaders, periods of silence, morning and evening prayer, Eucharist, covenant groups and community time. Time for rest and recreation are also part of each day.

The Academy is sponsored by the United Methodist Conferences of North Alabama and Alabama-West Florida, Upper Room Ministries, and the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama.


Dear friends,

Last August I participated in my first-ever 5-day Academy through the Academy for Spiritual Formation, an excellent opportunity for spiritual enrichment. The Academy is the brainchild (heartschild) of the Upper Room, a global ministry sponsored by the United Methodist Church, and actively seeks to include Christians from all denominations.

I have to admit that I was a little uncertain about what I would find when Marc and I attended the August session. Having spent time in monastic settings, I was a little worried about whether these Methodists really knew what they were doing. (I admit it — I was a monastic snob!) And being an introvert, oh help, all these people! I wouldn’t know. But there were two things that kept me going as I headed toward my first Academy: the first was my dear long-time friend, Pat Luna, who invited me and invited me and invited me again until I said “yes” — Pat, whose heart I trusted and whose encouragement was always enthusiastic. The second thing was the topic, Celtic Spirituality, and the fact that the faculty were published scholars in this area — people who embodied what they taught, and who knew it deeply.

When I arrived at my first Academy, here is what awaited:

• The beautiful outdoor setting of Camp Sumatanga, near Gallant, Alabama. How could anything rival Camp McDowell? But I have to confess, Camp Sumatanga is gorgeous.

• A monastic rhythm that allowed me to rest, to listen to God, to find God in community, and to find God in quiet. This rhythm was very like what I have experienced in Episcopal religious communities and includes a regular daily round of Morning, Noon, Evening and Night prayer, and Eucharist, with a balance between community time and time for quiet reflection.

• Excellent faculty who not only provided wonderful lectures, but who invited us to “wade in deeper.” They made the week’s topic rich and real.

• Caring staff who attended to the needs of the community, day and night.

• A week — a whole week! — to live into the daily rhythm, and to find it mold me enough that I was able to carry some of that richness back into my regular life.

• A wonderfully diverse Christian community. I met other Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and nondenominationalists. I revelled in being One in Christ with these delightful folks, and in forming a community together during our time at Academy.

• Delicious meals, prepared and waiting, three times per day. (As a mom, this was huge for me.)

All of this was waiting, and all I had to do was show up! I hope you’ll consider showing up too. The May 4-9 Academy this year will focus on the Psalms, with esteemed faculty Roberta Bondi and Don Saliers. You can find registration information at http://academy.upperroom.org, and don’t hesitate to contact me if you have questions! My email address is jrothburnette@usa.edu

Yours in Christ,
Jennifer Roth-Burnette

Alaska priest elected Bishop of the Central Gulf Coast

The Rev. James Russell Kendrick, rector of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Birmingham, AL, was elected bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast on Feb. 21, pending the required consents from a majority of bishops with jurisdiction and standing committees of The Episcopal Church.

Kendrick, 54, was elected during the diocese’s 44th annual convention held at Trinity Episcopal Church in Mobile, AL. He was elected on the third ballot out of a field of three nominees.

The other nominees were the Very Rev. Edward Francis O’Connor, dean, Cathedral Parish of St. Andrew, Jackson, Mississippi; and the Rev. Dr. William Charles Treadwell III, rector, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas.

Kendrick has served as rector of St. Stephen’s in the Diocese of Alabama since 2007. In 1984, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in architecture and marketing from Auburn University in Alabama; and in 1995, he received a Master of Divinity degree from Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. He is married to the former Robin Rhodes. They have two children, Aaron and Hannah.

“I am keenly aware of and deeply humbled by the trust and hope that this election carries. Robin and I look forward to returning to the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast and serving our Lord with the people that once formed us and sent us forth into the larger church. I take this election to be a call for collaboration, cooperation and creativity as we seek to be apostles for Jesus in God’s world,” said Kendrick following the election.

Under the canons (III.11.4) of The Episcopal Church, a majority of bishops exercising jurisdiction and diocesan standing committees must consent to Kendrick’s ordination as bishop within 120 days of receiving notice of the election. Pending the required consents, the bishop-elect will be ordained and consecrated on July 25 at Christ Church Cathedral in Mobile. The bishop-elect will succeed the Rt. Rev. Philip Menzie Duncan II, who is the third bishop of the diocese.

“We are excited about Russell’s election — excited for the Kendricks, and for the Diocese of the Central Gulf,” said the Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, bishop of Alabama. “He is a very capable priest, and will be a wonderful bishop. He leaves St. Stephen’s in wonderful shape, and I join with them in their excitement for Russell, and in trusting that the Spirit of God will guide them in calling their next rector.”

The Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast includes southern Alabama and the panhandle of Florida, 62 churches, and approximately 20,000 members.

From an Episcopal News Service article

March/April 2015
UPCOMING EVENTS

DAUGHTERS OF THE KING SPRING ASSEMBLY
April 11 at St. Andrew’s in Tuskegee

The Alabama Diocese Order of the Daughters of the King (DOK) will convene at 9:00 a.m., April 11, for the annual Spring Assembly at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, 701 West Montgomery Rd., Tuskegee Institute, AL 36083. Rev. Carol Meade, priest and accomplished author from the Diocese of Mississippi will be the guest speaker, presenting, “The Word Resurrected: Giving the Bible Back to God.” Our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, and our newly installed DOK chaplain, the Rev. Deborah Leighton, will be joining us for our assembly as we faithfully strive to “revive, renew, and refresh” during the 40 days of Easter while we look forward to Pentecost. Information for registration can be obtained from the DOK Diocesan webpage or by contacting Yolanda Seawright, ypseawright@gmail.com, 334-303-6744.

BLUEGRASS & GEE’S BEND WORKSHOP
April 19 – 22 at Alabama Folk School, Camp McDowell

This spring, take part in our longstanding Bluegrass & Gee’s Bend workshop. Choose from one of eight music classes in banjo, fiddle, guitar and mandolin that highlight the Bluegrass style of music. You can also explore your sewing skills by taking the Sassy Tees class with Rachel Writing. Register today before spots fill up!

LOVING THE WORLD: PHOTOGRAPHY AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
April 24-26 at Camp McDowell

Poets, photographers and philosophers – and mystics like Rumi, Meister Eckhart and St. Francis – have made the connection between our outer vision and inner being. Join us to strengthen this connection, through the use of contemplative practices and digital photography. This is a retreat for those who would like to refresh their love of photography, as well as those who are new to making digital pictures. No level of proficiency is required. It is also for those who want to revitalize their spiritual practice through the pursuit of an artistic medium. Led by Paul Kimmerling. For more information visit: http://bit.ly/1GorK8l

ECW BLACK BELT SPRING CONVOCATION
April 25 at St. Paul’s, Greensboro

Featuring a music program by Rev. & Mrs. Samuel Keyes, followed by lunch at the famous Pie Lab. For more information contact Mary Lawson, maryclawson1948@yahoo.com, 334-624-9544.

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE WEEKEND
May 1-3 at St. Bernard’s Retreat Center, Cullman

The Beginning Experience Weekend originally scheduled for March 27-29 has been rescheduled for May 1-3 at St. Bernard’s Retreat Center in Cullman. This is a weekend of grief recovery for those who have been affected by the loss of a spouse. For more information call 205-969-8509 or visit http://www.birminghambeginningexperience.org.

2015 E-FORMATION CONFERENCE
June 1-3 at Virginia Theological Seminary

Save the dates for the 2015 e-Formation Conference at the Virginia Theological Seminary. The conference is an ecumenical conference on faith formation in the digital age for leaders invested in the future of faith formation. For additional details on the conference visit: http://www.eforationvts.org/conference-details/ or contact Christina Dorn, Grace Church in Anniston at: cedirector@aol.com.

KANUGA 2015 CHRISTIAN FORMATION CONFERENCE
June 8 – 12 at Kanuga Conference Center, Hendersonville, NC

How do you make your parish a safe haven when disaster strikes? How do you prepare yourself for the psychological impacts on your parish? How do you lead your parish to forgive? How do you teach forgiveness in a society focused on retaliation?

Listen as keynoter Lyndon Harris shares his inspiring story of being thrust into the center of tragedy on Sept. 11, 2001, while serving as a priest at St. Paul’s Chapel in New York City, just beside the World Trade Center.

Take part in more than 40 workshops with topics as diverse as creating an emergency preparedness manual, learning to live in the now; and how to use outreach with children and youth as a tool for healing after tragedy strikes. Workshops will also cover such basics as creating amazing VBS programs and tools needed for the novice to experienced Christian education director. Learn more at: http://bit.ly/1zFhJY, or contact Kathy Graham at: kraham@dioala.org.

CLERGY NEWS

The Rev. Steve DeGweck, associate rector for pastoral care at St. Luke’s in Birmingham, has decided to retire after 40 years in ordained ministry. His last Sunday at St. Luke’s will be Aug. 23.

The Rev. Derrick Hill, associate rector at St. Mary’s-on-the-Highlands has accepted the call to serve as rector for St. Timothy’s Church, Signal Mountain, TN. He began his ministry with St. Timothy’s on March 16.
WHAT’S NEW/NOTEWORTHY AT THE EPISCOPAL BOOK STORE

By Cindy Funderburk, Manager

It Is Finished: 365 Days of Good News by Tullian Tchividjian with Nick Lannon (David C. Cook, hardback)

This new 365-day devotional reminds you daily that God has good news for you — He loves you more than you know and there’s nothing you can do to earn that love. God gives grace freely to people who don’t deserve it at all — all of us! These short readings remind us of this every day.


In What’s So Amazing about Grace?, Yancey issued a call for Christians to be as grace-filled in their behavior as they are in declaring their beliefs. He now returns to this vital subject, asking why Christians continue to lose respect, influence, and reputation in our modern culture. Vanishing Grace explores how Christians live in the middle of hostility and rejection today. Yancey dives into the reasons for the hostility and gives us models of different, more effective ways to communicate the Good News. Yancey ultimately asks if the Gospel is Good News after all.

Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter by Editors of Plough Publishing (Plough Publishing, hardback)

Though Easter (like Christmas) is often trivialized by the culture at large, it is still the high point of the religious calendar for millions of people around the world. And for most of them, there can be no Easter without Lent, the season that leads up to it. Bread and Wine can be dipped into at leisure or used as a guide to daily devotions and returned to any time of the year. There is a sampling from contemporary writers, including Philip Yancey, John Updike, Frederick Buechner, Madeleine L’Engle, Henri Nouwen and Brennan Manning.

Bunny’s First Spring by Sally Lloyd-Jones (Zondervan, hardback)

When a bunny is born in spring, he sees the world as green and new and full of hope. But as the seasons change, the bunny worries that the earth may be dying. In this new picture book celebrating the Easter season and rebirth, nature speaks to the bunny, assuring him of something more. Award-winning artist David McPhail’s whimsical illustrations reflect the beauty of the world around us as Lloyd-Jones’ inspirational text prompts readers to celebrate the changing seasons and the miracle of nature’s rebirth.

The Story of Easter by Juliet David (Candle Books, board book)

With clear, simple text and engaging illustrations, this board book helps children understand the true meaning of the Easter season. Full color, ending with “At Easter, we remember that Jesus died. And that he is alive for ever.”

Read-Aloud Bible Stories Vol. 5 by Ella K. Lindvall, illustrated by H. Kent Puckett (Moody Publishers, hardback)

The 4 volumes of the Read Aloud Bible Stories series has delighted us for decades. The stories of the Bible are retold in clear, simple language children will love and understand; while adults will appreciate the accuracy of the message. In this beautifully illustrated volume #5, Ella Lindvall re-tells five of Jesus’ parables in a way that will entertain and teach the truth of the Bible. After each story the child can reveal the meaning of the story in the “What did you learn?” section. And – the Read Aloud Bible Stories are not just for reading to children but are perfect for the early reader too!

BISHERS’ VISITATION SCHEDULE

Saturday, April 4
7:00 p.m. Bishop Marray St. Andrew’s, Birmingham
8:30 p.m. Bishop Sloan Grace, Woodlawn

Sunday, April 5
10:30 a.m. Bishop Marray St. Paul’s, Selma
10:30 a.m. Bishop Sloan St. Peter’s, Talladega

Sunday, April 12
10:00 a.m. Bishop Sloan St. Stephen’s, Huntsville
10:30 a.m. Bishop Marray St. Luke’s, Birmingham

Sunday, April 19
8:45 a.m. Bishop Sloan All Saints, Birmingham
11:00 a.m. Bishop Marray Christ Church, Tuscaloosa
9:00 a.m. Bishop Marray St. Dunstan’s, Auburn
11:00 a.m. Bishop Marray St. John’s, Montgomery

Sunday, May 3
9:30 a.m. Bishop Marray Ft. Payne
9:00 a.m. Bishop Sloan Advent, Birmingham
11:00 a.m. Bishop Sloan Holy Trinity, Auburn

Sunday, May 10
10:30 a.m. Bishop Marray St. Philip’s, Greensboro
10:30 a.m. Bishop Sloan St. John’s, Montgomery
10:00 a.m. Bishop Sloan St. Paul’s, Greensboro

Wednesday, May 13
6:00 p.m. Bishop Sloan Holy Comforter, Gadsden
6:00 p.m. Bishop Marray St. Mark’s, Prattville

Sunday, May 17
10:00 a.m. Bishop Marray Nativiy, Huntsville
10:00 a.m. Bishop Sloan St. Mary’s, Birmingham

Wednesday, May 20
6:00 p.m. Bishop Sloan St. Wilfrid’s, Marion
6:30 p.m. Bishop Sloan Christ Church, Albertville
Selma “Unity Walk” draws some 2,000 participants

St. Paul’s among event organizers

By St. Paul’s Staff

The image of a city can become frozen in time, the Rev. Jack Alvey knows. A single event can create an impression so deep that it never fades. Fifty years ago, state troopers attacked marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma in one of the defining moments of the civil rights movement. Selma has been grappling with the legacy of that moment, and the events that led up to it, ever since.

On Sunday, March 1, a coalition of faith leaders, including Alvey, the rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Selma, helped the city demonstrate the progress it has made. A racially integrated crowd of some 2,000 people took part in a Unity Walk that began on the south side of the famous bridge and ended with a prayer service in Song of Selma Park. Participants walked the same route as marchers on Bloody Sunday, but in reverse, to symbolize the theme of the gathering, “One Selma: Coming Home United in Faith,” said organizer Juanda Maxwell, a lay leader at Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

“I believe God wants Selma to be a reminder of the new story we are given through the good news of Jesus Christ,” Alvey told his parishioners in a sermon Sunday morning prior to the walk. “Our walk will give us permission to celebrate the bridge, to look at the bridge in a new way. We can look at the bridge and see people of all colors and stories walking in a faith that believes God is making us one.”

Turnout for the walk was almost three times what organizers had anticipated, he added, and rather than closing two lanes of the famous bridge, police closed all four. Participants included the Rev. F.D. Reese, who had invited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Selma, and a number of local political leaders including U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Birmingham, who grew up in Selma.

“I thought it was beautiful to look out behind me and see 2,000 people walking behind me for one purpose: to say we are united,” said the Rev. Jerry Light, pastor of First Baptist Church, another event organizer. “It was almost like a family reunion on the bridge. We stood there and I thought, ‘This is why God called me to Selma five years ago.’ ”

The walkers crossed the bridge behind an 11-foot wide Unity Quilt, composed of 176 squares contributed by individuals and congregations from across the city and coordinated by Alvey’s wife, Jamie, a quilter. Begun in January, the quilt became the focal point of the event. “Everybody wanted to come up and get their picture made with it,” Jamie Alvey said.

“This is the Selma I know and love,” said Allen Bearden, a parishioner at St. Paul’s. “This is the Selma I want the world to know and love.”

About half of those who participated in the march were black and half were white according to Maxwell. “That’s almost unheard of,” she said. “And it was just beautiful, just like that patchwork quilt.

“We wanted to celebrate those who marched in 1965, especially the martyrs,” she added. “But we also wanted to speak up for Selma as it is today because we are not downtrodden.”

Maxwell said the coalition next plans to encourage members of the city’s predominantly black and predominantly white churches to invite one another to worship together on a specific Sunday during the coming year.

“I was overwhelmed by how well it turned out,” Jack Alvey said. “The spirit was joyful. I heard someone say that this was like a wedding. It was like a wedding. But now we are ready for the marriage—a long term commitment to come together as a community.”