

**GB-21-1166**  
**Christian Church in Georgia**

**Contact**

Christian Church in Georgia  
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**Staff**

Rev. Denise Bell – Regional Minister  
Rev. Betty Brewer-Calvert – Director of Women's Ministry  
Rev. Richard Williams – Director New Church and Church Development  
Jackie Byrd and Carrie Norris – Interim Co-Directors of Regional Youth Ministry  
Pam Van Dusen & Marilyn Parks –Co-Directors of Summer Camp Programing  
Tommy Freeman – Camp Manager  
Vacant – Administrative Assistant

**2020 Yearbook Report**

Number of Congregations: 53  
Total Members – 4,294/ Participating Members – 5,935/ Average Worship Attendance – 3,004

At the close of 2019, we had all kinds of ministry plans for 2020. When the pandemic first hit, we thought it was temporary. Unfortunately, it continues to wreak havoc globally, along with associated crises in education, economics, and our public health care systems. The pandemic, coupled with social unrest, the deep divide in our country around racial issues, gender, theology, politics, generations, etc., plus natural and human-made disasters, has resulted in personal and church circumstances that are both challenging and stimulating. We finished the year in the black, thanks to the PPP loan. Our mantra is, "We survived 2020 to thrive in 2021." Through the promise of our Lord, in 2021 we shall reclaim what the locust stole (Joel 2:25).

As much as this has been a challenging year, we declare it has been a year of lessons. We have learned that ministry must be agile and flexible. The questions of our mission and ministry's core purpose and how do we fulfill it continues to loom large in my mind. We pray that as you continue to serve the local, regional, and general church, you, too, ask such questions.

Just as the pandemic became a household word, we sold our regional office building that had been in the regional family for 55 years. The pandemic's noise and frantic activity overshadowed the regional board's courage to release the 5,700 square foot building. One of the essential elements of increasing the vigor of regional ministry was to re-create the Region's ministry in local congregational life. Our mantra across

the state was that regional ministry does not happen on a patch of dirt located in Macon, GA; instead, regional ministry happens wherever we gather across Disciple congregations. We are now sharing ministry space with First Christian Church in Macon, just a few feet away from our former building.

### **169<sup>th</sup> Regional Assembly**

The Christian Church in Georgia virtually hosted its 169<sup>th</sup> Regional Assembly November 13-14, 2020. Our theme was "Grounded in Love . . . Powered by the Holy Spirit" (Eph 3:16-19). We started on Friday night with creative worship led by our Regional Youth Directors and their youth team across the Region. On Saturday morning, we hosted one workshop with a great list of panelists who talked about "What do we do now?" Our featured preacher was Dr. Ronald Allen, who delivered a powerful sermon, "Responding to the Power at Work Within Us." The worship service was riveting. We enjoyed diversity, creativity, and the Lord's spirit as if we were in person. We would not have created such an excellent virtual experience without the gifts and generosity of Rev. Jabari Butler, Chris Waltz, and Eli White.

### **Other Events**

We created a virtual prayer event every Monday night via ZOOM broadcast over Facebook live to help get through these strange days. So far, we have had over 2,000 touches from people all over. The intent is to remind the Christian Church in Georgia that prayer is the thread that keeps us together and keeps our eyes on God and not our circumstances. We maintained our monthly district meetings, established and hosted several ZOOM workshops featuring topics such as clergy under 40, stewardship amid uncertainty in a pandemic, ministry tools during a pandemic, safety persuasions during a pandemic, clergy support during a pandemic, the right technology during a pandemic. We created a clergy resource page where we publish learning opportunities and resources about – guess what – how to get through a pandemic. Additionally, we continue to create resources and communication tools across the Region to keep clergy connected, including a monthly video platform called "Georgia Coffee Talk."

### **Georgia Commission on Ministry**

The Georgia Commission on Ministry met quarterly this year as usual. This year was a productive one for addressing some longstanding issues under consideration and responding to several challenges confronting the Region's churches. Our Region is confronted with four primary problems. First, we have some small churches with aging populations struggling with the continued viability of their ministries. Second, our Region is one that is at the heart of the struggle for social justice in protesting police brutality and widespread incidents of racial discrimination and hate murders. Third, we are vigorously attempting to establish new congregations during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fourth and lastly, our reality is that our denomination is not producing the requisite minimum number of new ministers to replace retiring ones. Complicating these problems is the pandemic, forcing almost all churches to discontinue in-house worship and provide ministry primarily over the phone and online. Even the convening of the commission itself was changed to ZOOM meetings after the January meeting. Despite the pandemic, we ordained Rev. Henry Brewer-Calvert, transferred standing of Rev. Stacy Pardue, Rev. Nick Chambers, and Rev. Jared Wortman, and received under care Rev. Will Johnson, Ann Edmondson, Daniel Bookhoop, Christopher Clark, and Jerry Dorriety.

We continued to celebrate pastoral ministry to embrace new forms of ministry through retirements including Rev. Jane Hull and Rev. Tom Van Laningham. We celebrated new ministry assignments including Rev. Beth Wendl, the new Senior Pastor of Brookhaven Christian Church, Rev. Jerry Dorriety, the new Pastor at St. Andrews Christian Church in Macon, Rev. Joel Saucedo, the new Senior Pastor at Johns Creek Christian Church, and Rev. Alan Cloar, the Interim Pastor at Union Christian Church in Watkinsville.

### **Healthy Boundary Training**

After a bumpy start to 2020, with three Healthy Boundaries workshops canceled due to COVID-19, the collaborative teaching partnership between the Christian (DOC) in Georgia and the Southeast Conference United Church of Christ, successfully taught its first two Healthy Boundaries workshops by ZOOM. Nine participants attended "Healthy Boundaries 201: Beyond Basics and into the Internet," held on two consecutive Saturday mornings, Sept. 12 and 19, 2020, and 18 participants attended "Healthy Boundaries 101: Fundamentals" on Saturday mornings Oct. 31 and Nov. 7, 2020. The project has required considerable revision in updating current teaching materials and working with the curriculum provider, FaithTrust Institute, for streaming and video assistance.

The leadership team is Rev. Kathy McDowell (Georgia Disciples administrator) and Min. Carrole Moss (SECUCC administrator), and also includes Rev. Erica Gerald (DOC) and Rev. David Kenley (DOC).

### **Reconciliation Ministry**

We have a new leader for our Reconciliation Ministry – Rev. Dr. Jared Wortman. The latter, along with Rev. Beth Wendl and Pastor Chris Clark, will lead us into a dialogue ministry. The clergy across the state wrote an open letter to address the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia. The letter called for justice, with specific steps to include the passing of the Georgia Hate Crimes Bill (passed by the State Legislature in June), and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) involvement in handling the case due to a botched job in the initial investigation. The Regional Board wrote an open letter to the Region concerning the use of excessive force by law enforcement in the state of Georgia and around the country. The new

commission created a video to start a conversation of what reconciliation means and how we can become a part of one another's best stories.

## **Georgia Disciples Women**

Early in the year, the commission surveyed women across the Region on their needs and desires regarding women's retreat. Results were beginning to come in when the pandemic hit. Initial responses valued affordability while maintaining the option for private rooms and baths. Respondents were ready or willing to try some new retreat centers around the Region. Epworth By The Sea in St. Simons, GA, was to be our 2020 fall retreat site.

Commission members made plans to host or attend events in their districts during the first half of the year. Four middle Georgia churches participated in a combined winter lunch held in late February and planned by Lavonda Shadix. All other planned events were canceled due to COVID-19. Commission members continued to reach out to churches to provide support during a challenging time.

Instead of its annual planning retreat, the Disciples Women's Commission held a series of summer ZOOM meetings. As the pandemic continued, the commission elected to hold a virtual fall retreat and to defer the retreat at St. Simon's until next year, if possible. They chose the theme "Act. Love. Walk," with Micah 6:8 as the scriptural text in light of the realities of 2020 and invited the Rev. Terri Hord Owens as keynote speaker.

Instead of in-person women's gatherings, Rev. Betty Brewer-Calvert and the Disciple Women's Commission have worked to create spaces for dialogue and conversations around difficult subjects. The Fall Retreat was a virtual experience, where the women gathered by ZOOM Sept. 25-27, 2020. The Rev. Terri Hord Owens blessed us with two sermons shared in opening and closing worship. The commission sought to create a schedule that would balance live and pre-recorded elements. Despite a large learning curve to put it all together, the event went smoothly. Worship spotlighted a variety of participants from across the Region. Women enjoyed seeing beloved faces on the Saturday morning ZOOM and in the workshops. A lovely memorial service for sisters we've lost since last year was planned and pre-recorded with leadership from Winder First Christian Church. The retreat was undoubtedly a different experience than gathering in the same location, but we were joined by heart.

## **Georgia Disciples Men**

The Georgia Disciples Men (GDM) are committed to gathering through rallies, retreats, and service projects. GDM may have been one of our hardest-hit ministries because of the pandemic. Every year, many of the Disciples Men activities involve workdays at Camp Christian. Due to the pandemic, there were no group activities allowed at Camp Christian Camp and Conference Center. However, under the

leadership of John Anderson, the men hosted a virtual fall rally featuring Rev. Greg Alexander, and lay leaders from across the Region participated in sharing ministry in song and scriptural study. They continue to encourage men in service, study, and fellowship.

## **Regional Youth Ministry**

Regional Youth Assembly (RYA) 2020 “Behind the Filter” was very successful at Epworth by The Sea on February 21-23, 2020. Twenty churches from across the Region participated, and 182 persons enjoyed learning, worship, fellowship, and the retreat environment's incredible surroundings. There was an overwhelmingly positive response in person and on social media, with #behindthefilter2020 cataloging dozens of posts and hundreds of likes/comments.

The Youth Minister Network started in 2019 and continues to grow beyond the already existing Facebook group. The Regional Youth Directors (RYD) hosted the second annual Youth Minister Networking Group gathering at RYA 2020. RYDs held a meeting with youth ministers in March to assess their needs as they served through a pandemic and continued to work to provide convenient methods for resource sharing, fellowship, and support between the youth ministers.

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) hosted a Virtual Youth Retreat on April 25, 2020, via ZOOM. The virtual platform created a refreshing space for 41 participants to engage with adults and youth alike, playing games and discussing relevant issues. The keynoter was Rev. Richard Williams, who talked about the power of prayer. YAC led mighty worship to end the retreat, reminding us all that even virtual spaces can be sacred.

## **Georgia Mental Health Initiative (GAMHI)**

The GAMHI team is led by Rev. Erica Gerald, administrator, along with Rev. Cheryl Clour, Rev. Tom Edmondson, Rev. Dr. Christina Hicks, Rev. Matthew Marshall, Rev. Kathy McDowell, Jane Osborne, Rev. Orlando Scott, Rev. Darrell Vandervort, Rev. Tom Van Laningham, Don Wayman, Rev. Diane Bales, and Danielle Hawkins.

During the summer, the Georgia Mental Health Initiative regularly offered resources to congregations in Georgia. These included the following:

- Rev. Diane Bales presented a two- hour ZOOM workshop for youth leaders on May 30, 2020, "More Than Moodiness" covering mental health issues among youth.
- Rev. Matthew Marshall created a Clergy Visitation Guide, which was posted on the website and distributed to clergy via a Google group.
- The team vetted and posted information on numerous mental health events and resources on the Georgia Disciples website including:
  - NBA Webinar Series (May) on Soulcare – Taking Pause in Crisis

- Dialogue and Discussion Virtual Group led by Rev. Dr. Christina Hicks (June & July) on "Women & Singleness During COVID-19"
- Virtual Group (spring and summer) led by Joshua Generation Care & Consulting Services, L.L.C., on "Therapeutic Conversations"
- Virtual Grief Share Group (Summer and Fall) led by Rev. Erica Gerald

## **New Church and Development**

Rev. Richard Williams served as the New Church and Development Director. The New Church and Church Development Team's goal is to work with our regional L.I.F.T.<sup>1</sup> Initiative to fulfill our vision to create vibrant and dynamic ministries for Christ. We were blessed to receive a financial contribution to the New Church fund from Peachtree Christian Church for \$10,000. Terrell McTyer, the minister of New Church Strategies, helped us launch two new church projects. We also invested in a software program called Mission Insight to help congregations tap into their local community's core needs to discern what ministry opportunities might be practical.

### *Warner Robins Church Plant*

Rev. Bethany Apelquist worked with the New Church team in launching a parallel ministry project at First Christian Church of Warner Robins. Within a year, the church experienced a slight increase in membership, created partnerships in the community, and explored new outreach ways in the community. Unfortunately, due to the strain of the pandemic, the parallel ministry could not gain traction. However, the church has decided to sell the building and re-engage in transforming its mission and vision.

### *Snellville New Church Plant*

The Snellville project is a unique ministry representing a partnership between the Disciples Church Extension Fund and the Christian Church in Georgia. In 2019 Shiloh Christian Church in Snellville decided to celebrate the conclusion of its physical ministry in the Snellville community by discontinuing the ministry and releasing its building to the Region for new and innovative ministry. The Snellville property is an excess of 10 acres that includes a building that includes worship space for 150, two classrooms, two offices, a kitchen, a softball field, a pavilion, and a large parking lot. The partnership will allow for a multi-faceted and holistic ministry with community-wide partnerships and spiritual formation for the local community. Rev. Orlando Scott, the new church planter, has already created a team, a marketing strategy, and an outreach initiative. This ministry's essential strategy is to build teams for a strong core leadership and serve the community through outreach to build a brand in the community. The Snellville Church, named "*Amplify Christian Church*," is scheduling to launch in August 2021.

## **Church Development**

In 2019, we worked with Liberty Christian Church in Newnan, Community Christian Church in Fayetteville, Peachtree Corners Christian Church in Peachtree Corners, and First Christian Church in Waycross on church transformation steps. In 2020, we redeveloped our church development strategy within the team. We have moved towards a district concept in a way to reach more churches simultaneously. In addition, we will continue to reach out to other congregations to engage them in transformation. Lastly, we are looking to use media to offer frequent tips for church transformation.

## **Camp Christian Conference Center & O.M.A.T.**

We began planning in early 2020 for our regular summer camp, but with COVID-19, we had to reevaluate our plans and decided to go virtual. Chalice Connects, our virtual camp experience, was successful, as the directors and counselors went above and beyond to make it happen. Over the spring and the summer, more than 600 campers, parents, counselors, and directors enjoyed Camp-in-a-Box and other virtual gatherings. Special thanks also to our Outdoors Ministry partners for Disciples Home Missions, who, along with directors and counselors, contributed to the success of Chalice Connects.

Looking to serve the community in the area, Rev. Bethany Apelquist and her committee coordinated a food drive (June 27) and school supply drive (August 1) at Camp Christian, serving local at-risk children and families normally served by our annual OASIS camp. Through these efforts, we successfully reached 637 OASIS families and children.

Because we did not generate our expected income from our camp program, our fundraising team, led by Jenny Miller and Carolyn Grant raised an excess of \$35,000. We owe much appreciation to them and all who have supported Camp Christian Conference Center during this unusual time. We are thankful to God, who allowed us to create 1,771 touchpoints through our camp and conference center ministry.

Finally, even with the challenges of in-person gatherings, Pam Van Dusen and Marilyn Parks, Camp Program Co-Directors, pulled together Mission Days, where 112 people came to camp over many weeks and made repairs and improvements to camp property while practicing COVID-19 safety precautions.

## **Disciples on Campus**

Disciples on Campus is the campus/collegiate ministry of the Christian Church in Georgia. It is primarily focused in Athens, GA, for now, with plans to expand the ministry to include college-aged young adults across the Georgia region as

resources are available and opportunities are identified. Disciples on Campus became a ministry of the Christian Church in Georgia in September 2019.

### **Athens Ministry**

The Athens-based component of Disciples on Campus met weekly during the spring semester of 2020. Weekly face-to-face meetings took place at the Grubb House, space offered by the First Christian Church of Athens, from January through early March. Members of First Christian Church of Athens and Bogart Christian Church provided dinner to students each week. Meetings included a discussion about a Biblical passage or story, prayer and support for each member, an issue related to faith and life, or a current events topic and its connection to faith.

### **Remote Ministry via Zoom**

Beginning on March 18, when colleges and universities moved to virtual education after spring break because of COVID-19, we began meeting virtually via ZOOM. Our meetings focused on checking in, sharing highs and lows, supporting each other through struggles, and making sense of changes caused by the pandemic. We continued to share joys and concerns, communion (using any elements handy at home), and prayer. These virtual meetings continued weekly through early May. At students' request, we continued holding biweekly ZOOM meetings through the summer. We kicked off Fall 2020 with a socially-distanced meeting in the First Christian Church of Athens parking lot on Sunday, August 23. Since then we have continued weekly ZOOM meetings, with all college-aged young adults invited, not just those in college in Athens.

### **Conclusion**

Yet, as much as this has been a challenging year, we declare it has been a year of lessons. We have learned that ministry must be agile and flexible. We discovered that with a new resolve to forge ahead with calm courage, we could still do ministry well with an adaptable orientation. Ministry does not have to be complicated, high tech, or extreme. Ministry does have to be purposeful, and it does have to LIFT people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

1. L.I.F.T, our regional mission statement reminds us to

\*Love all people.

\*Inspire all generations.

\*Focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

\*Transform lives unto the glory of God!



## Associated Organizations to The Christian Church in Georgia

### **Campbell-Stone in Sandy Springs**

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### **Camp Christian Conference Center**

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