



GROWING THE CHURCH FAMILY

Like a lot of families, mine is spread throughout the country. My Uncle Ross and Aunt Sandy live in Muskegon, Michigan but winter in Mesa, Arizona. One of my Aunts lives in Manhattan, New York, and the other lives in Winterville, North Carolina. My brother lives in Wichita, Kansas with his family, and I have cousins in North Carolina, Michigan, and Indiana. Therefore, it is always special when my relatives can get together for a family reunion.

For Thanksgiving in 2021 Patti, the kids and I were able to see most of my family, on my mother's side. It was wonderful to be with everyone again, hear about their exploits, see my Cousin's home, meet a new relative and her family, and talk about those who could not make the trip and those who are no longer with us. This visit was a rite of passage in many ways because it involved the toughest of tasks, keeping six Adens, four Allens, and one Rushing, fed, rested, and happy.

In the church, we often refer to each other as family. We call other Christians brothers and sisters, refer to our sister churches, and we read and talk about the family of God. Our faith calls us to form close ties with each other, but just like families who are tied by blood, we get tired of hearing the same old stories and sometimes we argue. Yet, throughout it, all the connection remains because we are united by ties that cannot be broken.

But ours is a family that is called to grow. It is often said that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the best-kept secret within the denominations of America. Our focus on ecumenism, reconciliation, hospitality, and personal education makes for an interesting mix of ideologies and theologies. However, being the best-kept secret is not a compliment. It means that those who are not associated with our denomination know nothing about us. If we are truly to be the family of God this must change.

One of our former General Minister and Presidents, Rev. William Chris Hobgood, writes "As different as we may be, as Disciples we share the most important thing - our belief in God and our confession of faith in Jesus Christ." He suggests that Disciples have five covenantal values that define us as a denomination. These five values are:

- 1) The confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.
- 2) The hospitality of the Lord's Supper.
- 3) The call to ministry for all believers.
- 4) The love of unity.
- 5) The justice of God that orders all our actions.

These values should guide our lives and should be shared.

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Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, January 6**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

3209 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, Alabama 35802
Telephone: 256-881-0150 **Leave a message.**

...**Growing** continued.

How do you live out these five Disciple values in your life? How do you build the family of God each day? How can we make sure that the world's people are fed, cared for, rested, and happy? As we continue through the season after Epiphany and move into Lent let us reflect on these questions, enjoy our families, and work to build the heavenly Kingdom together. Amen



SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online

CHURCH CALENDAR

- Jan. 3 Quilters
- Jan. 5 6 pm Phoebe Circle
Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Jan. 9 11:45 am Community Outreach
- Jan. 10 9:30 am Esther Circle
10:30 am Quilters
5 pm Conveners Meeting
- Jan. 11 6 pm Elders' Meeting
- Jan 12 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Jan. 13 6 pm Board Meeting
- Jan. 17 **Church Office Closed**
10:30 am Quilters
- Jan. 19 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal

CONDOLENCES to the family of **Not Published Online**

We are temporarily publishing, as space allows, the prayer concerns that are normally listed in the Sunday bulletins. **Concerns are listed for one month unless we receive an update.** Long term prayer concerns are published monthly in the *Journey*. Send requests to publisher@fcc-hsv.org or call the church office at 256-881-0150 to leave a message.
Please notify the Pastors or the church office if you are going to the hospital and would like to be contacted

REGIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS
First Christ Christian Church
Anniston, AL

**CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S MINISTRIES (CWM)
VALENTINE PROJECT**
CWM is seeking current names and addresses for our college students and service men and women. If you have this information, please email AAA@gmail.com
Thank you for your help with this outreach

The 2022 sign up chart for **FOOD BASKETS** is available. You may call the office at 256-881-0150 or email publisher@fcc-hsv.org to select a Sunday to remember or honor a friend, loved one, anniversary, birthday, or other special occasion. Donations are \$25.00 and go to Community Outreach. Make checks payable to First Christian Church and Food Basket on the notation line. You may also make your payment through PayPal and designate Food Basket through the link below.



This QR code is linked to the Church's PayPal giving page for your convenience.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

I've been asked to lead up a committee to help grow the number of volunteers on our AV/ Technical crew - the people that run our sound, record and livestream our services, and put the visuals on our screens. For far too long, we've relied on our friends Chuck and Michael, as volunteers, to run all our systems, week in and week out.

None of the work is particularly difficult ...in fact, it's pretty routine once you know how to do it. Have you ever...

- Shot some video with a camcorder, smart-phone or digital camera?
- Pushed some buttons to change the music on your stereo?
- Worked a slide projector, or run a Power-Point presentation?
- Used a microphone?

Our goal is to build a large group, maybe twenty or so...to help with our AV team. A group this size gives us the ability to rotate people to help out once every two, three, or four weeks. And, we don't need everyone to know how to do everything. It's OK just to want to help run camera, or run slides...that would be great.

Chuck wants to step away from this big weekly commitment, and we should show our thanks for all he has done, by giving him that opportunity. Personally, I don't want to work AV every week, and I'm not planning to, but I'm going to learn how, and I'd like you to join us. And that goes for our youth, too.

With Chuck's guidance, our church has invested in good quality AV equipment in recent years. Our committee is going to work very hard to simplify and streamline our processes...and our equipment, and make them simple to learn, and as dependable as we can.

If you'd like to help, reach out to me at 256-XXX-XXX or AAA@AAA, or call the church office. We're scheduling evening/weekend training sessions now. Watch for more information in the Journey, the bulletin, and our social media in the weeks ahead. I hope you'll join us!

Brad Clasgens

CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S MINISTRIES (CWM)

BLANKET MONTH 2022

CWM's January service is supporting Church World Service that will send blankets to people in need all round the world. What do you do if you are cold? At home you reach for a blanket or turn up the heat.

What if you didn't have an extra blanket or no blanket at all? What if you didn't have a home because of a natural disaster, tornado, hurricane, earthquake, or flood?

Church World Service provides blankets to those without blankets all over the world. CWM invites FCC to join us in giving blankets during the month of January. The cost of a blanket is \$10. Make your check out to FCC and mark for blankets. As one person put it, "it's about loving our neighbors on this small, interconnected planet, just as Jesus commanded".

Only \$10 per blanket warms someone, furnishes a carry-all, as well as offers protection and shelter. For more information go to churchworldservice.org.

Margaret J. Vann, CWM Blanket Chair

THE COFFEE CART IS BACK!

Coffee is available at the Commons Area from 9:15 - 10:45 Sunday mornings. Please use the hand sanitizer station by the coffee cart before you touch anything on the cart.



Thank you, the Coffee Crew!

IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

We offer in-person worship services Sunday mornings at 9:30 or you may also stream them live at 9:30, or watch previous services anytime, on [facebook.com/fcchsv](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.twitch.tv/fcchsv), or [youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhugUnUhCKw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhugUnUhCKw)

ATTENDANCE

Worship Service: 44
Small Groups: 13

THE WORD MADE FLESH

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon Jan. 3, 2022

Scripture Verses:

John 1: 1-18

The image of light has always been important to Christianity. That is why we have light throughout the sanctuary, on the communion table, the light of the Advent Candles and the Christ candle, the lights in the windows, even the sunlight that comes in through the Stained Glass windows, they all remind us of the light of God that shines in the darkness, filling us with warmth and love.

But my favorite use of light occurs during Christmas Eve when the lights are dimmed, and we each take up a candle and spread the light of Christ throughout the sanctuary as we sing Silent Night. At that moment we are unified as people of God spreading the good news of Christ's coming throughout the days of Christmas.

We are still in the season of Christmas, however tomorrow, January 3rd, we begin Epiphany. This is the last day of the celebration of Christ's birth. The 12 days of Christmas are coming to a close and we are celebrating a New Year and new opportunities to serve God, but today our souls are warmed by the presence of the light of Christ, the sanctuary is aglow, and the darkness of the world seems far removed for we experience the presence of the Lord through scripture, song, and the fellowship of our community.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John begins his gospel with a discussion of the nature of Christ. Jesus is eternal, a part of God, there before the beginning of time and beyond the end of time.

The author of Mark opens his gospel with the baptism of Jesus while Matthew and Luke begin with birth accounts that are the center of the season of Advent. But John wants us to know the true nature of Christ. There is no guessing and no questions, Christ is God sent to Earth to save us from our sinful nature that we might become the children of God.

In John's account there is no star, no wise men, no shepherds in the fields; only John the prophet, who witnessed to the coming of the Messiah, a

light that would destroy the darkness, the "Word" becoming flesh so that we might see the glory of God.

John did not write about the birth of Jesus for a reason. He knew that Jesus' human birth was not the beginning. The true beginning was the Word; that was and is always with us, a part of the Trinity, one with God.

John's gospel is different than the synoptic gospels in other ways. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written as historical accounts of Jesus' life. Granted, some stories were left out of the gospels, and others were changed or put at different times to suit the writer's theological claims, but these works were written to put flesh to the life of Jesus.

The author of John was not writing a history of Jesus' life. That is why there are so many differences between the gospel of John and the synoptic gospels. John was less concerned with human time and the limitations of history than the ultimate "truth" of the God we worship. John's gospel is a theological framework, laying the groundwork of Jesus' reign as the King of Heaven and Earth.

Chapter one of this gospel does not begin the story of Jesus' life; it opens with the creation of all our lives. It is the story of history, the story of time, the story of God, the beginning of every story. John wants to make it clear that Jesus did not just appear at that moment. He was not another device sent by God to work in the world, a wisdom seeker, or an empty shell that appeared and then disappeared. Jesus was always with us, in the past as a part of God, on Earth as the Messiah, in the present as our Redeemer, and he will return in the future.

The word become flesh and lived among us. John is clear that the "Word" that was with and is God, comes to Earth in human form to live and work with us. In this manner, Jesus becomes a part of the creation that he helped to create. This is no trick, no illusion, Christ came to us as a human so he could not only know but experience firsthand everything that it is to be human.

The Messiah had come, but the world was not

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...**Word** continued from page 4 ready. Most could not recognize their salvation because they did not believe that God was with them. Sin blinded them, and they chose to believe in what they understood, human power, greed, and vanity.

But some did receive the message, and the interesting thing is that those who did were not the ones you might expect. The ones who recognized Jesus were the poor, the sinners, tax collectors, gentiles, rough fishermen, tired shepherds, women, and men whom society had turned away from, but whom God accepted. These people, who so desperately needed the light, saw and believed because they understood that God had not given up on them.

Just as God never gives up on us. God's love is so great that God sent the Son, Jesus Christ, for us. This was the ultimate gift for all people, even those who do not know God. In the same manner, Jesus defeated sin and death and was raised so that the promises of God would continue. Christ's presence on Earth did not end when he ascended into heaven he is with us even now. The Spirit of God renews and makes us one. Christ enters our hearts, teaches us how to live for others and how to love ourselves.

Even amid our despair and sin, when we know that we are unworthy to even grovel in the dust before him, Jesus is there to pick us up, hold us in his arms and call us family, brothers, and sisters united by God.

Rev. William McCord Thigpen III wrote, "On a visit to a local hospital before Christmas, I stopped at the front desk to find the room number of a patient I was to visit. The woman sitting at the desk was talking with another hospital employee. They stopped their conversation to give me the room number. When they realized I was a clergy person, one of them asked, "Can you believe that?" and she pointed to the nativity set on the desk counter.

It took me a moment to take in what they were talking about. "Somebody stole Jesus. Can you believe that?" And the Jesus figurine was

missing. I had to laugh to myself; it reminded me of the nativity set I had bought a few years ago that was missing one piece--one out of forty--missing the baby Jesus.

"Somebody stole Jesus right off this counter! Can you believe that?" I didn't know how to respond, so I offered, "Well, I guess somebody just took Jesus out of Christmas." They just stared back at me. So, I tried again, "Uh, maybe he is out in the hospital making rounds, maybe he'll be back when he's done. Maybe the person who took Jesus really needed him." I don't think they appreciated my attempt at humor, so I said, "Well, let's hope they bring him back soon," and I went on my way.

During these twelve days of Christmas amidst all the things that pull at us, we are reminded, called back to where our center is to be located, where our hearts belong--to celebrate the mystery of God becoming flesh and blood and to joyously receive the coming of Christ among us. Christmas is about the powerful, transcendent God who comes near. Sometimes we talk about the transcendent God, mysterious and beyond comprehension, but here in this celebration, God the Creator takes on flesh, our flesh, and becomes one of us. Amid our darkness and the chaos of our lives, Jesus comes announcing life and not death.

Later in John's gospel, we will hear Jesus say, "I come that you may have life and have it abundantly." Jesus' way is the way of the Creator, the way of life. He is that Word spoken amid our chaos and darkness and creates life where all may seem impossible. And in and through Jesus, we are shown how we are meant to be, full of life, full of hope, full of joy--that even as God has poured upon us the new light of God's incarnate Word, we are to allow this light to shine forth in our lives.

The Gospel of John may not have a birth account that we can sing about and remember fondly. There are no fuzzy lambs or wondrous Kings, yet that does not diminish the gospel because the true glory of Christ is not located in the story of his birth but in the wondrous love and sacrifice of God.

As we celebrate Christmas we know that there

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...**Word** continued from page 5
is no end to this story because there is no end to God. Jesus is with us; the Emmanuel continues to be born when we accept him in our hearts he lives in us and through us.

The birth of Jesus in a stable was a wondrous event, but it was not the beginning. The beginning was with God when the Word became flesh, and the end will never come. For now, we are the light of Christ commissioned to spread the word and share the love of God with all people. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and Thanks be to God, Amen.

DON'T! STOP! NOW! By Jennifer Brownell

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! – Psalm 148:7-10 (NRSV)

I don't know about what happens at your house, but the day after Christmas is generally a pretty low energy affair around here – recycling wrapping paper, heating up leftovers and wondering whether there's really any reason to change out of pajamas. The year is nearing its end, and we usually wouldn't even poke a head out of the door to witness its waning days.

Here in the 148th (or third-to-last) Psalm, you might think the psalmist has earned a rest, like a preacher at the end of a busy season. But instead, the book sprints to a finish, calling all of creation – from the beautiful mountains to the fruitful trees, from the most delicate birds to the most monstrous creatures – into a vigorous, exclamatory act of praise and rejoicing.

As the season winds down, it can be tempting to check praise off our list, the way we checked off wrapping presents for the in-laws or baking the Christmas goose, relieved that that's over and we don't have to think about it for another year. But the psalm today invites us to remember that praise isn't just for special seasons, it's for every day and everywhere.

So instead of loafing, today I'm going to walk out

into the grey light of the end of the year. As I walk, with each step I'm going to remember that I am one of God's creatures too – delicate and monstrous, fruitful and beautiful. And I'm going to sing the praises that still flow, tired though I may be, with each breath.

Prayer Along with all creation! I praise you!
Amen.

COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS

Approved by the Board on October 14)

- **One 9:30 a.m. service** will be offered at least through May 2022. First Christian Church offers virtual services (facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or First Christian Church Huntsville on YouTube) every Sunday. While FCC and State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level.
- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office are locked.
- **Wearing face coverings/masks at all times inside the church is encouraged for everyone.**
- Hand sanitizer and masks are available at the Lobby Welcome Table along with prepackaged communion elements.
- The **nursery** is open for the 9:30 a.m. service and the 10:30 a.m. small group time.
- **Every other row of pews is roped off on the pulpit side of the sanctuary to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort. The front section on the pulpit side is the least impacted zone with our heating and cooling system.**
- **Attendees may vocalize** during the service, such as stating the Lord's Prayer, litanies, etc., and sing hymns/songs when lyrics are projected on the screens.
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- **Coffee (only) is from 9:15 - 10:45.**
- **Small groups** (including Sunday school classes) will meet at **8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.**
- Anyone with any symptoms will remain home and celebrate virtually for at least 14 days
- **Please notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending a service.**