



# First Christian Church

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207 Tarboro Street NE, Wilson NC 27893

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The Church Bell

May 1, 2024

## **Open & Affirming Proposal Presented at the First Christian Church Board Meeting on April 28, 2024**

Dear Members of the First Christian Church Board,

As our church continues to navigate our journey of faith for wholeness in a fragmented world, the ad hoc team for Inclusive Spirit is proposing an important step forward for our congregation. It is with great enthusiasm and commitment that we present to you the proposal for First Christian Church Wilson, NC to officially become an Open and Affirming congregation.

Did you already think we were Open and Affirming? So did a few of us!

For many years, our church has embraced the principles of inclusivity, acceptance, and love for all. We have strived to create a welcoming and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and respected. However, despite our longstanding practice of inclusivity, we have yet to formalize our commitment through an official Open and Affirming declaration.

By becoming an Open and Affirming congregation, we have the opportunity to reaffirm our dedication to the values of love, compassion, and justice that lie at the heart of our Christian faith. This declaration would serve as a public statement of our commitment to embracing and celebrating the diversity of God's creation, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, political stance or theological perspective feel safe, valued, and fully included in the life and leadership of our church community.

Our Inclusive Spirit ad hoc team includes Theresa Mathis, Tish Scott, Robby Boyette, Stephanie Pridgen, Roy Henderson, Alysun Skinner, and Rev. Scott Schieber.

Formally adopting an Open and Affirming stance would not only align with our core values but also reflect the evolving social and cultural landscape in which we live. It will also grant us the opportunity to extend our outreach efforts and engage authentically with marginalized communities both within and beyond our church walls. We believe it is imperative that our church stands as a beacon of light, love, and affirmation, welcoming all, as God has welcomed us.

In practical terms, adopting an Open and Affirming designation would involve a process of education, dialogue, and discernment within our congregation. It would require us to engage in meaningful conversations about the theological, ethical, and practical dimensions of inclusion, as well as to address any concerns

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# Minister's Corner

## Affirmed

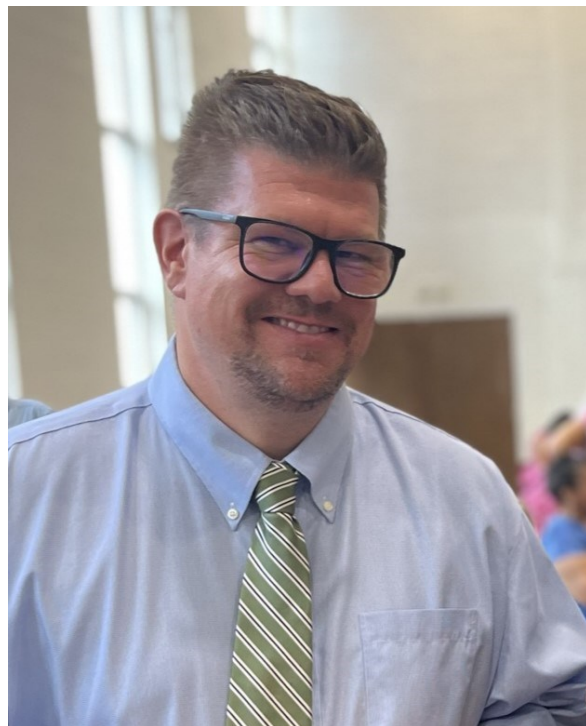
As you have probably heard and can read about in this edition of The Church Bell, FCC is now in the process of discernment toward becoming officially an Open and Affirming (O&A) congregation in the Christian Church-DOC. It is widely-held that we are already living this designation, and I agree. So why change? Here's some perspective from beyond the walls of FCC.

Our denomination itself is officially Open and Affirming, in that all people are welcome into all forms of church life, including ordained ministry. The denomination allows individual congregations to decide for themselves if they would like to work toward the designation. By my estimate, about 40% of Disciples congregations are already O&A. The church I recently served in Columbus has been O&A since 2020. One thing I learned from the pastor who served there at the time is the importance of being able to take a stand while maintaining the role of pastor to the entire congregation. I am committed to, and anticipate, having conversations with those of you who have reservations about this movement. My role in that time is to hear your thoughts, and dialogue with you, and not have a debate.

From a day-to-day perspective, I don't believe becoming O&A will change much at FCC. My preaching won't change and our celebrations of inclusion will not change. I believe that change will come in how we are seen by people outside of our church. Our website and social media will reflect that we do welcome everyone. We will be designated as O&A on our website and the Disciples' website, which will attract people to our church, members of the LGBTQ community and allies alike.

When I began to search for a congregation to serve last year, I was clear that I would only consider churches that are O&A. It was suggested to me that FCC is on its way, and I'd have the opportunity to help the process. I have been an ally for decades. Many of you know that my daughter is in a same-sex relationship; that is a new thing for Beth and I, but Cate's announcement hasn't changed our outlook on the matter, it has only deepened it. I don't see this movement within our congregation as personal toward anyone in favor or opposed to the movement. We are simply making official what we already are. We aren't moving in this direction to placate anyone or to alienate anyone; we have moved to take this step because we believe that it's the right thing to do.

Peace,  
Scott





# NOTEWORTHY MENTIONS FROM MUSIC MINISTRY

## Mobile Music Ministry in May {visits are now at 10:30AM}

Please join us for these intimate visits with members whose mobility may not allow them to worship with us in person. We bring worship and hymns of the faith to them, in their space, surrounded with love and prayer.

**Monday, May 6 | 10:30AM The Landing with AJ Walston**

**Monday, May 20 | 10:30AM | Wilson Rehabilitation, 2501 Downing St with Kathleen Ujlaki**

### Upcoming Worship enhancements

May 5 | Chancel Choir with members of Hunt Chorus Vocal Ensemble

& Jack Fisher, clarinet

May 12 | Kids Praise

May 19 | Pentecost - Chancel Choir & Encounter

May 26 | Andrew Childers, soloist

June 2 | Chalice Ringers

### Growing Disciples

Our Growing Disciples will meet next on Wednesday, May 1 and then finally on May 15!

Dinner is served at 5:30PM (please RSVP to Casey) and groups are from 6-6:45PM.

We will be working on a special song for Mother's Day! These Wednesdays with Growing Disciples are always open to kids K-12!

## Hymn Festival on Sunday, June 23 at 4PM

### Forest Hills Baptist Church

Join members of First Christian and over 6 other faith communities as we come together as one. The Greater Wilson Area Church Musicians' Guild is planning an afternoon of hymns of the faith, from old to new. We will share a collective time of music both with congregational singing, instrumental ensembles and a mass choir. Come, and be with community!

*The Greater Wilson Area Church Musician's Guild presents...*

# Redeemed!

*How I Love to Proclaim it!*

# HYMN FESTIVAL

**Sunday, June 23, 2024  
4p.m.**

**Forest Hills Baptist  
Church Wilson**



## **Vacation Bible School**

**Mon–Thurs, August 5-6-7-8**

VBS Worship on Sunday, August 11

Volunteers needed for Decorating, Music, Set Up, Snacks, Registration, Group Leaders,



## **Taking a Summer Break**

The Children’s Sunday school class will wrap up on **Sunday, May 19**. We will take a break over the summer. Between vacations of families and volunteer teachers, arranging a set schedule is difficult over the summer. The class will restart on Sunday, September 8, after Labor Day.  
*Happy summer time!*

### **Pentecost - May 19**

In the spirit of Pentecost, on May 19 you are encouraged to wear red or yellow to symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and the beginning of the church’s global mission.

### **2024 Graduates**

If you are a high school or college graduate, please let the Church Office know so that we can set up a time for recognition during a church service.

### **Seeking Wilson Pride Festival FCC**

#### **Booth Volunteers**

FCC will once again participate in community outreach during the Wilson Pride Festival on Saturday, June 1. We are seeking a team of volunteers to help prepare items for the booth, paint rocks with positive messages and serve as welcoming greeters at the booth. We will also support the Worship Service on Sunday morning, June 2, that starts immediately after our own worship service ends. We need both volunteers to participate in the service and members to attend the service.

A festival planning meeting is set for **Thursday, May 16 at 6:00 pm**. A rock painting session is planned for Sunday, May 19 at 4:30pm.

### **Festival Volunteers Needed**

- Saturday, June 1 - 10:30 am – 12:30 pm (3)
- Saturday, June 1 - 12:15 pm – 3:30 pm (3)
- Saturday, June 1 - 3:15 pm – 5:30 pm (3)
- Sunday, June 2 – 10:30 am – 12:30 pm (3) *Help set up and participate in the service*
- Sunday, June 2 – 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm (no limit)  
*Attend worship service directly after FCC dismisses*

If you are interested in being a volunteer or painting rocks, please contact Theresa Mathis.



# INCLUSIVE SPIRIT SUMMER GATHERINGS

*Join the Journey!*

The *Inclusive Spirit Team* invites all FCC members to participate in a series of summer gatherings as part of the discernment to officially declare FCC as an “open and affirming” congregation.

Each gathering will have a different theme with fun activities such as an ice cream social, summer sweets and rock painting.

During the gatherings, the *Inclusive Spirit Team* will also invite storytelling by our LGBTQ+ members and allies, share research and information, and hold a question-and-answer session to help address any uncertainties or inquires.

The *Inclusive Spirit Team* invites members to volunteer at the FCC community booth during the annual Wilson Pride Festival on Saturday, June 1 and participate in the Pride Worship service on Sunday, June 2.

A congregational survey will be shared in June to collect feedback from all members of FCC.

Please save the dates and join us!

*Inclusive Spirit Team*



Theresa	Alysun
Tish	Stephanie
Robby	Roy



**May 19**  
Sunday @ 4:30 pm

Ice Cream Social  
Storytelling  
Listening • Q&A  
Rock Painting  
for the Pride Festival



**June 1-2**  
Wilson Pride Festival  
FCC Booth &  
Worship Service



**June 9 & 16**  
Congregational  
Survey

**July 17**  
Wednesday @ 7 pm

Summer Sweets  
Storytelling  
Listening • Q&A  
FCC Affirming  
Statement



Dear Church Family,

On Sunday, April 28, I stood with the Inclusive Spirit Team and proposed that FCC become an official Open and Affirming Church. For some, this proposal was a surprise as many FCC members thought our congregation was already! Well... *we are - kinda*. FCC has been living as a loving, supporting, and affirming congregation for at least 15 years. The day you accepted my family into FCC you became open & affirming. And you've continued to do so as you have accepted my service with Vacation Bible School, Stephen Ministry, Nurture and Growth (Education), Sunday School, Deacon, Elder, Board Chair and Vice Chair and the Easter Bunny liaison. And you've expanded that acceptance to other families.

I would imagine a handful of questions are already popping up in the parking lot conversations. We will be holding a series of summer gatherings to answer those questions and also have some fun together. I hope you will attend. (*see flyer*)

The first question we think members may be asking is – *why do we need to be official, isn't the way we've been doing it good enough?* For a while it was okay, but times have changed. There are so many churches out there that declare they are “welcoming”. However, once inside visitors discover that the term is just a courtesy word. The old fashion “bait & switch” process begins. Newcomers that thought they were walking into a loving congregation suddenly become topics of conversation, targets of derogatory messages and made to feel “less than” those around them. The atmosphere of “love the sinner, hate the sin” becomes overwhelming. I know how this feels because my family experienced it personally several times in Wilson. But then, we finally discovered the truly loving and affirming members of First Christian Church.

Some members may be asking – *what do we have to do to become official?* The DOC-Alliance Q organization has a check list of items we need to complete. Over the years, we've done about 75% of them, now is the time for us to finish the list and make it official. The check list is a combination of proof that we truly are accepting and affirming, that we demonstrate inclusiveness and support local and regional outreach. We will have the full check list at the summer gatherings if you want to review it step by step.

And some members maybe asking – *won't that make us the gay church?* It will make us one of the few transparent, loving, supportive, open and affirming churches in Wilson. If we had a new daycare center, wouldn't we anticipate an influx of families with small children? If we built a community garden, we would certainly not think twice if a whole bunch of new neighbors with tiny shovels and dirt under their fingernails showed up. Once we officially proclaim ourselves as O&A, we hope to see an increase in attendance and lots of new faces!

I would imagine we have a large percentage of members that are ready to take this next step. But there may also be a few members that are a little uncomfortable or unsure. To those, I say it's ok. As Disciples of Christ, we don't have to agree on everything. We don't have to be 100% confident or even sit on the same side of the aisle. All we have to do is honor Christ, worship together, pray together and love one another.

This next step of becoming officially open and affirming, for me, is both practical and personal. Practical because we need it. Walt Disney used to say the family experience begins in the parking lot. Which is why all Disney parking lots are colorful, have memorable names and the shuttles are friendly and play fun music. In today's world– the experience begins on websites and social media. Rarely does anyone visit a church, a restaurant or vacation spot without first checking it out online. For practical purposes, we need the official open & affirming statement to let visitors know clearly that First Christian Church is the congregation we say we are.

Personally, this church has been my family for 15 years. You have loved me, Deanna, Jessica, and Duncan without question. You've lifted us up, surrounded us in prayer and loved us through everything – and I mean *everything!* Our original plan for Wilson was limited to 5 years. I was here to move up the ladder and then move on. But... then you loved us. We were welcomed and uplifted by Lynn, Joshua, Gary, Jamie and now Scott. From the first time we walked through the doors, to the countless youth activities, CYF and

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Chi Rho, all the VBS volunteering, the Deacon & Elders circles, the Leadership team, the Chalice Ringers, Encounter, Sunday Small Group, the Christmas Eve celebrations, and the Easter Egg hunts, you have continued to open your arms and your hearts to us. The world needs you. Wilson needs you. I need you to take this next step. Please continue to be the family we've come to know, love, depend upon - and love right back.

In His grace,  
Theresa (*sniff, sniff*)



## Red Cross Blood Drive

Wednesday, May 15, 2-6pm, Fellowship Hall

Please visit [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org) or call

Carol Steffa at 252-230-6965 to schedule an Appointment



## Opportunities for Ladies of First Christian Church

Ladies of First Christian, you are invited join Beth Williams on Thursday, May 2nd at 6:00pm for Women's Night Out or Jennifer McHarg on Wednesday, May 22nd at 12:00pm for Ladies Lunch. Both will be at Daniel's in Brentwood. No agenda, no reading required, just a casual time to get to know each other better.

\* Call or text Beth Williams at 252-373-1365 for RSVP for Thursday, May 2nd at 6:00pm.

\* Please RSVP by Monday, May 20th, by emailing [Jennifer@ChessonAgency.com](mailto:Jennifer@ChessonAgency.com) for Lunch on Wednesday, May 22nd.



*ladies*

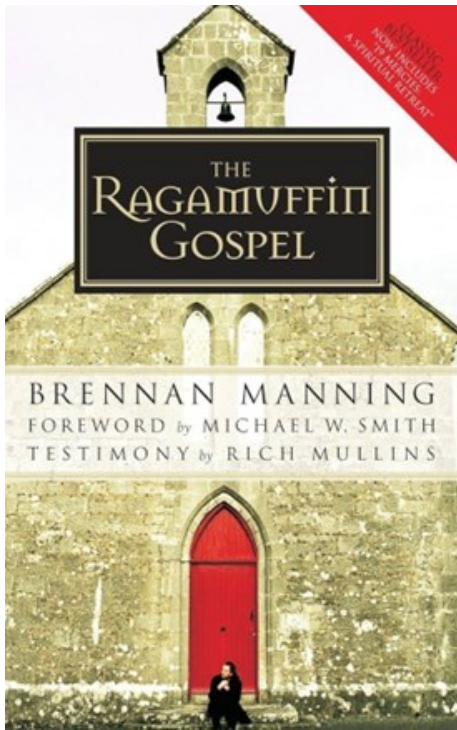
You're Invited!

Dinner at Daniels  
This Thursday,  
May 2nd,  
at 6:00 pm.

Call or text Beth  
Williams for RSVP.







## Sunday Morning Small Group – Join us @ 11:11 am

Looking to connect with a group where you can be real, laugh together, share openly, talk about life and faith or maybe just sit and listen? Come join the conversations held each Sunday morning on the back hall of the educational building. During May and June, we will explore what *The Ragamuffin Gospel* has to share. This new book explores God’s grace and his willingness to love us no matter what. Many of us say we believe in God’s grace, but somehow, we continue to see the Lord as a bookkeeper, tallying our failures and successes on a score sheet. We come to Him as ragamuffins—dirty, bedraggled, beat-up, confused and worn out by life’s challenges. Let’s walk together in His grace and love. Please come join us, even if you don’t read the book, the conversation is worthy of the long walk over.

## Camp Caroline Summer Camp Dates to Remember

June 14-16	UNO Camp (K-2 Grades)	July 1-5	Rainbow Camp
June 16-21	CYF Conference (9-12 Grades)	July 7-12	JYF Camp (2-5 Grades)
June 23-29	Created to Be Me Camp (8th Gr.)	July 14-19	Chi Rho Camp (6-7 Grades)
		July 25-28	Family Camp (All Ages)



The Christian Church (DOC) In North Carolina  
Bishop Valerie Melvin, Regional Minister

## 176TH REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Saturday, June 22, 2024

“LET’S MEET AT THE TABLE”

Keynote Speaker



Rev. Dr. José Francisco Morales Torres

**HOSTED AT**  
First Christian Church  
2035 Oleander Dr.  
Wilmington, NC 28403

Regional Minister



Bishop Valerie Melvin

CORA-Co-Chair



Rev. Brad McDowell

Register Today!



[www.ncdisciples.org](http://www.ncdisciples.org)

CORA-Co-Chair



Rhondra Fleming

## "Let's Meet At The Table"

All Roads lead to Wilmington, NC, on June 21 and June 22 as we gather for the 176th Regional Assembly. The spirit of unity and fellowship fills the air. Under the dedicated leadership of Rev. Brad McDowell and Sis. Rhondra Fleming, this year's Assembly promises to be truly unforgettable.

Please don't wait until it's too late! Take the time now to register for this awesome Assembly and bring your family to the beautiful city of Wilmington, NC. May this Assembly be a time of reflection, growth, and renewal as we strengthen our bonds and celebrate the beauty of being a disciple. Welcome to the Table – where all are valued and all are loved.

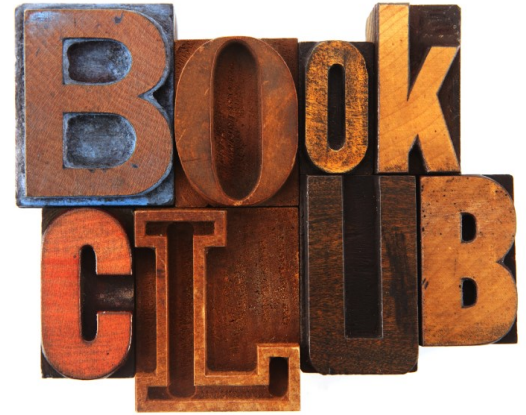
You may register online at [https://app.aplos.com/aws/events/2024\\_regional\\_assembly](https://app.aplos.com/aws/events/2024_regional_assembly)

# A Novel Idea

Tuesday, May 21, 5:30 p.m.

## *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*

By James McBride



In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new development, the last thing they expected to find was a skeleton at the bottom of a well. Who the skeleton was and how it got there were two of the long-held secrets kept by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side and shared ambitions and sorrows.

Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Moshe integrated his theater and where Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. When the state came looking for a deaf boy to institutionalize him, it was Chona and Nate Timblin, the Black janitor at Moshe’s theater and the unofficial leader of the Black community on Chicken Hill, who worked together to keep the boy safe.

As these characters’ stories overlap and deepen, it becomes clear how much the people who live on the margins of white, Christian America struggle and what they must do to survive. When the truth is finally revealed about what happened on Chicken Hill and the part the town’s white establishment played in it, McBride shows us that even in dark times, it is love and community — heaven and earth — that sustain us.

## Treasurer’s Report – YTD March 31st, 2024

*Tim Sharp / April 15, 2024*

For the month ended March 31st, 2024, FCC had YTD total income of \$90,282 and YTD total expenses of \$87,496 resulting in a YTD **surplus** of \$2,786\*.

### 1/01/2024 – 3/31/2024 – YTD Operating Budget

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Variance</u>
Income	\$90,282	\$96,983	(\$ 6,701)
Expenses	\$87,496	\$96,983	(\$ 9,487)
Actual YTD Surplus/(Deficit) *	\$ 2,786		

### Month of March - Operating Budget

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Variance</u>
Income	\$16,272	\$32,328	(\$16,056)
Expenses	\$24,659	\$32,328	(\$ 7,669)
Month of March Surplus/(Deficit)	(\$ 8,387)		

*(All amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar)*

*\*YTD income includes \$2,803.41 from our Operating Reserve account (\$934.47 per month) that was included to balance the 2024 operating budget.*

# May 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Apr 28	Apr 29	Apr 30	<b>1</b> 5:30pm Growing Disciples—Kids & Youth Programs 7:00pm Chancel Choir	<b>2</b> 6:00pm Ladies Night Out at Daniel's	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> 10:00am Worship 11:11am Sunday Morning Small Group 11:15am Disciples Class	<b>6</b> 10:30am Mobile Music Ministry at The Landing with AJ Walston 2:00pm Bible Study in the Parlor	<b>7</b> 10:00am Staff Meeting 2:00pm CWF	<b>8</b> 7:00pm Chancel Choir	<b>9</b> 7:00pm Elder's Meeting	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12 Mother's Day</b> 10:00am Worship 11:11am Sunday Morning Small Group 11:15am Disciples Class	<b>13</b> 2:00pm Bible Study in the Parlor	<b>14</b> 10:00am Staff Meeting 5:30pm Encounter 6:30pm Chalice Ringers 6:30pm Girl Scouts	<b>15</b> 11:30am Young At Heart (Something Different) 2-6:00pm Red Cross Blood Drive 5:30pm Growing Disciples—Kids & Youth Programs 7:00pm Chancel Choir	<b>16</b> 6:00pm Pride Planning Meeting in the Parlor	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b> 10:00am Worship 11:11am Sunday Morning Small Group 11:15am Disciples Class 3:00pm Compassion and Service Team Meeting 3:00pm Rocky Mt Chamber Choir Concert 4:30pm Listening Session for Open & Affirming process	<b>20</b> 10:30am Mobile Music Ministry at Wilson Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center with Kathleen Ujlaki	<b>21</b> 10:00am Staff Meeting 5:30pm A Novel Idea Book Club 5:30pm Encounter 6:30pm Chalice Ringers	<b>22</b> 12:00pm Ladies Lunch at Daniels 7:00pm Chancel Choir	<b>23</b> Fellowship Hall Reserved 7:00pm Elder's Meeting	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> 10:00am Worship 11:11am Sunday Morning Small Group 11:15am Disciples Class	<b>27 Memorial Day Church Office Closed</b>	<b>28</b> 10:00am Staff Meeting 5:30pm Encounter 6:30pm Chalice Ringers 6:30pm Girl Scouts	<b>29</b> 7:00pm Chancel Choir	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	Jun 1

# Our Church Family

Please notify the church office at (252) 237-4125 if someone's birthday needs to be added and/or if you have some news to share.



<b>May 2</b> Bryant Glover	<b>May 16</b> Tina Hensley
<b>May 4</b> Sheldon Campbell	Christina Terdik
<b>May 6</b> Nalan Logan	Amy Watson
<b>May 7</b> Julia Floars	<b>May 17</b> Bill Tyson
<b>May 8</b> Ricky Brown	<b>May 18</b> Cecilia Avery
Curtis Ray	Kaitlyn Henderson
<b>May 9</b> Gilbert Ferrell	<b>May 19</b> Ernie Smith
<b>May 12</b> Betsy Brewer	<b>May 24</b> Ann Watson
<b>May 15</b> Kathy Werline	<b>May 27</b> Mary Ann Ruffin
	<b>May 31</b> Graci Brown

## In Our Prayers

Peggy Anderson; Vickie Balazsi (Kathy Sandifer's cousin); Clayton Bardin; Betsy Brewer; Jim Boswell; Donahue Bottoms, Jr. (Dalen Bottoms' son); Victoria Burns (friend of Sue Ray); Bobbie Deans; Mary Louise Gray; Nell Griffin; Elaine Hanna; Janet Harris (Laura Pritchett's aunt); Anita Hathorn (Laura Pritchett's aunt); Shirley Hayes (Kathy Proctor's stepmother); Kay (Stephanie Pridgen's Aunt); Lynn Kyle (friend of Libby & Allan Daniell); LaRue Massey (Kathy Sandifer's friend); Evelyn Meyer; JoJo Near; Robbie Pinner & Family; Janet Robbins; Sitau Salesa (Jennifer Whitehurst Hendrix's brother-in-law); Troy and Leigh Ann Tatum; Alice Thomas; Steven Winstead.

## Homebound

Peggy Anderson; Jim Boswell; Dalen Bottoms; Sherry Brenner; Hazel Byers; Gena Carter; Gilbert Ferrell; Judy Harris; Doug Ramsey; Anne Sharpe; Lenore Smith; Alice Thomas; Kathleen Ujlaki; A.J. Walston.

## Young At Heart

We welcome anyone to come fellowship, have fun and have delicious food at Something Different. An uplifting program is always presented. We meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 11:30am. Come join us on May 16th!

## CWF

The CWF will meet on May 7 at 2:00pm in the Church Parlor. All women of the church are invited.

## Worship Service Participants for May

	<b>5th</b>	<b>12th</b>	<b>19th</b>	<b>26th</b>
Elder	Mary Louise Gray	Jerry Pritchett	Christy Webb	Gilda Cauley
Worship Leader	Phyllis Leary	Savannah Story	Terry Shackleford	Melissa Inscoe
Deacon Team	<b>#4</b> Natalie Sutton Steffanie Sharp William Wooten	<b>#1</b> Curtis Ray Sue Ray Ricky Brown	<b>#2</b> Melissa Whitley Andrew Whitley Glenn Etheridge	<b>#3</b> Steven Winstead Kristin Lamond Terry Shackleford

**Elder on Call for the Month of May is Jackie Clifford**