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Name of ministry:

Christian Church in Alabama-Northwest Florida

Ministry

Executive/Regional

John P. Mobley

Minister name:

Ministry

Executive/Regional

jpmobley2@aol.com

Minister email:

**In what ways is your
region/ministry thriving?**

Ministry in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is thriving in many ways. Our new congregations are growing in numbers and are becoming an important part of the Regional family. The number of congregations that are establishing a virtual ministry in addition to in-person ministry is growing. This growth means that the reach of many of our congregations is expanding. The total number of participants is growing in many cases. Programs are offered in ways that allow more people to be involved, even if the way they are involved is now virtual rather than in-person. Congregations are growing in their understanding of technology and in their use of technology to expand and enhance the ministry of the congregation.

Leaders are rising to the challenge of ministry during difficult circumstances. Many of our pastors are participating in a Colleague Group in which they are focusing in a year-long emphasis on leader development in the congregation. These groups provide mutual support as well as peer learning.

Although many events in the past year have had to be canceled or done in a different way, there is still a strong sense of support for the Region's ministry

throughout the Region. The number of persons who support the Region's Annual Fund grows year by year and has become one of the Region's important streams of income. Financially the Region is strong and stable.

Communication in the Region is thriving through monthly email blasts to our master list about news of interest and significance in the life of the Region and the wider church. These monthly communications are also posted on the Region's Facebook page and are often shared by congregational leaders throughout their congregations. Clergy receive regular emails about matters of particular interest to them, including prayer concerns about colleagues who are experiencing particular joys or difficulties.

Ministry with youth and young adults continues to thrive through the work of Regional staff working with youth and youth leaders in our Region's youth programming. We were able to return to in-person camps in June of 2021 and they were quite successful.

The Region had an important congregational transformation event in August, 2021, on which Rev. Terri Hord Owens was a guest preacher and workshop leader. The theme was "Re-Church: Re-Connect, Re-Imagine, Re-Charge." There were a variety of workshops offered to help congregational leaders grow in their effectiveness. The Region's Global Mission Partner for the past 25 years, Elena Huegel, was able to be with us and make two presentations, one in English and one in Spanish.

The Region continues to make becoming an anti-racist/pro-reconciling church a priority. Our Anti-Racism Team offers training to clergy and provides resources for congregations. The "Voices from the Community" video resource and discussion guide was created in 2020 by the Anti-Racism Team and has been used both

within the Region and beyond.

The Region is thriving in the quality of leadership it has, both in the staff and among the clergy and lay volunteers who give of themselves in so many ways. The long tenures of all of the Regional staff provides stability for the Region. There is a high trust level between the staff and the Region. The officers and other leaders take their roles seriously and offer their gifts to strengthen the Region's ministry.

The Region is thriving as it faithfully fulfills its purpose as expressed in its mission statement:

"The Mission of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region is to encourage and equip its congregations and pastors for the ministry of Jesus Christ in local communities and throughout the world, while seeking to nurture them into deeper relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole church."

What are the biggest challenges facing your region/ministry this year?

In many of our congregations there has been a significant decline in participation due to COVID-19. The programming, especially around Christian education and discipleship, has weakened significantly during the pandemic. In most cases worship has been maintained, but with fewer participants physically together. Although there are many cases where congregations have successfully offered a hybrid worship experience that includes both virtual and in-person participants, it cannot be denied that there has been a psychological and emotional impact on church members who are sensing a loss when they see a reduction in programming and in physical participation. There is a yearning to be together without restrictions. There is a desire to see each other without the emotional distance that comes with a mask over the face, covering the smile and muffling the conversation. Some of the joy of church involvement is missing. It is a great

challenge to find ways to facilitate the return of that joy that was formerly present.

The next year in Alabama-Northwest Florida will be a time of significant change. The Regional Minister will retire after a long tenure in the coming months. The other staff and volunteers will have major adaptations as a new interim leader begins service. The Region will face the challenge of looking at itself and its needs honestly as it crafts a Regional Profile which will be necessary in the search for a new settled Regional Minister. Strong leadership will be needed from officers and staff during this transitional period.

What is something you hope to accomplish in the next year?

In the next year the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region hopes to lay the groundwork for a successful transition from a long-tenured Regional Minister to an Interim Regional Minister and then a settled new Regional Minister. The leaders of the Region hope to work with the Office of the General Minister and President and the College of Regional Ministers in following a process of discernment and search that has been recommended by the General Board for executive searches.

What is something you would like the General Board to know about your region/ministry?

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has had only three settled Regional Ministers since 1950. Transitions in Regional Ministers have been few and far between. In 2022, however, the Region will face a transition in which it will seek to call a new leader who can help advance the ministry of the Region in the years to come.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

Pray for all aspects of the ministry of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region. Pray that clergy and lay leaders will feel supported as they carry out their roles. Pray that our congregations will be energized to carry

out the ministry of Jesus Christ through their outreach ministries and that they will find creative ways to inspire members to grow in their faith and in their witness to the unconditional love and grace of God. Pray that our congregations will experience unity and that diversity will be celebrated rather than become a source of tension. Pray that the Region will be an expression of unity and reconciliation as it continues to work against racism and its impacts on the church and community.