



# NAP News

December 2023



NAP News is a monthly newsletter provided by the NAP staff to celebrate ministries and provide updates for the churches of North Alabama Presbytery.

Do you have news you'd like to have included? Send submissions to [adminoffice@napcusa.org](mailto:adminoffice@napcusa.org) by the 25th of each month.

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Follow us on Facebook & YouTube



The Advent season is upon us and churches are busy with adorning their sanctuaries with festive colors to mark this season of hope and expectation. Special services are being planned, choirs are rehearsing, and costumes are being readied. All to tell the good news of Christ's birth and celebrate God's gift to us in human form. Yes. You're probably well-versed in how to prepare for those inside the church.

But, what about those who are on the outside of your church building; those searching for meaning in this holiday season; those looking for a place to be invited in and welcomed with outstretched arms of grace and love?

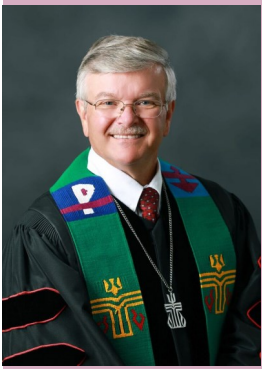
Advent is a time when the internet is buzzing with those searching for connections. **NOW is your opportunity to take a new look at your website and social media platforms so they are ready and welcoming for searchers!**

Is your website easy to find? Are you using key words that will be picked up by search engines? Do you have a "what to expect when you visit" page so visitors can be prepared? Are your special services front and center with times, locations, and nursery options? Does your mission page show how you are actively engaged in your community and beyond?

When was the last time you updated your social media platforms? Are your special services pinned to the top of your page? Do you have pictures so searchers can see you? Are their links to your YouTube services?

How do you record and broadcast your worship services? Do you have a YouTube channel? How do people find it? Do you provide links on your other social media platforms so searchers can find your worship services?

Advent is a season of hope for those in your pews and can be a season of connecting for those who are searching. It is a time to reach out to the many who drive past your building and invite them in to hear God's story and experience God's abundant grace. **"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be**



**From our Transitional Presbyter,  
Dr. Tom Lovell...**

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Yes, the season is upon us. Red and green lights are twinkling, the air is filled with the sound of carols, presents are piling up under the tree as our celebration of Christmas is but a few short weeks away. But as strange as it may sound, that is not the season that I'm thinking of. While we may be preparing for our celebration of Christmas, I would like to suggest that our celebration of that Holy Day will be incomplete without our first embracing the season of Advent, that wondrous liturgical season which helps prepare our minds and our hearts for the celebration of Christ coming into our lives not only in the Bethlehem stable, not only at the end of the age when Christ's kingdom will be fully established, but to prepare us for the coming of Christ into our lives right here and right now.

The call of Advent beckons us to the wilderness that we might examine our lives and clear out all of those things which prohibit our fully experiencing the coming of Christ into our lives. During Advent we are challenged to listen again to the call of the prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist as they encourage us to **"Prepare the way of the Lord!"**

As the prophet Isaiah proclaims the coming of God into the lives of his people, God informs them that there is some major work to be done beforehand. The work required is described in terms of the building of a major thoroughfare through the wilderness. Brush and debris will have to be cut down and hauled away. Rocks and mountains must be blasted away, and valleys filled in. That's hard work, but as Isaiah promises, it will be worth it, for this new way will be a **"Glory Road,"** on which God's glory will be revealed for all to see. John the Baptist echoes Isaiah's call to return to the wilderness. It was to the wilderness that Jesus was sent to be tempted following his baptism. It was the wilderness where Jesus took his disciples to prepare them for ministry. Throughout the Bible, the wilderness is where God's scattered people are re-gathered as the people of God and drawn back to the fundamentals of the faith. Heeding John's call to go back to the wilderness provides us with the opportunity to confront the trappings of those things that rob our lives of meaning and which distance us from God's presence: unresolved guilt, unfulfilled expectations, envy, arrogance, or even a struggle with our own self-worth. It may also include our buying into our consumption-oriented society hook, line and sinker, the idea that whoever dies with the most stuff wins, or the more we have, the greater others will think we are. John's summons to join him is an invitation to take a few steps backwards in reflection and repentance, that we may clear the way to our hearts and move forward in forgiveness, faith, and obedience.

While it is easy for us to be excited and rush into the clamor and chaos of Christmas, during these next few weeks, let's take care to hit the pause button, and take the time to reflect on what we need to do to prepare our minds and hearts for the coming of Christ into our lives, even before December 25<sup>th</sup>.

*Happy Advent  
Tom Lovell*

**Dr. Lovell's Preaching Schedule**

December 3—Westminster, Florence

December 24—First, Guntersville



**Stewardship**

**The Stewardship season continues** as churches gather together to celebrate God's many blessings and choose how to utilize all they have been given for the glory of God.

As an extension of local churches, North Alabama Presbytery has unique opportunities for supporting the larger community of faith.

**Please consider how your church can continue to be part of the NAP community** through financial gifts and volunteers who are willing to serve on committees and offer their talents for special events.

*Clerks have received a Presbytery Stewardship letter for per capita and unified giving. Volunteer opportunities are available from Rev. David Kling (David.kling@covhsv.org) or Tom Lovell (execpresbyter@napcusa.org)*

## December NAP Events

### Committee on Ministry

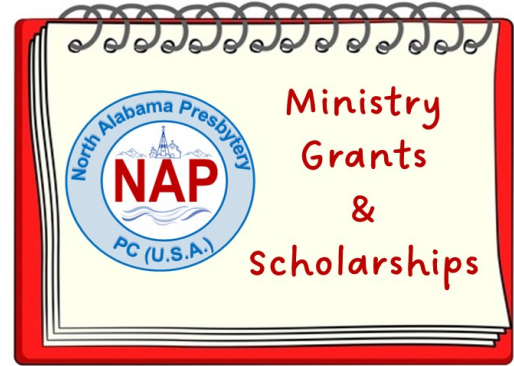
Thursday December 7 @ 6:00pm  
via Zoom

### NAP CALLED MEETING

Monday, December 11 @ 4:00pm  
via Zoom

### Executive Commission

Tuesday, December 12 @ 10:00am  
via Zoom



**Does your congregation wish** they had money to start new ministries or build relational ministries they already have?  
**Is your church building in need** of repairs or updates that have become a burden to your budget?

**Are you a pastor who can't afford** to attend a conference because of financial limitations?

**Do you have youth and/or young adults** who would love to go to Montreat but can't afford the entire cost?

**Are you on a NAP Committee or Commission** that would love to sponsor an event or hire extra help for our churches?

### **Don't despair—help is on the way!**

The Business Affairs & Personnel Team is pleased to announce the formation of **Ministry Grants & Scholarships** to help congregations, pastors, youth & young adults, and NAP entities reach their ministry goals! Our Presbytery has been blessed to be blessing with funds to help our ministries grow and flourish as we spread God's love and grace to communities near and far. Details and applications for these Ministry Grants & Scholarships can be found on the NAP website at [www.napcusa.org](http://www.napcusa.org).

## Important Dates



### NAP Winter Stated Meeting

Saturday, February 24, 2024

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Decatur

### NAP Summer Stated Meeting

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Location TBD

### NAP Fall Stated Meeting

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Maranatha Camp & Conference Center



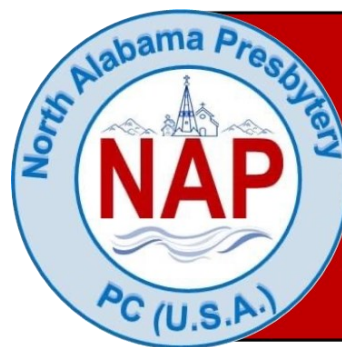
**Officer Training**  
**Saturday, December 9**  
**9:00am—12:00 noon**  
**via ZOOM**



Once again, our Transitional Presbyter, Dr. Tom Lovell and the Stated Clerk, Therese Howell will be providing virtual officer training for elders and deacons within North Alabama Presbytery.

This will be an excellent opportunity for newly elected or returning officers to refresh their understanding of the basics of what Presbyterians believe and how our beliefs impact the way our church is governed and organized.

To receive the zoom link for this training session, please send an email to [adminoffice@napcusa.org](mailto:adminoffice@napcusa.org)



## WE'RE HIRING!

**Stated Clerk**  
15 hours per week

**The NAP Executive Commission**  
**is searching for our next Stated Clerk!**

The full position description is on the NAP website. Interested applicants are asked to send a letter of intent and resume to David Stumbaugh ([tdstum@gmail.com](mailto:tdstum@gmail.com)) by December 28, 2023.



## Matthew 25: Doing What We Already Do; Becoming What We Already Are!

The Albertville congregation, where I serve as Stated Supply, recently signed on to become a Matthew 25 congregation. I am happy to report that there was no arm-twisting or coercion involved in that process.

Jason Boatfield was our representative to the fall meeting of North Alabama Presbytery at Maranatha not long ago. He has been to Presbytery meetings several times before, but this is the first time he and I had attended that meeting together. Most of you will remember that the fall meeting included a presentation from a staff person from the denominational center in Louisville about Matthew 25. Jason had helped set up the display of material and resources that supported that presentation. Early in the meeting Lauren Rogers, NAP's Ministry Engagement Advisor, stood up to make her presentation, and we all listened politely. About halfway through her talk, Jason leaned over to me and said, "Isn't that all stuff we're already doing?" Of course it was. So then he said, "Why haven't we signed up?"

Jason and I talked about Matthew 25 on the way home that day. The three main emphases of Matthew 25, as most of you know, are: 1) building congregational vitality; 2) dismantling structural racism; and 3) eradicating systemic poverty. In a small congregation like ours, everything we do is designed to increase the vitality of our congregation. We may not do all the programming that larger churches do, but we constantly look for ways to show ourselves and our community that we are alive and open to the leadership of God's Spirit. Like many congregations in North Alabama Presbytery, we are mostly white, but we welcome people of all races and identities who worship with us. We are surrounded by people in need, just as most churches are. We regularly help our local Blessings in a Backpack effort to provide food during school breaks for area school children. The first time we did this since we've been here was when someone said we needed to provide 1,000 pouches of oatmeal for that program, I will admit that I wondered how much oatmeal that meant I'd have to buy. The second week of our collection, we brought more than 1300 oatmeal packs. We took the surplus to a school in our area not served by Blessings in a Backpack. That's just one way we try to help beyond ourselves. We have collected school supplies and cleaning supplies for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. We made homemade ice cream and asked people to pay to eat it and sent the proceeds to the Presbyterian Home for Children. We just finished our effort to help our local Christmas Coalition and to send money for gifts to the Presbyterian Home for Children.

When our Session met shortly after that meeting, we took some of the information we had gotten at Presbytery about Matthew 25 and talked about the goal of the program. Everyone on the Session joined Jason in saying, "We already do those things! Let's join others who are doing them, too!"

We are thankful for opportunities we have had to respond to God's call to serve in our community and beyond. We are not done yet! We are delighted to join with other congregations in our Presbytery and beyond who have heard God's call to serve others. For us, it's not a burden. It's doing what we already do. It's becoming who we already are!

Rev. Bob Phelps, Stated Supply, First Presbyterian Church, Albertville, AL



Faith, Huntsville  
Fellowship, Huntsville  
First, Ft. Payne  
Westminster, Decatur  
First, Florence  
First, Albertville

Is your congregation ready to  
claim their ministry and add their  
voice to the choir?  
Visit [presbyterianmission.org/](http://presbyterianmission.org/)

### ***From our Ministry Engagement Advisor, Lauren Rogers.....***

Recently I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts on which Nadia Bolz-Weber, author and ordained Lutheran pastor, was a guest. She recalled a conversation with a friend where the friend asked her, "Why is community so important." Her answer stopped me in my tracks: "Because giving and receiving is the economy of our souls. We must give and receive help, and love, and forgiveness, and because the Lord in his mercy created us as fleshy musical instruments, and no matter how hard I try, I cannot sing harmony alone."

I had to rewind and listen to this a handful more times. "No matter how hard I try, I cannot sing harmony alone."

In Matthew 25, we are called to a big task- to feed the hungry, provide drink to the thirsty, invite in the stranger, clothe the naked, look after the sick and imprisoned. That's a tall order, but it's not impossible! Especially when we join our hands, hearts, and voices with others.

Earlier this fall, North Alabama officially signed on to be a Matthew 25 presbytery. Not only have you strengthened the PC(USA)'s efforts to serve "the least of these," but you are also strengthening your own efforts to be a church of action in North Alabama. By adding your voice to the choir, you are joining over one thousand PC(USA) congregations and over 90 mid-councils who have made this work a priority. This opens you up to a network of resources and connections to guide you in your ministry. I look forward to seeing how North Alabama Presbytery lives into the Matthew 25 call, and I can't wait to share *your stories* with the wider denomination. If you have any questions or need any support as you do this work, please feel free to reach out. I am your partner in harmony! [Lauren.Rogers@pcusa.org](mailto:Lauren.Rogers@pcusa.org)

**From the NAP Stated Clerk, Therese Howell...**

Advent is the season of hope. Frederick Buechner wrote, “For Christians, hope is ultimately hope in Christ. The hope that he really is what for centuries we have been claiming he is. The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, he somehow conquered them. The hope that in him and through him all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too. The hope that at some unforeseeable time and in some unimaginable way he will return with healing in his wings.”

I agree with Buechner – Christians are people of hope. It is hope that moves us forward in our lives. Whenever I think of hope, I think of love and faith. *Faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.* [Paraphrase of 1 Cor 13:13]. Hope does move us forward, along with its traveling companions, faith and love.

I’ve spent a lot of 2023 on the road, alone in my car, just my files and my phone, and a lot of pavement in my rearview mirror. I am never alone in my car – music, books, stories, podcasts, and even phone calls keep me entertained, keep me awake, and keep me moving forward. I am always hopeful of my directions, and that I will arrive when and where the GPS tells me I will arrive.

In worship at the October 17 Presbytery meeting, Rev. Brandon Miles reminded us that we are connected in faith and hope, and called to proclaim the grace of God. He said we have a life lived in love already given to us in Christ Jesus. Later in the meeting, Transitional EP Tom Lovell voiced a concern about the struggles churches are facing, but stated he sees in North Alabama a vitality in ministry and mission. He encouraged North Alabama Presbytery to look forward in faith, to see what God is already doing, and to be bold enough and dare to be faithful.

I would say to all of us – that is hope! It is hope that prods us, encourages us, and keeps us moving forward as we seek to be God’s faithful people. Let us have hope in Christ so that we can indeed conquer the things that try to hold us back. Let us live in hope as we work together with faith and love to live out the ministry Jesus Christ calls us to do.

This Advent season, take a few minutes to reflect on what was in your rearview mirror. What times of hope (and faith and love) did you encounter? How will hope propel you forward? And this Advent season, remember to take the time to give thanks for the One who brought us faith and love, and most importantly, hope.

**Important News for Clerks**

The 2023 college football season is winding down . . . which means it’s time to prepare for the 2023 session annual statistical report!

The statistical report, workbook, and password will be emailed to every clerk of session mid-December.

**The deadlines are as follows:**

**Statistics open to clerks of sessions: December 1, 2023**

**Deadline for clerks of sessions to file report: February 15, 2024**

If you have any questions about the report, don’t hesitate to reach out to me – you can call or text me at 615-305-6795, or you can email me at thehowell@outlook.com. If you are unable to get your report filed by the February 15<sup>th</sup> deadline, I can file the report for you. You will need to get me the report before March 1, 2024.

Per capita payments to the Synod of Living Waters, the Office of the General Assembly, and North Alabama Presbytery are based on membership numbers reported by the churches. The number of Presbytery teaching and ruling elder commissioners to the General Assembly is based on the membership numbers reported by churches. And North Alabama periodically reviews parity in ruling and teaching elder commissioners, also based on the session annual statistical reports.

Help us achieve 100% participation by filing your session’s annual statistical report! And don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions – I am here to help! Therese Howell, Stated Clerk

**Important Reminder For Treasurers**

**Please make your final remittances of pledges, per capita payments, and special offerings by December 20 so our office staff can process these before the holidays.**

Final contribution statements for 2023 will be emailed in early January for all payments received by December 31st.

**Important Reminder for Pastors**

**In accordance with the Book of Order and the NAP COM requirements, all ACTIVE ministers must complete their Boundary Training and sign the Code of Ministerial Ethics by December 31st.**

Contact Krista at [adminoffice@napcusa.org](mailto:adminoffice@napcusa.org) if you need the link to the training or another copy of the Code.



# The perfect gift.

Through the Christmas Joy Offering,  
we come together to support past,  
present and future leaders,  
embodying God's perfect gift to us,  
Jesus Christ.

WHEN WE ALL DO A LITTLE, IT ADDS UP TO A LOT.



**CHRISTMAS JOY**  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE  
DECEMBER 3 - DECEMBER 24



**CHRISTMAS JOY**  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE  
DECEMBER 3 - DECEMBER 24

## What child is this?

THE PERFECT GIFT.



## We celebrate

leaders like retired pastors, church workers and their families who have faithfully guided and led us. Our gifts restore hope and stability through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions




**CHRISTMAS JOY**  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



“Former church workers who have served long and well deserve to be recognized for their efforts over their lifetime. Your gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering serve to validate their life and their ministry.”

**Sue Anne Fairman**  
Former mission worker  
New Wilmington, Pennsylvania



**CHRISTMAS JOY**  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



“The Christmas Joy Offering isn't just a program, it touches individuals' lives, and I'm so grateful.”

**Carla Louca,**  
student  
Stillman College

**Congregations may remit offerings directly to  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
P.O. Box 643700  
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.**



# NECESSARY RISKS

2024 COLLEGE CONFERENCE @ MONTREAT

January 2–5, 2024  
[montreat.org/college](http://montreat.org/college)

## WHAT IS COLLEGE CONFERENCE @ MONTREAT?

College Conference @ Montreat is everything that you might have loved about Youth Conference, but with college students specifically in mind. Conferees participate in worship, keynote, and recreation opportunities, but instead of small groups, conferees engage in larger Q&A style Critical Conversation Groups which discuss the conference theme.

## ALSO FEATURING



**Rev. Theresa Cho**  
Preacher

**Rev. Jasmine Evans**  
Music Leader

**Chris Clay**  
Assistant Music Leader

Learn more about these leaders on our website or in future newsletters!

## LIFE IS FULL OF RISKS, BUT WHICH ONES ARE REALLY NECESSARY?

Our lives are filled to the brim with activity, and there are risks at every turn. But which of those are necessary risks? Ones that allow us to engage deeper and live our lives more authentically? Which risks are we called – in one way or another – to take.

From a biblical perspective, Jesus' disciples took risks. We may initially see the risk as them dropping everything to follow Christ's call, but maybe the true risk was building relationships with those who were risking it all, who were seeking wholeness through community.

Join us as we explore and learn about Necessary Risks together.

## KEYNOTE SPOTLIGHT



**Rev. Dr. Teri McDowell Ott**  
Keynote Speaker

Teri is an ordained Presbyterian minister who has served the church in a variety of pastoral roles and currently serves as the editor/publisher of *The Presbyterian Outlook*. Her first book, *Necessary Risks: Challenges Privileged People Need to Face*, was inspired by her work with college students. In her life and her call, Teri's come to recognize that if she's scared to do something, it's usually worth doing.

**Cole Arthur Riley**  
Keynote Speaker

Cole is a writer and poet. She is the author of the New York Times bestseller, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us*. Cole is also the creator and writer of *Black Liturgies*, a project that integrates spiritual practice with Black emotion, Black literature, and the Black body.



### For your College Students!

We'd love to form a NAP group!  
Contact Jaina Glaze today at  
[Revjainaanderson@gmail.com](mailto:Revjainaanderson@gmail.com)

**NAP Scholarships available!**



# April 19-21, 2024

## Maranatha Camp & Conference Center

### Alabama Pilgrimage Jubilee Weekends

Visit [alabamapilgrimage.com](http://alabamapilgrimage.com) for details.



Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

*2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17*

A weekend at Jubilee is like standing under a waterfall of grace.



“Before I went to Pilgrimage my spirituality was all in my head; afterwards it was also in my heart.”

**PILGRIMAGE** is an opportunity to rediscover and renew your relationship with Christ and return equipped to live out this relationship in your home, workplace and church.



The focus of Jubilee is living the Christian **LIFE** – **Living In Faith Every day.**

It is not just a weekend retreat, it is an experience... *that lasts a lifetime.*

