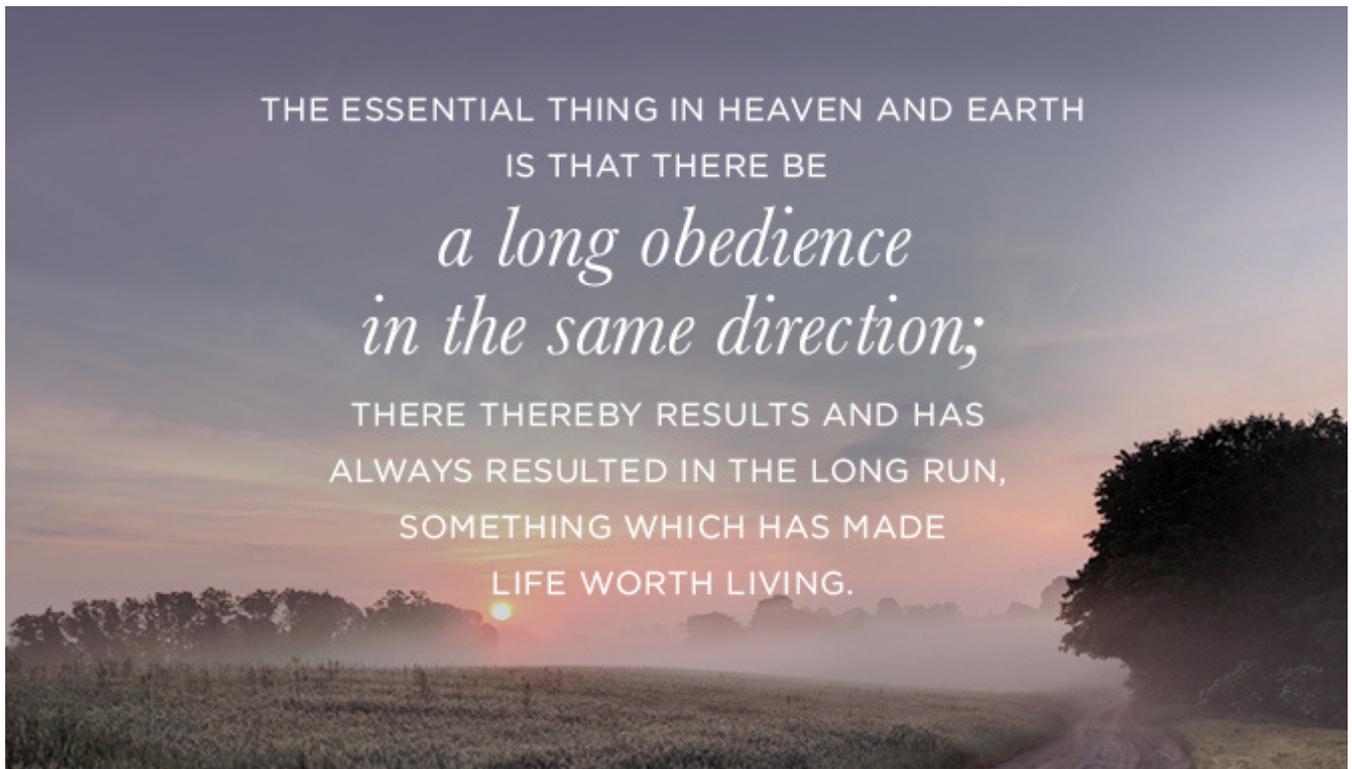

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER EDITION

The SPARKS

Flint River Presbytery's E-Newsletter



THE ESSENTIAL THING IN HEAVEN AND EARTH
IS THAT THERE BE
*a long obedience
in the same direction;*
THERE THEREBY RESULTS AND HAS
ALWAYS RESULTED IN THE LONG RUN,
SOMETHING WHICH HAS MADE
LIFE WORTH LIVING.

From the Executive Presbyter

Deb Tregaskis, Executive Presbyter

A marathon designed for missional imagination is before us.

Pandemic + Politics = Polarization

And YET, there is another way – Jesus' way – to solve this equation.

Pandemic + Politics = Wide-Eyed Tending to the Movement of the Holy Spirit

When grief, fear, and uncertainty are the unwanted companions for our marathon, clear-eyed courage, long-lasting patience, and unerring hope will be a few of the necessary walking sticks to support us on the way toward deepening faithfulness.

Of course, all of this requires ardent soul-tending. We change the world as we notice the ways that God changes us.

We are not called to change the opinions of our neighbors, we are called to love them.

May we, Flint River Presbyterians, be a body of believers who are learning how to lean into Jesus' way of love. This kind of love does not transmit pain, but rather transforms it.

May we be stewards of this holy season, remembering that God wastes nothing.

Crumbs, my dear friends, can feed a crowd.

Practices for a Pandemic

- Be grounded in gratitude.
- Watch the sunrise.
- Bless the name of the Lord.
- *Slow down.*
- Look for the stars and learn their names.
- Let Color and Light inside you. Let it remake you.
- Plant seeds of beauty wherever you go.
- *Slow down. More.*
- Listen for the Light.
- Be the Light.
- Make bold mistakes.
- Make bolder amends.
- *Slow down. Seriously.*
- Pay attention.
- Be saturated by Scripture.
- Watch for Jesus at every turn.
- Learn Patience.
- Create Order.
- Honor Grief.
- Discover Joy.

Christ be with you,

Deb

Congregations in Focus: Dillon Road

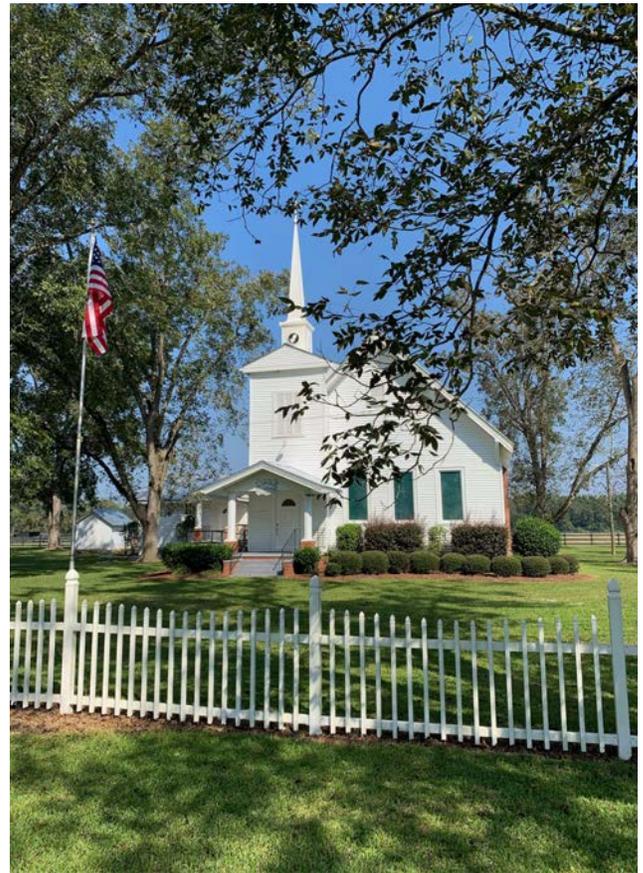
Elizabeth Cantrell, FRP Office Manager

Several years ago, we started "The Blaze" newsletter as a way for congregations to learn about their sister churches. Jean Clemmons of All Saints served as a marvelous compiler, writer and editor of these initial editions, which eventually ended when we landed at the letter D. During this pandemic time, we've decided that now, more than ever, is a time to share stories and stay connected, so we're picking up where we left off!



After a drive on a well-shaded, two-lane cut-through road around Thomasville, full of serpentine twists and turns, Dillon Road Presbyterian Church appears around a curve as a welcome surprise.

Dillon Road Presbyterian, with its adjacent graveyard, is nestled in a shady pecan grove, in front of a big, green horse pasture and just across the road from a cotton field, which on this day was in full bloom and looked like a field full of snow. This happy little churchyard even sports a white picket fence, and a US flag slaps against the flagpole in the breeze. If you didn't know better, you might think you'd stepped into a Norman Rockwell painting.



The warm October morning I visited, I met Mrs. Janice Collier, long-time church pianist, and session member, in the social hall adjacent to the sanctuary. A quintessential Southern lady, she greeted me like we'd known each other for a long time.

In 1983, Mrs. Collier and her husband, both dyed-in-the-wool Baptists, were looking for a church home. They visited lots of churches in the area but couldn't find a good fit. Then, someone invited them to Dillon Road Presbyterian. Mrs. Collier says it was like, "coming home."

Dillon Road is not unlike many of the smaller congregations in the Flint River Presbytery. Members question low attendance when they have so much to offer, a common refrain heard throughout the presbytery. "If it can be done, we've done it: Vacation Bible School, after church potluck dinners, women's Bible study groups. Folks just don't come like they used to."

A few years ago, the church members became aware of a Boy Scout troop looking for a space to meet. No other church in town would allow the Scouts a meeting space. So, Dillon Road decided to open their doors and hearts to the boys and their families.

Instead of asking what the Scouts could do for the church, Dillon Road asked what they could do for the Scouts. A comfortable relationship between the two began when boys from different walks of life and experiences came from over Thomasville with a parent for Scout meetings. This relationship grew membership and interest.



Then, the unexpected and tragic death of one of the scouts, whose parents are members at the church, crushed the congregation. "Losing that child almost killed all of us," Mrs. Collier explains. "It's not been easy for any of us, not at all," she explains in a reverential whisper.

The pandemic has only added insult to injury. After closing services for a while, Dillon Road has re-opened with some social distancing, masking, and hand sanitizing measures in place, "but it doesn't feel quite the same," states Mrs. Collier.

With a weekly attendance of around 15, not all is lost at Dillon Road. There is a great sense of hope for the future. As Mrs. Collier and I walked through the sanctuary together, it is obvious the church is well-loved. The heart pine floors polished and shined, hardwood pews solid and still, and bright sunlight fill the sacred space. The tell-tale signs of weekly faithful are evident throughout the sanctuary. Faithful worshipers create little nests in their seats - a unique pillow from home, a fan, a box of Kleenex, mark their spots even when the sanctuary is empty on a weekday morning.

Mrs. Collier said their upright piano, of which you can tell she is proud, is the outcome of a church fundraiser from years ago. She and others went to the piano shop in Tallahassee, ready to buy, and realized quickly they would come up a little short. "The man in the shop let us have it anyway," said Mrs. Collier, "I've never forgotten that."

The church bell still works, too, and there is a little boy in the congregation who delights in ringing it on Sundays. That, alone, is plenty of reason for hope.



Dillon Road: Five Questions

1) How do the early stories of the beginning of the church speak of God's presence, Jesus' love, and the power of the Holy Spirit? Dillon Road began as a "mission church" in 1922. It first met in a school, which was once here on the property. (The remnants of the old well are still out front in the churchyard.) The church may have first gathered in homes, as Bible studies and prayer groups.

Dillon Road always had strong backing from First Presbyterian Church in Thomasville. Into the 1950's, Mr. Cyrus Maller would come from there to play the piano and teach Sunday School. There was such a number eager to be involved at Dillon Road that on cold days the children would huddle together in a larger automobile to have their class!

People would walk 3 miles to come to the church house. At that time, Sunday school was at 3pm, and worship was at 7pm. So, some would walk the distance twice!

2) Describe your congregation in verbs.

- **visits and reaches** out to the sick and inactive
- **engages** with its active weekly Scouting groups
- **worships** with these Scouts and their Scouting families
- **fellowships** joyfully as part of the FRP and in being with sister churches
- **gives** monetarily to help those less fortunate
- **serves** others who need help with various home projects
- **shares** burdens and **prays** for each other, intently making needs known
- **welcomes** newcomers warmly

3) What memories do you have of this congregation at its very best?

There was a time in past decades when there were strong VBS programs with lots of children. Mrs. Blanche Duren was a key leader, as was Ms. Willie Mae Carlton. There were great weeks of evening revivals held, with inspirational preaching and singing, which many still recall from years ago. Many would come! Youth, as well as adults, would go to Montreat events. The lay involvement was strong, with good pastoral leadership. There were many families and lots of youth and children.

4) What three church supper dishes could you not supper without?

- Mrs. Canary Eubanks' Coconut Cake
- Mrs. Paula Duren's Creamed Corn
- Mrs. Merle Smith's Fried Pies

5) As we move forward into the 21st century, what are your hopes and dreams for Dillon Road?

We would love for Dillon Road to have the numbers it once did, but whatever our numbers, our hope is that we would each remain faithful to God, and do so as a whole church.

That we'd always remember to live out the Lord's Prayer, which we say each week, asking God to "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

That we would continue to be as bright a light as we can be, not just on Dillon Road in Thomasville, GA - but wherever each one of us is at a particular moment so that others can see us, the scattered church, shining out in a dark world, which needs the light of Jesus!

We Are Connected by Memory and Meaning
Please hold these situations in prayer.



NE Cluster

Buddy Leach, a ruling elder of 1st (Warner Robins) and a member of the current TRE class died on October 22nd, after a fearless fight against cancer.

Diann McMillan, long-time clerk of Session at Washington Avenue, died unexpectedly on October 6.

Kenneth Moyer, pastor of Washington Avenue, is tending to his father who is on hospice care in Michigan.

NW Cluster

Fred Holt, a ruling elder at Edgewood who grew up in Sherwood, died on October 26, after decades of deep investment in the mission of his local congregations and our presbytery.

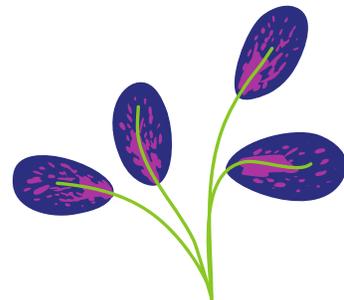
Central Cluster

Biff Coker retires from Covenant (Albany) on December 31st. May God prosper the work of his hands!

Southern Cluster

A warm welcome to **John Erthein**, the new pastor at Bainbridge. His e-mail is anglocalvinist67@yahoo.com. Take a minute to send him a note of welcome!

Our Donalsonville and Moultrie congregations continue to have active PNC's, searching for a pastor. Know someone who might be a good fit for either congregation? Reach out to deb@flintriverpresbytery.org so that fruitful connections between candidates and congregations can be made.



TOP FIVE: MOVIES

Every issue, we're asking ministers (in alpha order) to contribute to this segment, Top Five. No explanations. Just titles of books, poetry, heroes of the Bible, paintings, recipes to share for our mutual enjoyment.

This issue, we feature Sommer Bower, pastor at First (Americus).

- 5) "Harvey" (1950)
- 4) "Inside Out" (2015)
- 3) "Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone" (2001)
- 2) "A&E's Pride & Prejudice" (1995)
- 1) "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" (1989)



Odds & Ends

Have you noticed our new website? Documents are lodged in new places on the site, so don't hesitate to reach out to FRP staff if you cannot find something you need. Most documents are lodged under congregational roles, so that those most likely to need particular forms or guidelines, such as pastors, clerks, or treasurers, can easily find them.

November is a busy month with committees and continuing education events. Don't allow COVID brain to dim your memory.

[Check out our calendar here!](#)

Did You Know?

Every single one of our denominational agencies has done something to support our congregations and presbytery during this pandemic. **The Board of Pensions** has offered dues relief to small congregations and \$10K grants to qualifying pastors. **Presbyterian Disaster Assistance** has offered countless grants to our congregations and presbytery. **The Presbyterian Foundation** continues to offer free assistance in providing online giving platforms for all congregations and campus ministries. **The Presbyterian Mission Agency** has provided “manna in the desert” by offering free worship and educational resources.



Final Sending for October 17th Presbytery Meeting

Beloved Sisters and Brothers,

Know what God sends you forth, so...

Repay no one evil for evil (*Romans 12:17ff)

Offer kindness in the midst of hatred.

Harbor love.

Shelter Light.

Care for those the world has trampled.

Look at them.

Listen to them.

Learn from them.

Choose resurrection hope

in the face of despair and division.

Savor beauty.

Stitch a thin but unbreakable thread of gratitude

to bind you to the One who made you.

Reflect joy

to honor the One who blesses us.

