

WORSHIP ON THE WATER . . .



In 2003, then Deacon Bill Stewart and newly confirmed Episcopalian James Hurt were brainstorming during an Evangelism Committee meeting. They discussed the church service available on the south end of the Lake Blackshear sponsored by Warwick United Methodist Church. They were aware that Sonny Burt (a now retired Methodist minister and husband of our Sr. Warden, Susu) had discontinued north-end lakeside services sponsored his church in nearby Leslie. Bill and James decided that a similar program would be a good outreach program for Christ Church, Cordele. Robert Powell contacted the Retreat at Lake Blackshear and asked if the docks there could be used. They agreed. Thus began a ten year (so far) labor of love for us.

The first year the small but devoted group worked out of the back of James Hurt's pickup truck. They started on Memorial day week- end and, led by Deacon Bill Stewart, had a service each week until Labor day. Flush with success and with the support of the members who preferred to continue services at the church in town, a cargo trailer was purchased and furnished to haul the equipment - chairs, sound system, altar, music stands and whatever else was needed. Our own Mickey Burke built the altar which he designed to suit the specific space and use needs of our unique situation.

Each year, preparations begin well in advance of the opening Memorial Day service. An email is sent to all owners of lakeside property in Crisp County. Flyers go to the Retreat and businesses nearby. Frances Carwell delivers flyers to people in the campgrounds at the park each Saturday evening. Team members appear on programs at local television and radio stations to tell about the coming event. There will be at least one article of announcement in the local paper. Banners are placed on the dock at The Retreat as well as on the rail bridge spanning the lake. The team will do a full set up practice.

Our first service each year includes a Blessing of the Boats, asking God's favor on our leisure and his protection for those who enjoy the lake. Each craft (power boats, pontoon boats, canoes, kayaks and jet skis) is blessed by the priest and each owner is given a token key chain shaped like a buoy. The key chain is imprinted, "this craft has been blessed". This service almost always brings our largest attendance, usually well in excess of 100 people.

Services follow a simple format. The team arrives at 8 am to set up the sound system, the altar and chairs for those who don't come by boat. We do sound checks and make ready for the service. We then stop for a moment of prayer. Deacon John asks God to ensure that in our busyness, the reason for this ministry will always be foremost in our every thought, word or deed. We then set about welcoming attendants, assist in docking and getting our registry signed. At nine o'clock the service begins. Music is supplied by local volunteers. Music may be supplied by a single person with recorded music or there may be a group of 8 to 10 singers and instrumentalists. After the peace, we invite all to meet in the gazebo next to the dock for refreshments and fellowship. Attendance ranges from 30 to 100 + depending on weather and relevant holidays. On non-holiday Sundays attendance averages around 50. The heaviest attended services are, of course, during the holidays.

WOW services have become the "summer church" for a number of residents of Lake Blackshear many of whom are faithful members of other denominations and some who don't attend church regularly during the rest of the year. The ministry not only provides an opportunity for worship to visitors from as far away as Norway, but has also led to summer attendees becoming confirmed members of Christ Church, Cordele.