



PHOTO BY ROB KAUFMAN

## Spiritual CONNECTIONS

St. Andrew's By-the-Sea's minister, Clark Jenkins.

By Charlie Clark

You could say he went into the “family business” and, for Clark Jenkins, it was the business of God and helping others build a spiritual connection and a community focus for their congregation. Clark, like his father and his father before him, is a minister. One of the first things you notice about Clark is his relaxed demeanor and infectious laugh.

Clark is the first to admit that, like most ministers, his vocation chose him. His original plan was to be a journalist. During his freshman year, however, his father asked him to speak to a church youth group. “Afterwards, my father said ‘you sound pretty good’ and that got me thinking about the ministry,” said Clark.

Clark was a minister in Charleston for ten years, including seven years on Johns Island, an area where the majority of his congregation fell well below the poverty line. His Hilton Head ministry at St. Andrew's By-the-Sea stands in stark difference, but he sees similarities just as strikingly, with people needing the same thing once all the layers of society are stripped away.

“It’s about having a love for all people,” said Clark. “You have to love them all; that’s what the church is here for.”

Clark is a South Carolina native and also a black minister in a predominately white congregation. “I don’t see it as a black and white thing, I see it as a ministry,” and his growing congregation views it the same way.

Clark believes people are hungry for spirituality and meaning in their lives. He feels that the church’s role is to effectively meet that need and sees connection to God, each other and to the community as the way to do it.

“People shop for churches like they shop for groceries,” he said with a smile. Clark believes church should offer a place to connect and programs and services relevant to today’s families. “We have some outstanding youth and children’s programs at the church,” said Clark. The church also offers Contemporary Issues classes where controversial topics aren’t hidden under the pews – they are openly discussed and debated. “Dying churches are those that don’t remain connected to the community,” said Clark.

When asked what he feels are the biggest misconceptions about church he’s quick to answer. “People think the church relates to something in the past, that it’s something old vs. a living breathing thing.” He’s also quick to point out that some pastors feel the challenges of being part of an institution such as the church. “Tradition doesn’t like to be disturbed,” he noted, but you get the distinct impression that Clark knows how to make those traditions relevant to today’s churchgoers and that change is something he embraces. “You have to reach people where they are,” he said.

Clark comes from a legacy that values education and saw it as an opportunity to succeed. His father was a minister and his mom was an educator. “Back then, we were teachers or preachers,” he noted with a chuckle, but education is a thread that runs deep in the Jenkins family. Both of his children received their bachelor’s degrees in South Carolina and his wife Carolyn will receive her doctorate in education this December from USC, he stated with obvious pride.

Hailing from Pickens, South Carolina, Clark also serves on the General Churches Social Justice Board for the United Methodist Church at the national level. It’s an honor and a highlight of his life in ministry.

Clark and his wife are fond of Hilton Head and, to remind himself of its beauty, he walks on the beach each Friday morning “You have to walk on the beach, otherwise, you forget it’s there,” he said with an infectious laugh. Island life and ministry suit him well. **M**