

Special Guest Speaker Bill Glass and Gospel Concert Mark Honey Lake Church's Inaugural Service



Greene Publishing, Inc. Photo by Lynette Norris, January 8, 2013

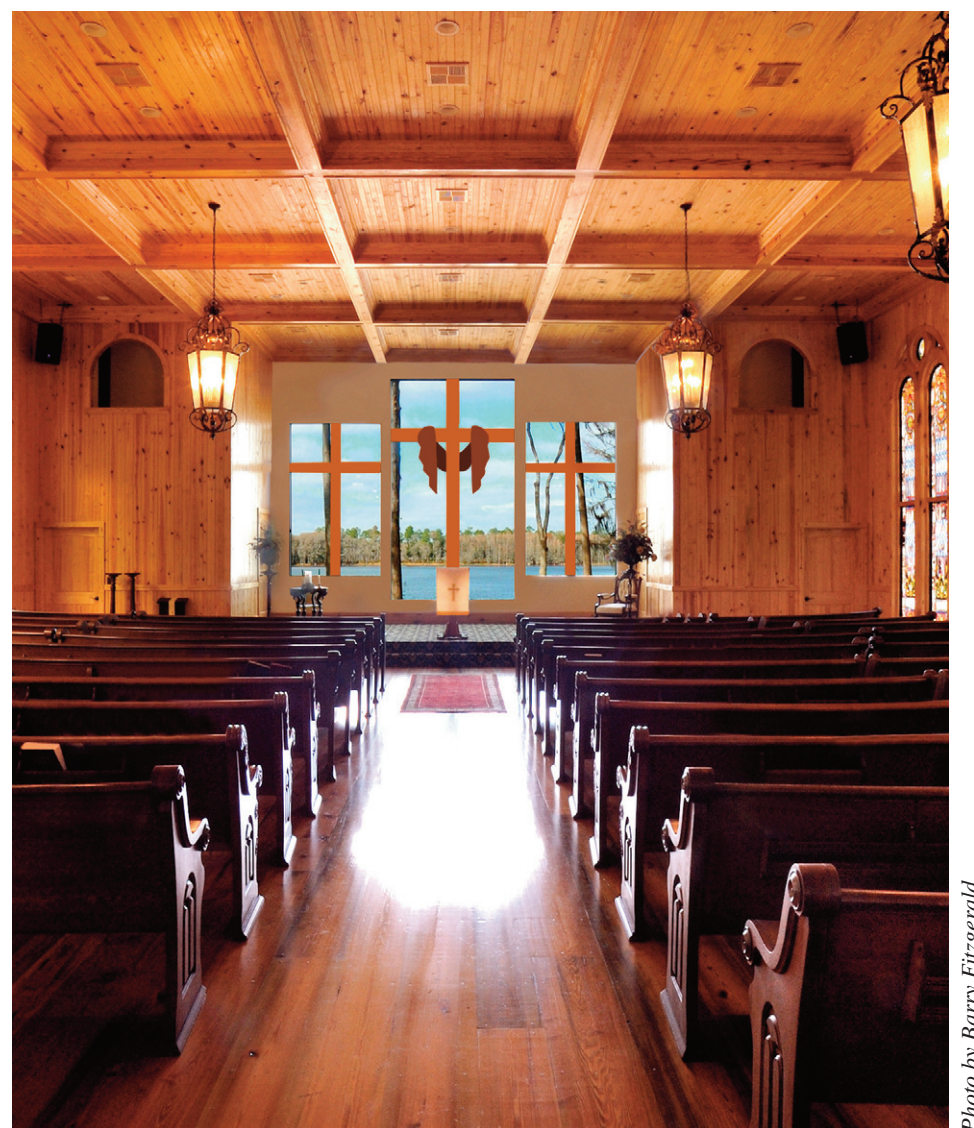


Photo by Barry Fitzgerald

Bob Williamson, owner of Honey Lake Plantation, stands at the front door of the Honey Lake Plantation Church.

Inside the church, behind the pulpit, are the three huge windows whose mullions form the three crosses and frame the view of pristine beauty of Honey Lake.

LYNETTE NORRIS
Greene Publishing, Inc.

There's a quiet, almost unearthly beauty to Honey Lake Plantation that a cloudy, overcast day cannot diminish. If anything, the muted grays and browns of a wintry January morning only accentuate the views of open areas of light brown grass and of the lake through the trees. Some of the trees are bare, some are still holding onto brown or golden-brown leaves, and some are the splendid dark evergreen of pine. Through the dark trunks of trees on the other side of the road running through the plantation, the lake reflects the overcast sky in a muted silver-gray.

One can only imagine the full splendor of spring and summer in a place like this, but the winter scene casts its own spell. Here, on this calm winter morning, it is a serene beauty that flows quietly past the conscious mind and stirs something in the id – the soul.

Across the road, beside the silver-gray lake, is the Honey Lake Plantation Church, a white, wooden, picture-postcard building with dark green trim, and tall white steeple with a church bell. The stained glass windows, believed to be the oldest such windows in the state of Florida, once graced the windows of the old Presbyterian Church of Madison.

The little church belongs so perfectly in such a setting, it looks as if it has always been there. In front of the entrance, a life-sized statue of a doe and two fawns welcome all those who come to worship.

On Sunday, Jan. 20, at 10 a.m., Honey Lake Plantation will hold its inaugural service for this little church, said Bob Williamson, owner of Honey Lake Plantation Resort and Spa. Special guests for the occasion include

speaker Bill Glass, a former All-American Football Player at Baylor University, where he attended seminary, and former defensive end player for the Detroit Lions, followed by seven great years with the Cleveland Browns. He went on to build the largest prison ministry in the world, and has been a frequent speaker at Billy Graham's services. Bill Glass Ministries is known worldwide, and Bob Williamson is a member of the ministry board. In fact, Bill Glass Ministries will hold a board of directors meeting at Honey Lake on Jan. 19, the day before the special church service where Glass will speak.

The music planned for that Sunday is another special treat, featuring both nationally known musician, songwriter, actor and former All-American football player Terry Warren, as well as a local favorite group, Root 3:16.

Warren, a native of Titusville, was a former NCAA All-American linebacker from Florida State University who had been signed by the Dallas Cowboys. Sidelined by a career-ending injury, he returned to his first love, music, and began establishing himself as a serious artist. His credits include the theme music from several TV shows, including "Evening Shade," and his acting credits include the role of Jean Valjean in a Broadway production of "Les Miserables." However, his focus is on reaching people for Christ through his music.

Root 3:16, a popular Christian music group hailing from Thomasville, includes Randy Young, Bobby Dollar, Chris Hall, Joel Carter, Jim Spangler and Gene Carlton, known for their blend of favorite Christian classics and contemporary music.

After the church service, guests can buy a tasty meal served up by the talented chefs at the

Honey Lake Restaurant and enjoy more great music at the Gospel Brunch, hosted in the newly remodeled Lakeside Pavilion.

"Our church is taking a different approach, trying to reach the unchurched and those turned off by conventional churches," said Williamson. The Honey Lake Plantation Church is non-denominational and there is no dress code. People can dress casually and comfortably.

"I don't have a problem with people coming to church in flip-flops and Bermuda shorts," Williamson added. On the flip side, if people feel like dressing up for a church service, that's fine, too. The church's invitation is for people to be comfortable enough to come just as they are, as Jesus would have them come...God cares about people's hearts, not what they are wearing.

Williamson plans to launch a worldwide ministry from the Honey Lake Church, with services streamed over the worldwide web, again, trying to reach the unchurched, or those who have been turned off or disillusioned by conventional organized religion for whatever reason. After the Jan. 20 service, regularly scheduled services will be held the second Sunday of each month, with additional services for holidays, such as Easter. When these services begin, two services will be held simultaneously: one contemporary, held in the Pavilion, and the other held in the Honey Lake Church that is a little more traditional... but not quite as traditional as, well, "traditional" churches. It is through this ministry at Honey Lake that Williamson hopes to see the message of Christ delivered in a loving, nonjudgmental environment.

"Make no mistake, our belief system is in the Bible," he said. "The word of God is preached."

However, there is no reason why the services cannot be interesting, with well-known speakers, good music, good preaching, good food, and a good time had by all. There is no reason why the entire day of Sunday can't be a wonderful, special time for families to spend together, both in church, and afterward in a beautiful setting that would be "like spending a day at the park," with a petting zoo and hayrides for the children, a chance to walk around the plantation and enjoy the natural setting, throw Frisbees, or just relax and take in the view. Since there is no dress code, families don't have to go home and change clothes or bring a second set of clothes with them in order to enjoy the fellowship and beauty of Honey Lake after the church service. That should be the whole point of a special day set aside to celebrate, rejoice and regroup for the week ahead.

"Church should be an important part of their lives," said Williamson, who hopes the regular, family-friendly Sunday services, sometimes featuring powerful testimony from well-known people, whether athletes, musicians, or even former criminals whose lives have been turned around by the power of God, Christian music that moves the spirit to rejoice, and special time spent together with family members in the beauty of a national-park-worthy setting will bring home to people the importance of integrating God into their everyday lives.

If they have never been to church, or have been turned off by churches and organized religion in the past, Williamson hopes they will come out to the inaugural service on Jan. 20 and give Honey Lake a try.

"We're hoping we can show them that we're different," he said. "Just like Jesus was."