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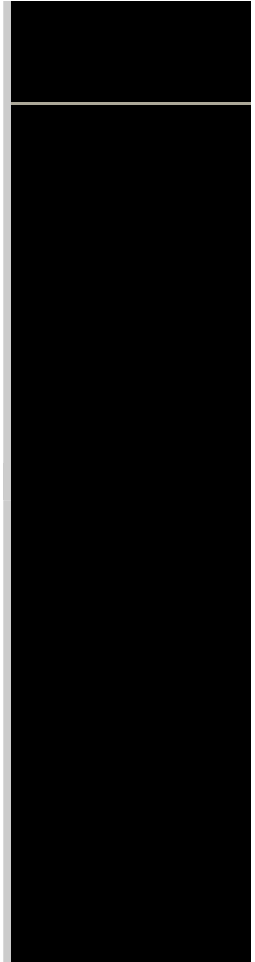
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Local News - Saturday, January 14, 2006

Moving in prayer Yoga classes bring Christ into the mix

By **ASHLEY MCKINNEY**
The Times

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Blending an ancient Hindu practice with Christian beliefs may sound impossible to some Christian traditionalists.

But Becky Martin, founder of Christ Centered Yoga and a member of First United Methodist Church, is set on proving that a Biblical message and yoga can be intertwined easily.

"Christ Centered Yoga is another element of what people are doing and is biblically sound," Martin said.

Yoga, which has about 18 million practitioners nationwide according to published statistics, is best

known as a type of exercise that stretches, strengthens and joins the body, mind and spirit through poses or asanas.

As a registered yoga teacher with Yoga Alliance and a Senior Master Trainer with YogaFit, Martin brought yoga to the Thompson Bridge Road church four years ago, and has instructed Christ Centered Yoga for a year and a half.

"At first I did find some resistance, but loving resistance," Martin said. "And it caused me to go back and do some research. We prayed for about eight to nine months.

"After doing the research in secular text and biblically, I found that yoga is a tool, much like music. You are



Paula Stuhr The Times

Beth Abernathy, front, and Vicki Bailey hold a pose during Christ Centered Yoga Thursday at First United Methodist Church in Gainesville.

Christ Centered Yoga

- **Where:** First United Methodist Church, 2780 Thompson Bridge Road, Gainesville
- **When:** 9 to 10:15 a.m. Mondays and Thursdays
- **Cost:** \$5 church members, \$6 nonmembers
- **Contact:** Becky Martin, (770) 861-8420 or <http://www.christcenteredyoga.com/>

breathing and moving the body physically and moving in prayer, praise and worship."

The Rev. Hugh Cauthen, First United Methodist pastor, hasn't attended a class but is certain it's spiritual.

"I do know that it is Christ centered and they are keeping Christ the center of it," Cauthen said.

Martin sees the joining of yoga and religion an easy match.

"The first time I tried yoga it was very spiritual to me," she said.

Class member Valerie Butts agrees that Christ Centered Yoga is a spiritual way to worship God.

"I've gained mindfulness in the fact that I'm able to throw down everything for that hour, and it sets the tone for the day," Butts said. "It took a while to get in the place that I'm in now, it has definitely been a journey, and I can say I am praising God in this way."

Each class begins with a Bible verse and a prayer. The yoga class that follows incorporates various styles.

"We do a combination of hatha yoga," Martin said. "That includes primarily vini yoga, which is based on an idea that in yoga there is a pose for every body. We do ashtanga (power moves), iyengar (important for alignment) and vinyasa (breathing and movement); these are all under the umbrella of hatha yoga."

Through Martin's class, doors recently have opened to take Christ Centered Yoga to other churches, yoga studios and gyms throughout the South and the country.

Martin will teach the first-ever Christ Centered Yoga workshop at the Harris YMCA on Feb. 18 in Charlotte, N.C.

"As far as my research goes, this is the first ever workshop of its kind," Martin said. "It is amazing how the YMCA is supporting me and the workshop. They want to incorporate it in their program, and doors are opening for me and I need to be available and be ready when those doors open."

There are 8,000 members of the YMCA in the Charlotte metro area.

Martin will teach those that attend the workshop how to create a similar program at their respective locations.

"I have talked to several people that want to take the program to their church or studio," Martin said. "One lives in Chicago. The program just enhances whatever yoga method an instructor teaches."

While Christian-oriented yoga practice isn't new, it recently has become more mainstream. During the past 10 years, there has been a rise in Christian yoga publications, books and articles.

Nancy Roth, an Episcopal assisting priest in Oberlin, Ohio, has written "Invitation to Yoga," and Thomas Ryan published "Prayer of Heart & Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice," just to name a few.

Time magazine also recently tackled the topic.

With the new interest in Christian yoga, Martin believes that her program is a good way to praise God while keeping your body and mind healthy.

"The elements brought into the class will make you feel different when you leave," Martin said. "Now there is research for those that were skeptics, and that has brought a second wave of people into yoga."

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Originally published Saturday, January 14, 2006

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