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# The Panhandle Presbyterian

*A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida*



Volume 3, Issue 12

December 2020

## From General Presbyter Roy Martin

How many of you have a nativity crèche you like to put out with other Christmas decorations? I have friends who collect them from all over the world and display different ones each year.

What is yours made of? Is it made of wood or is it ceramic? Whatever it is made of, I am sure it is just beautiful. I think I can also be fairly sure of what the structure looks like and who is present in and around that structure.

The structure, no doubt, looks sort of rustic and humble, probably like a stable that would hold animals. The infant Jesus is there in a little wooden crib. Mother Mary and father Joseph are kneeling beside him. There may be a cow or a donkey or sheep present. And perhaps there is an angel suspended from the top of the roof. Around the outside, there are three wise men bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And there are also two or three shepherds. That, at least, is the typical nativity scene.

But you won't find it like that in the Bible.

That is, you won't find all of those things mentioned in one story about Jesus' birth. Actually, there are two stories about the birth of Christ; one in Matthew where the baby Jesus is in a house and not a crude animal stall. The three wise men came but there is no mention of any shepherds. The other story is in Luke's gospel where Christ is presented in a manger, not a house, and shepherds do come to see him but no mention of wise men bearing gifts.

All this is to say that your nativity scene, if it contains all of these elements, is a composite arrangement of two biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus. Why did Luke and Matthew give different pictures of the nativity scene? Very simply, because they wanted to emphasize different aspects of who Jesus Christ was and is for the world. Matthew wishes us to see the kingly nature of Christ and his lordship over the world. A king would not be presented in a stable but in a house. And lowly shepherds would not be front and center in the

story, only rich wise men who may have been kings themselves.

But Luke is trying to accent the meekness and humbleness of Christ, one who walks the way of the common person, one with whom even the poorest among us can call friend. That is why, for Luke, there are no wise men front and center, but only lowly shepherds, and no house, but only a stable.

I think it is important for us to remember both pictures of Jesus' birth. For Jesus Christ is both friend and Lord. May you experience him both ways this Christmas!

Stay tuned!  
Roy



**The Rev. Dr.  
Roy Martin**

## From our Stated Clerk



*By Jeannie Dixon,  
Fellowship,  
Tallahassee,  
Ruling Elder*

## Annual statistical reports, insurance info due soon

Clerks may begin entering 2020 year-end statistical reports online Friday, Dec. 4. There are no changes to the form from last year! Enter statistics and find answers to frequently-asked questions at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/churchwide-ministries/stats/statistical-reporting-faq/>. At the bottom of that page is a PDF of the workbook; it is helpful to complete the survey in the workbook before going online.

For your church PIN and password, contact the Presbytery office at [office@presbyteryofflorida.com](mailto:office@presbyteryofflorida.com) or 850-535-2335. For other assistance, contact the presbytery office or email me at [statedclerk@presbyteryofflorida.com](mailto:statedclerk@presbyteryofflorida.com).

You have until Friday, Feb. 12, 2021 to enter the statistics for 2020. Please do not wait until the last minute. At a minimum, please enter your membership numbers, as this will affect the amount of shared support/per capita your congregation will be asked to pay in 2022. The report is very important in providing an accurate depiction of your congregation. I often am asked by folks moving to assist in finding a new congregation. Using the statistical report I can give them an idea of the size of the church, the various activities (like

Sunday School/Christian Education), age of members, etc. Prospective ministers can also look up the information! Actually, the statistics are available to anyone. See [Church-trends/pcusa.org](http://Church-trends/pcusa.org)

This information comes from the staff person in Louisville who works with the annual statistics. *One question that has come up regarding the statistics form, how do we count average attendance. We are all aware how strange the year has been, people are finding new and creative ways to worship. There also is no one way to count how many people are attending worship. Each church should account for attendance in a way that feels comfortable to them.*

Note that the financial section is NOT a financial report but a snapshot showing the financial health of the congregation. The session needs to approve the report as soon as possible after December 31, 2020. This is a session report and DOES NOT require approval at a congregational meeting.

The Committee on Presbytery Administration has asked the Stated Clerk to gather information from each congregation on insurance coverage. The form can be found at <http://bit.ly/pofins>. You may either complete the

form online OR email the requested information to [statedclerk@presbyteryofflorida.com](mailto:statedclerk@presbyteryofflorida.com).

Complete one form for each type of insurance held. The requested information includes type (s) of insurance, coverage amount, deductible. Please include the name of the church (including city), name of the person submitting the information and your position at the church. Please complete the requested information by December 18, 2020.

To facilitate the submission of names for the annual Necrology report, a reminder that an online form has been created. Information may be submitted throughout the year for the period of Oct. 1, 2020 – Sept. 30, 2021. Please go to <http://bit.ly/pofnecro> to complete the information.

Don't scramble next October when asked to submit the information! Complete the form throughout the year as needed. Anyone from your church may submit the information on the death of ruling elders who are members of your congregation (often the church administrator completes this). They do not need to be in active service at the time of their death, and don't have to have been ordained in your congregation. They must have been ordained as a ruling elder in the PC (USA).

## CER recommends ... Intentional reflection and evaluation as we shape a transformed church

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”  
Isaiah 43:18-19

The dual pandemics of COVID and racial injustice in our country are devastating. They leave us weary and at times hopeless. To say that we, in the church, have been adjusting to new models of ministry would be an understatement. Some of us have been hunkering down to endure this time and put things on hold with programs and events. Others of us are finding some creative ways to make connections and keep some flame of engagement lit, but this passage from Isaiah reminds us that God continues to new things in us and in the church. We just don't always perceive what that new thing might be.

In Walter Brueggemann's recent book, *Virus As A Summons To Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief and Uncertainty*, he suggests that now is the time for prophetic imagination. “The future does not reside in old, treasured realities. It belongs, rather, to bold faithful thought that evokes bold faithful action” (pg 58).

We may want to take this season of Advent and curl up on our couches for a Holiday Netflix binge, but we are called, as church leaders, to look forward to what this transformed body of Christ will be when we are all safely back in our churches. We must take to heart his last sentence to the church, “We have so much we will do well to forget.”

What in your church would your congregation “do well to forget”? How will your congregation spend this time of crisis being sure that your ministry is enriched when the crisis is over? Let's consider these pandemics a reset button – a time for deep breathing and then an opportunity to re-evaluate, assess what is important and get rid of what has lost its meaning or significance. Let's keep in mind our goal of shaping disciples into more faithful people walking with God.

### Take time for tough reflection and hard realities:

Some general questions for your congregation to reflect on:

- What have we learned about our congregation during this pandemic?
- What ministries have we begun during this pandemic? What do we want to maintain or improve as we go forward?
- What have we missed?

What have we NOT missed?

- What has our church gained during this time: Socially? Missionally? Spiritually?
- Are there things we are good at that we didn't know about? Things that we don't do well that we should address?
- Where do we see possibilities now that didn't seem at all possible before?
- Are we intentionally choosing resources for classes and groups? Evaluate how those curriculum pieces translate online. Is there a way to offer hybrid classes? Is this a need?
- List every class, program or event that your church offers and spend time evaluating the goal of the program: is the goal worthy, meaningful, has it been met? Did the event or program strengthen people's faith or connection to the church? What are the reasons this should be continued? Is there something more meaningful that people should invest their time in instead?

As we think of moving forward with hope, let's rejoice in the opportunity to experiment, discontinue, change and start up. Let's do that new thing that God has begun in us and embrace change with hearts open to the Holy Spirit doing a new thing in us.

## From the Committee on Educational Resources



By Christy Williams,  
1st, Tallahassee  
Director of  
Christian Education

## From the Committee on Congregational Revitalization



*By Rev. Lisa Martin,  
Chair, and  
1st, Lynn Haven Pastor*

## CCR to unveil partnership plans and revitalization toolbox

The Committee on Congregational Revitalization continues to have spirited discussions about what revitalization might look for the congregations of Florida Presbytery. Every congregation of every size can benefit from thinking holistically about its vitality as a center for mission in its place. We are honored to partner with congregations to help this revitalization ministry along!

Work continues to hone policies and procedures for congregations that wish to partner with us specifically in the area of calling pastoral



leadership. Hopefully we will unveil our masterpiece (!) at the February presbytery meeting!

At the end of December, CCR loses the significant leadership of The Reverend Jim Huffaker, who has served the committee faithfully for many years. Most recently, Jim served as chair, then vice-chair. His skillful approach to

revitalization – a ministry near and dear to his heart – has helped countless congregations throughout his ministry and here in Florida Presbytery, too.

Also rotating off of CCR is Mary Keyt, a ruling elder from Faith Church in Tallahassee. Mary has been an active part of our Holy Cow! training and working with the Revitalization Toolbox (which we also hope to unveil in February). Thank you, Jim and Mary, for your faithfulness in service on CCR.

To all congregations of Florida Presbytery, CCR wishes you and yours a meaningful Advent and joy-filled Christmas!

# The Living Nativity

Our Special 10th Year Edition!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 5:30-8 P.M.  
LAUREL HILL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 8115 FOURTH STREET

TAKE A MOVING SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM AND DISCOVER THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS!  
PERFORMED BY LIVE ACTORS AND ANIMALS! • REFRESHMENTS! • SOCIAL DISTANCING ACCOMMODATED

Presented by The Laurel Hill & Crestview Presbyterian Churches



CHRISTMAS JOY  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS

LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

*join us!*

God is  
with us.

— MATTHEW 1:23

THE PERFECT GIFT.



*Merry Christmas  
and may God's Peace  
be with you in the coming year!*



From your friends at the Presbytery of Florida and Dogwood Acres

## From the Committee on Dogwood Acres



*By Ben Powell,  
DWA Director  
and 1st, Quincy  
Ruling Elder*

## DWA tackles projects, adds safety measures during downtime

**H**ave you wondered how Dogwood Acres has been doing during the pandemic? Here's a quick update and the latest news.

Thankfully, due to changes a few years ago in the way Dogwood tracks and reports its finances, we went into the pandemic knowing exactly where we stood, what money was where, and how every dollar was allocated. We take this part of our ministry very seriously and continue to manage every dime with utmost care. Fortunately, we have gotten through the past eight months with the help of PPP, belt tightening, and the generosity of our supporters. For that we are grateful, though because of being closed with no retreat or summer camp income, things are beginning to get very tight.

These months have not been wasted, however! The grounds have been constantly cared for, and Robert and others have tackled several time-consuming and long-awaited projects. Visitors today will find the camp in better condition than the last time they visited!

We are slowly opening back up, with a retreat here and there, and volunteers trickling back in to enjoy this fall

weather. We remain dedicated to the safety and health of everyone, with new handwashing stations and social distancing rules. We are fortunate to have 20 separate living quarters in our ten cabins, making it easy for small groups (up to 20 or 30) to take advantage of our vast outdoors and separated sleeping quarters.

We all pray for an end to the pandemic and the chaos it has spread over all our lives. Dogwood Acres is no exception – we have been disrupted, and we

pray for relief. But please be assured that the past several months' downtime has not been squandered and that the Committee on Dogwood Acres is optimistically hopeful for a recovery sometime in 2021.

In the meantime, let us know if you have questions or would like to bring your family for a quick retreat or a few friends to work on a volunteer project. These are the "perfect weather to be outdoors" days if you will abide by a few simple safety rules, you are welcome to use **YOUR Dogwood Acres!**

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PRESENTS

OUTDOOR  
CHRISTMAS  
CONCERT



FEATURING  
PERDIDO BRASS

DECEMBER 6TH  
@ 4:00PM

BRING YOUR LAWN CHAIR  
REFRESHMENTS & FAMILY ACTIVITIES PROVIDED

## Protect creation with Community Carbon Fund gifts

I love the month of December with all the holiday colors, lights and singing of carols, but I am especially taken with my grandchildren's reaction to the story of the birth of the Christ child.

They love this story and the baby. We all love babies and instinctively want to protect them. We understand our moral obligation to guide, nurture and prevent harm to our children, but ask yourself this: *Have we done all we can to leave them a safe world?*

I heard Gus Speth, an attorney and founder of the World Resources Institute, answer this question in a soon-to-be released movie entitled "YOUTH v. GOV."\* He said, "What we have done to the planet is the saddest story ever told and a dereliction of government responsibility". Pretty harsh, but there is plenty of evidence to support it.

A few examples are: Government-built interstate highways through low-income neighborhoods, exposing generations of children to poor air quality and chronic health problems. Government subsidizes the fossil fuel industry, the wealthiest business on the planet, whose product is destroying the planet's climate. Finally, in spite of all the scientific evidence of the ravages of climate change, government continues to



defend the fossil fuel industry and not take steps to stop climate change.

Essential to protecting our children is responding to God's call to care for creation. "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24). This is the foundation on which the future and welfare of all children depend. Simply put, children need clean air and water to survive and grow. They need a healthy atmosphere and safe food. They need us to ensure these conditions by caring for the earth.

When we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, let's not forget that God's child became human. He was made of the earth and walked on it. He asked us to love our neighbors and to take care of the poor, but to do this we must love our planet and take care of it.

I encourage everyone to take a concrete step to protect creation this

month. One meaningful action is to donate money to the Sustainable Tallahassee's Community Carbon Fund. This money helps local charities reduce their energy usage, saving them money and reducing their carbon emissions.

Every year, our family and friends receive a Community Carbon Fund offset gift. For as little as \$5, you can offset the carbon produced by the average family car during a month's use, or for \$20, a native tree will be planted that will sequester a metric ton of CO2 over its lifetime. There are more gifts.

Pre-COVID, you would select your gifts at the John Wesley UMC Alternative Christmas Market, but this year it is online. To see the gifts, go to <https://sites.google.com/view/acmumc/home>. It provides a link to Sustainable Tallahassee's Community Carbon Fund, where you can make a donation in the name of a friend or family member and then send them a note.

Please contact me with any questions or comments at [pammcvety@hotmail.com](mailto:pammcvety@hotmail.com).

\*This movie is about the 21 youth plaintiffs in *Juliana v. U.S.*, a lawsuit against the U.S. government. I saw the film online at the DOC NYC Film Festival last month. I refer you to my November 2019 column for more information about a similar lawsuit in Florida.

## Caring for Creation Notes



By  
**Pam McVety,**  
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Stewardship  
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*"Simply put, children need clean air and water to survive and grow. They need a healthy atmosphere and safe food. They need us to ensure these conditions by caring for the earth."*

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The Panhandle Presbyterian

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