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The Panhandle Presbyterian

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From General Presbyter Roy Martin

As we have entered the season of Advent with Christmas soon to follow, we find ourselves falling in love again with the old Christmas carols we've sung all our lives. I have many favorites, as I am sure you do, as well. One of my favorites is "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear." I am always interested in the origins of hymns, and carols such as this one frequently have fascinating births.

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" is one of the first carol hymns to have been written by an American author. First published in 1849, it was written by the Rev. Edmund Hamilton Sears. He received his theological training at Harvard and spent most of his life pastoring small Unitarian churches even though, as he once said, "I believe

and preach the divinity of Christ."

This particular hymn is generally considered to be one of the first hymns to emphasize the social implications of the angels' message. Sears wrote the hymn during a time of great social unrest in the United States. There were the increasing tensions between North and South, which ultimately led to the Civil War. There was the industrial revolution in New England that created an increasing divide between the haves and the have nots. And, of course, there was the forty-niner gold rush in California, where many fortune seekers found only poverty and destitution.

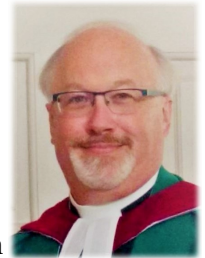
This hymn addresses all of that, as it is written for those "beneath the crushing load" and urges us to listen once again to the singing of the angels

whose heavenly music "floats O'er all the weary world."

Are we in any less need, in our time, to be lifted above the flotsam and jetsam which surround our lives to hear, yet again, the stirring words of this carol hymn: "For lo, the days are hastening on, By prophet bards foretold, When with the ever-circling years Comes round the age of gold; When peace shall over all the earth Its ancient splendors fling, And the whole world give back the song Which now the angels sing."?

May you experience that peace in this season.

Roy



The Rev. Dr. Roy Martin



CHRISTMAS JOY
SPECIAL OFFERINGS

LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 19



When we give to the Christmas Joy Offering, we share our love with the leaders of our Church — past, present and future — who point us to God.

From Our Stated Clerk



By Jeannie Dixon,
Fellowship,
Tallahassee Elder
(statedclerk
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Annual church statistical reporting begins December 3

Annual reporting of the Statistics of the Church, to gather information on various aspects of the congregation, starts this Friday. This year, the program will open on **December 3** and close for the churches on Thursday, **February 17**.

Last year, 100% of our Presbytery's congregations at least met the minimum requirement by submitting membership numbers. Let's do that again, and even better!

For those unable to enter the data on a device, Melissa in the presbytery office or I can enter your information and also can provide the username and password for you. Additionally, a recording of the statistical report training I conducted via Zoom in November is available. Contact the Presbytery office at office@presbyteryofflorida.com to request a link to the recording. I will offer a second session of training on Monday, January 31, at 6 p.m. CST/7 p.m. EST.

Don't wait until too near the deadline to work on the report. Regardless whether the clerk of session, an office administrator, or someone else prepares the report, the session must approve the report before it is submitted. Also, the treasurer who provides data for the financial section will likely be very busy at year's end.

Financial information requested includes annual income, annual expenses, mission, personnel, and facilities. The online form provides guidance for what to include for every item in the survey.

Other figures requested will be average worship attendance – a count of participants in Christian Education (Sunday School plus Presbyterian Women plus any Bible Studies or classes held in 2020). Please – Make every effort to provide more than just an ending number of members.

Providing the age distribution and disability groupings of your congregation, along with the racial/ethnic distribution, provides valuable information to the presbytery about our presbytery's diversity. This is information the Committee on Representation can use to help the Committee on Nominations fill committee appointments

that are representative and conform to the PC(USA) commitment to diversity.

If your church uses ACS or a similar program, it can provide statistical reports for this information – that is, if your church has entered member birth dates and genders. If not, maybe now is the time to start.

Consult your church directory about categories. Total members and female members can easily be counted there.

If you know your congregation well, the categories for disability can also be done. Again, these are not a scientific/medical survey, but how many hearing impaired (use hearing aids), sight impaired (wear glasses), mobility impaired (use a cane, walker or wheelchair), or otherwise impaired are in your congregation.

The age distribution is a bit more challenging, but do your best. This is not the U.S. Census. *Thanks for doing your part!*

Join us at Trinity Presbyterian Church for an

OUTDOOR CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Featuring Perdido Brass



Sunday, December 19th
3:00PM

This free concert includes beverages and family activities

Bring your lawn chair

*Thank you for respecting Trinity's no alcohol on premises policy



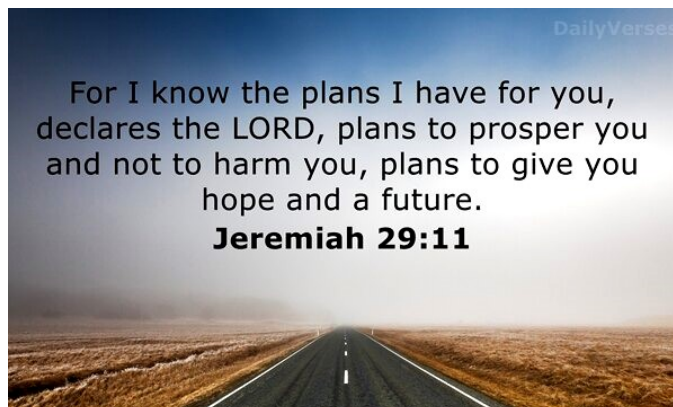
CER asks: What practical lessons did we learn from 2020 and 2021 that we can take into 2022?

The pandemic continues to affect Christian Education at all levels and all age groups. First Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee Director of Christian Education Christy Williams challenged us last year in this publication to reflect on our congregations and evaluate how we have adapted to our circumstances. Let's look at a few changes we may want to keep:

► Attendance with technology

Some of the churches adapted to Zoom, Youtube, Facebook live to continue not only Church services, but also Adult, Youth, and children's education experiences. These yielded new, unexpected opportunities.

For instance, we did not have a decrease in attendance. Because some of the not-so-early risers were actually able to make it to the screen on time for adult Sunday school, our numbers went up! Snowbirds joined us from far away – North Carolina, Michigan, even California – because they could! Out-of-town speakers were easier to schedule. Many of our at-risk senior members have become faithful viewers and have a lot to contribute to our Bible studies and adult learning



For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

classes. We need to be thinking of ways to accommodate their needs and the needs of the children who benefitted from yard visits from leaders. Presbytery meetings, gatherings and Disciplefest were well-attended with technology.

► Planned spacing for events

When the pandemic allowed for temporary, masked, distanced togetherness, the celebration of the retirement of our pastor was held drive-in-movie-style with a huge outdoor screen with the sound available by tuning in on car radios. Our church picnic became possible in a delightful, different gardens venue we might not have tried had we stuck to the one we had been using for years. Some Presbyterian Women's circles were able to meet outside in a park, in backyard spaces to "carry on" with Bible study and precious social presence missed by all.

► Attendance In-Person

When church service opened up to spaced masked gatherings, it felt like some normalcy was returning. Our church was measured for the required social distancing. At first, we required reservations to attend, but now we have an overflow room with the service on a screen. That same multi-purpose room is soon to be used for in-person adult inquirers' Sunday class in hybrid mode, with some participating from home.

The goal was for these classes and programs to strengthen people's faith and connection to the church. Our ultimate goal was to shape disciples into more faithful people walking with God. We continue to move forward in these still uncertain times... with hope for our ever-reforming church.

From the Committee on Educational Resources



By

*Esther Moring,
CER member and
1st, Tallahassee Elder*

From the Committee on Congregational Revitalization



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

CCR plans two news endeavors for the coming year

The Committee on Congregational Revitalization has a couple of things for the presbytery to look forward to in the new year!

We are creating policies for the use of some of our funds that will help congregations that have emergency needs, technological wants, and continued desire for revitalization. As stewards of a generous sum of funds housed with Texas Presbyterian Foundation (TPF), we know that revitalization looks different for every



congregation. Therefore, we aim to free up some of these TPF funds so that churches can address needs and desires without straining their in-house budgets.

We are hoping to sponsor an enrichment retreat for the presbytery's pastors (called and installed, temporary, stated supplies, Commissioned Lay Pastors, and

Authorized Lay Pastors). Our goal is to bring in someone who specializes in the field of revitalization and renewal for a three-day/two-night event at Dogwood Acres Retreat Center and Summer Camp.

CCR is excited about these two new endeavors, and our greatest hope is that congregations and pastors will avail themselves of these opportunities when they become available in the new year!

In the meantime, may you and yours have a happy Advent and Christmas season!

The Living Nativity
Our Special 11th Year Edition!

Saturday, December 11, 5:30 - 8 p.m. CST
Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church, 815 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

There is no safe manger for our babies

I have a question for you: Who is the most famous baby in the world? Hint: it is not the Gerber baby. For most, it is the Christ child, God's beloved son who was born in humble circumstances in a manger, surrounded by farm animals.

The Christ child, in reality, had more in common with Middle Eastern refugees than the white, cherubic-cheeked babies in our nativity sets and paintings. Robyn J. Whitaker wrote in *The Conversation* in 2017, that "if we pare back the story to its historical core – removing the nativity stuff, that Jesus was a child of a Jewish family living under a foreign regime. His family fled from a king who sought to kill him because he posed a political threat." This is the story of the thousands of climate refugees and their children who are now on the move, running from failed governments, rising unrest, extreme violence, collapsed agricultural systems, storm-devasted communities. She also pointed out, "that if we nostalgically focus on one baby while ignoring the numerous babies who suffer around the world due to politics, religion and poverty, we miss the entire point of the Christmas story."

The reality is that our babies are not safe.

The world's leaders left COP26 in November with the Earth on track to blow past the 1.5 degree C temperature increase that scientists say we have to have. The talks ended with a global

agreement that aimed to keep alive the hope of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees C. Our babies' futures now rest on the "hope of limiting warming". It's not reassuring. It's also not something, when our babies are grown, that they will think was of value as they struggle to live in a chaotic, deteriorating world.

Our leaders have failed us, and our denomination may, too. We are headed to yet another General Assembly in 2022 without asking for categorical divestment of our fossil fuel investments. Currently, the plan is to ask the GA to divest from five companies. There are over 200 companies involved in the production of fossil fuels, and we have investments in a lot more than five.

Let's be clear what this means. Our money continues to fund an industry that is making the world increasingly



unsafe for our babies, so that we can continue to profit from their products. Surely after all these years of dialoging while climate impacts escalate, it is clear that these companies have no intentions of stopping the production of fossil fuels. At one time, I would have said that it is foolish to pretend that we (the church) are making progress, but now I would say that it is dangerous.

So I end as I began, with a question – a tough question for Presbyterians:

What good is our faith, if we repeatedly justify actions that ignore reality?

Surely this is not what God intended when he shared his only son with us.

Caring for Creation Notes



By
Pam McVety,
*Presbytery
Stewardship
of Creation
Enabler*
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What good is our faith, if we repeatedly justify actions that ignore reality?

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Save the date (or visit <http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/events-calendars/>)

In December		Looking ahead	
Friday, December 3	Annual statistical reporting begins	Tuesday, January 4 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	Committee on Mission and Outreach (CMO)
Sunday, December 5	Session 5: Officer Training via Zoom with Rev. Dr. Roy Martin	Saturday, January 8 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	Committee on Representation (CR)
Tuesday, December 7 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	Committee on Mission and Outreach (CMO)	Tuesday, January 11 9:30 a.m. CST/ 10:30 a.m. EST	Committee on Ministry (COM)
Wednesday, December 8 11 a.m. CST/ 12 p.m. EST	Committee on Educational Resources (CER)	Wednesday, January 12 11 a.m. CST/ 12 p.m. EST	Committee on Educational Resources (CER)
Wednesday, December 8 1 p.m. CST/ 2 p.m. EST	Committee on Presbytery Administration (CPA)	Wednesday, January 12 1 p.m. CST/ 2 p.m. EST	Committee on Presbytery Administration (CPA)
Saturday, December 11 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	Committee on Representation (CR)	Monday, January 17	Presbytery office closed for Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday
Saturday, December 11 5:30 – 8 p.m. CST	Laurel Hill Presbyterian 11th Annual Living Nativity	Tuesday, January 18 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	Committee on Congregational Revitalization (CCR)
Sunday, December 12 9 a.m. CST	1st Presbyterian of Milton "A Christmas to Believe In"	Wednesday, January 26 10 a.m. CST/ 11 a.m. EST	"I Stand with You" Task Force
Sunday, December 12	Gulf Breeze Presbyterian "Walk to Bethlehem"	Monday, January 31 6 p.m. CST/ 7 p.m. EST	Annual Statistical Reporting Training via Zoom with Stated Clerk Jeannie Dixon
Thursday – Sunday, December 16 – 19	Faith Presbyterian, Tallahassee "A Christmas Carol"		
Saturday, December 18 6 – 8 p.m. EST	Christ Presbyterian, Tallahassee, Live Nativity		
Sunday, December 19 3 p.m. CST	Trinity Presbyterian, Pensacola, Perdido Brass Outdoor Concert		
Friday – Monday, December 24 – 27	Presbytery office closed for Christmas		
Friday, December 31	Presbytery office closed for New Year's		

Charles Dickens'
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
A FESTIVAL OF HOLIDAY MUSIC

December 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2021
7 p.m. EST
Faith Presbyterian Fellowship Hall
2200 N. Meridian Rd., Tallahassee

Purchase tickets at
www.showtix4u.com/event-details/59102