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# The Panhandle Presbyterian

*A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida*



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December 2023

## From General Presbyter Roy Martin

No doubt, you have heard of the Yule log. These days, the Yule log tends to take the form of a cake shaped like a log with an icing that mimics the bark of a tree. But the origin of the Yule log is quite different.

The word “yule” comes from the Old English word “geol”, which is a variation of the old Norse word “jul”. Both of these words refer to a pre-Christian festival centered around the winter solstice where families would bring the trunk of a tree inside and stick the large end in the fireplace. The log would feed the fire until there was more daylight after the solstice and the land would become fertile again.

As with other aspects of Christmas, Christians adopted parts of the pagan festival into the celebration of Christ’s birth. In the fourth century, Pope Julius I set the birth of Christ on December 25<sup>th</sup> to coincide with the Roman pagan holiday, Dies natalis solis invicti, the birthday of the invincible sun. The Yule log became part of the Christian celebration, and the log would feed the fire through the 12 Days of Christmas. It was important to burn the entire log to the very last ash.

The real enjoyment of Christmas is something like that. You really have to take hold of and celebrate the entire meaning and message of

Christmas if you are going to embrace it. Even the peripheral aspects of Christmas are deep in meaning for many of us. It would be hard for us to give up cookies, trees, ornaments, greetings, music, children’s programs, and gifts. Of course, we could still celebrate Christmas without any of these, but it wouldn’t be the same. Likewise, Christmas would be like an empty broken ornament if we did not treasure and rejoice in the good news that Jesus Christ the Savior has come into the world. It is like burning the whole log; we wouldn’t miss any part of it.

I sincerely hope this Christmas is a joyous one for you – one that is filled with peace and love and expectation of the Messiah coming yet again.

Roy



**The Rev. Dr. Roy Martin**

*Christmas Tea with Friends*  
December 12th at 2 pm  
Trinity Presbyterian Church  
Tickets on sale, each Sunday at Trinity  
**\$10** Bring a friend, your tea cup  
and wear your favorite hat  
Christmas favorites  
presented by  
Ellen Vinson &  
TLC Children  
For tickets & more  
information  
call 850-432-3205

## From Our Stated Clerk



By Jeannie Dixon,  
Fellowship,  
Tallahassee Elder

## Time for statistical reporting, policies and plan for reading minutes

The Annual Congregation Statistics opens Friday, December 1, 2023 and closes for congregations on February 16, 2024. The questions are the same as last year.

I would suggest you take your form from last year and update from those numbers. You should have printed a copy of the stats to include in your minutes for the year. If you need a copy of your form, [send an email](#) to me requesting that. The program includes help on the questions.

To get to that information once you log in to the statistics program ([Go to the Online Statistics Entry system](#)); the tabs are “Church” (update church address information), “Clerk” (update the name of the clerk of session), and “Statistics Questions”. That last tab has a set of tasks in a box on the right side of the screen listing each category of questions (membership, congregational life, racial/ethnic, financial). Each of those will give detailed instructions on completing those questions.

Click “Submit” when you have finished entering all statistics and the session has approved this. The system will save each set of questions as you move through them. Once you submit, you indicate no further

changes are needed.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The session needs to approve the report as early as possible after December 31, 2023. This is a session report and **DOES NOT** require approval at a congregational meeting.

If you spend more than 5 minutes on a question, put it aside and [contact me](#) for assistance. A workshop will be held January 18 at 6:00 pm Central/7:00 pm Eastern for any who have questions or need assistance. This will be on Zoom, and more information will be sent out nearer that date.

I will be on vacation Dec. 1-10 and not available by phone; I will return emails as I can, but it might be after Dec. 10.

► Work continues at the General Assembly level to get sample policies for child protection and sexual misconduct, harassment, anti-racism as mandated by the Book of Order. [This page](#)

provides helpful information. [This page](#) offers a slideshow presentation on creating child-youth-protection policies.

Many congregations ask why they need a child-youth protection policy when they have no youth in their congregation. You need this to protect any child/youth grandchildren, neighbors, scouts, etc.) who may visit on occasion.

► And finally, we need to plan how to get the 2023 minutes read. [Email](#) me your answers to these questions: 1) Are your minutes saved in an electronic format (like Word or Google Docs)? 2) Do you know how to combine those individual files into one document (so all of the minutes for the year are in one file)? 3) Do you know how to print that single file to a PDF format? The answers you email to me will help determine if this would facilitate the review.







December 14, 15, 16 and 17, 7:30 p.m. EST  
Information and tickets: [www.faithpcusa.org/christmas](http://www.faithpcusa.org/christmas)  
Faith Presbyterian Church  
2200 N. Meridian Rd., Tallahassee

*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



GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
(1415 AIRPORT ROAD, PANAMA CITY FLORIDA 32405)  
PRESENTS

**CHRISTMAS Extravaganza**

SPECIAL GUESTS: (Select Nights)  
**SANTA & MRS. CLAUS**  
**ELSA**

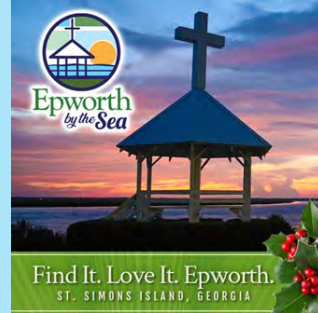
FACE PAINTERS      BALLOON ARTIST

**\$5 Per Person**

Gates Open At 5:30 PM til 10:00 PM      DATES:  
(Weather Permitting)      **NOVEMBER 24TH**  
TIL  
**JANUARY 1ST**

- SMORES
- HOT COCOA
- RAFFLES
- GAMES

Synod of South Atlantic  
**Association of  
Smaller Congregations**



**2023 Annual Conference**  
**March 2-5, 2023**  
**Epworth by the Sea,**  
**St. Simons Island, GA**  
**“Crossing Bridges”**

[www.atlpcusa.org/events/smaller-congregations-2023](http://www.atlpcusa.org/events/smaller-congregations-2023)

**The Living Nativity**  
**A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

6-8 P.M. • SATURDAY, DEC. 9 • FREE  
LAUREL HILL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
8115 FOURTH STREET

Embark along a candlelit path on your own  
Journey to Bethlehem, encountering the  
characters from The Greatest Story Ever Told!  
Held rain or shine. Refreshments and snacks follow

PRESENTED BY THE LAUREL HILL & CRESTVIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES



You are invited to celebrate  
the retirement of  
*Lisa Wilder*

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2023**  
3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

*First Presbyterian Church of Quincy*  
306 North Madison St  
Quincy, Florida 32351

## CER shares ideas and resources for coping with holiday grief

The holidays are traditionally a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness.

However, for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, this time of year can evoke profound feelings of grief and loneliness. Coping with grief during the holidays can be challenging, but our faith can provide us with a source of comfort and strength during this time.

Grief is our natural response to loss, and it can manifest in various ways, including sadness, stress, anxiety, anger, guilt, depression, or even physical symptoms like loss of sleep or appetite. Traditionally, during the holiday season, the emphasis is on family gatherings and celebrations, yet those who are grieving may feel a sense of disconnection, a sense of emptiness, loneliness, or sadness.

This is often associated with memories of past holidays with loved ones and can become bittersweet, serving as poignant reminders of what has been lost. It can be particularly challenging for those who are navigating the holidays for the first without a cherished family member or friend. However, there are coping mechanisms that can help navigate this time of year.

- The church family



can offer a sense of community and spiritual support through the holidays. Participating in worship services, prayers, or discussions with our support networks can help us feel more connected and less alone in their grief.

- Worship and other seasonal traditions can provide structure and meaning during the holiday season. Lighting candles, attending worship services, or partaking in other holiday traditions at Church can create a sense of connection to one's loved ones and God.
- Focusing on the messages of the season, such as hope, redemption, and Heaven, can bring comfort when we are grieving. This can also translate into our belief in a greater purpose or plan, which can offer solace and help process the grief and pain.
- Reaching out to friends, family, or support groups and sharing your feelings with others who understand and empathize can be incredibly therapeutic.
- Prioritize your self-care by maintaining healthy routines, getting enough rest, and engaging in activities that bring you

joy. Taking care of your physical and emotional well-being is essential during this time.

- Create meaningful ways to remember your loved one, such as setting up a memorial or volunteering in their memory. These acts can provide a sense of connection and purpose.
  - Make sure you are setting realistic expectations for yourself during this time of year. Some things may need to change, and it is okay to adjust your holiday traditions or take a step back from the usual festivities if it's too painful. Focus on what is manageable and feels right for you in the present moment.
  - Remember that if things get too intense, there are resources and people to help you. You can call or text 988 to reach someone 24 hours a day at the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. You can also reach the National Alliance on Mental Health Help Line Monday through Friday, 10 am – 10 pm, ET, by calling [1-800-950-NAMI](tel:1-800-950-NAMI) (6264) or texting "HelpLine" to 62640.
- Grief during the holiday season can be a challenging and deeply personal experience. It is important to remember that in addition to our faith, there are coping strategies, support systems, and people to help.

### From the Committee on Educational Resources (CER)



*By Rev. Tai Cole,  
CER member  
and 1st, Quincy  
Interim Co-Pastor*



## From Dogwood Acres



By Christy Williams,  
Interim Director

## DWA offers opportunities for remembrance and looking forward

Dogwood Acres is planning to honor the life and ministry of the late former DWA Director Ben Powell by creating an outdoor, covered cooking space where groups can gather no matter what the weather, to create meals and community. Ben loved the natural environment and was first introduced to Dogwood Acres as a forestry consultant. Without his leadership, Dogwood

would not have fared well after Hurricane Michael. He knew what to do to clean up and clear out the devastation in a way that benefitted the property. But as his ministry grew it was first and foremost about hospitality and that included delicious food and fellowship. Plans for a pavilion were already underway.

Donations to Dogwood Acres to honor Ben's ministry will be used to create and enhance this



Ben Powell

gathering space. If you would like to donate to this fund or to the annual fund, you can do so at [www.dogwoodacres.org](http://www.dogwoodacres.org).

The staff at Dogwood Acres is turning its attention to the retreats we are offering in 2024! Look for information on our upcoming:

**Confirmation Retreat** for middle and high school students – January 12-14, \$160 per participant- Registration, housing, food, supplies and activities are included. Join us as we walk alongside young people considering confirming the vows taken at baptism. Sessions will include:

“Why do Presbyterians do that?”, Polity, Church History and Worship. Chaperones or confirmation mentors must be Level 2 background checked – so please register early. **“Pause” A Yoga Retreat for Women** – January 19-21 \$200 per participant – Registration, housing, food, workshops, and yoga sessions. Back by popular demand, this retreat has multiple sessions of yoga interspersed with

hiking, workshops and time to rest – on and off the mat.

**Dogwood Youth Conference** – for middle and high school youth – February 9-11 *Faith over Fear* is our theme for the weekend that will be led by college-aged young adults. \$160 per participant – Registration, housing, food, supplies and activities included. Chaperones must be Level 2 background checked – so please register early.

# The perfect gift.

Through the Christmas Joy Offering, we come together to support past, present and future leaders, embodying God's perfect gift to us, Jesus Christ.



CHRISTMAS JOY  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS

LEADERSHIP, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

DECEMBER 3 - DECEMBER 24

## Our children are both victims and leaders in the climate crisis

When Jesus was born, the world was a vastly different place from now. Conditions were certainly more primitive, but the climate was stable. Children born this December are facing a very uncertain and risky future because of our warming climate. Worldwide, they are the victims of a profoundly fundamental injustice that they did not create.

With the rapid warming we are experiencing, the weather is far more extreme, with record events that now cost us about \$150 billion dollars annually. The climate of ancient Israel had a dependable rainy and dry season. It was located in the “Fertile Crescent” and had excellent conditions for agriculture because of the rivers going through it. Today, it is called the “(In)fertile Crescent” because it has been drying up for the past half-century due to climate change.

The global temperatures for the first eight months of 2023 rank second warmest on record, and some are predicting it will be the warmest year on record. Our summer was the hottest on record.

Last year, a shocking one third of Pakistan was

covered in flood waters, affecting 33 million people, **half of whom were children**. Many of these children already suffered from high malnutrition, poor access to water and sanitation and low school enrollment. The loss of important infrastructure, schools and public health facilities worsened pre-existing inequities, leaving these children even more at risk of hunger and disease. This is just one example of many of how vulnerable children are to the climate crisis.

The good news in all this misery is that our young people are concerned about the climate crisis, want it addressed and are taking action. From a December 2022, Yale Climate Note, [Younger Americans are Growing More Worried About Global Warming](#) we learn that public acceptance and worry about climate change have increased, and are increasing faster among younger Americans aged 18-34. Eighty-one percent of younger Americans accept that climate change is harming us and 82% support regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

One of the best-known spokespersons for climate

justice is a young person, Greta Thunberg. At age 15, she challenged the world to address the climate crisis by skipping school on Fridays, resulting in thousands of children around the world doing the same thing. Perhaps you saw or heard that a local young person, Charlotte Stuart Tilley, stood on the front steps of our old capitol on Fridays holding a sign asking for climate justice.

Today there are many organized youth groups fighting for climate justice. One group is “[Kids Fight Climate Change: Climate Change Education](#)”. Their focus is education and action. Another is our [Children’s Trust](#), which is suing state governments and the federal government for failing to address the climate crisis. They had a recent significant win in Montana.

Our youth are acting and are our hope, but remain vulnerable victims of the climate crisis. Surely our love, compassion and strong sense of justice as people of faith will move us to do more to address the climate crisis to protect them and their future.

## Caring for Creation Notes



By  
Pam McVety,  
Presbytery  
Stewardship  
of Creation  
Enabler  
([pammcvety@hotmail.com](mailto:pammcvety@hotmail.com))

*“The good news...is that our young people are concerned about the climate crisis, want addressed and are taking action.”*

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**Coordinating and Planning  
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**The Panhandle Presbyterian**

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

**In December**

Friday, Dec. 1	<a href="#">Statistical Reporting</a> opens
Saturday, Dec. 2 10 a.m.—5 p.m. CT	1st, DeFuniak Springs Sanctuary open for Christmas Tour of Homes
Sunday, Dec. 3 5 p.m. CT	Trinity, Pensacola Blue Christmas Service
Sunday, Dec. 3 6 p.m. CT Doors open at 5 p.m. CT	Gulf Beach, Panama City Beach " <a href="#">Church and the Arts</a> " Concert: The Ukulele Orchestra of St. Andrews
Monday, Dec. 4 10 a.m. CT/ 11 a.m. ET	Self Development of People (SDOP) Committee
Tuesday, Dec. 5 12 p.m. CT/ 1 p.m. ET	Committee on Educational Resources (CER)
Wednesday, Dec. 6 12-1 p.m. ET	1st, Tallahassee/1st Baptist/ Trinity United Methodist Lunch and Learn: Our Unhoused Neighbors
Thursday, Dec. 7 9 a.m. CT/ 10 a.m. ET	Committee on Mission and Outreach (CMO)
Saturday, Dec. 9 10 a.m.-2 p.m. ET	Christ, Tallahassee Christmas Mission Market
Saturday, Dec. 9 6-8 p.m. CT	Laurel Hill/1st, Crestview Living Nativity
Sunday, Dec. 10 11 a.m. ET	Lafayette, Tallahassee/ 1st UMC of Monticello Christmas Cantata
Sunday, Dec. 10 3-5 p.m. ET	1st, Quincy <a href="#">Retirement Celebration for Lisa Wilder</a>
Monday, Dec. 11 1 p.m. CT/2 p.m. ET	Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)
Tuesday, Dec. 12 2 p.m. CT	Trinity, Pensacola Presbyterian Women's Christmas Tea
Thursday, Dec. 14 2 p.m. CT/3 p.m. ET	Committee on Presbytery Administration (CPA)
Thursday-Sunday, Dec. 14-17 7:30-9:30 p.m. ET	Faith, Tallahassee "A Christmas Carol: A Festival of Holiday Music"
Thursday, Dec. 21 6 p.m. CT	1st, DeFuniak Springs Children & Youth Christmas Play
Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 25 and 26	Presbytery office closed for Christmas
Wednesday, Dec. 27 10 a.m. CT/ 11 a.m. ET	Racial Justice Subcommittee

**Looking ahead**

Monday, January 1	Presbytery office closed for New Year's Day
Tuesday, Jan. 2 12 p.m. CT/ 1 p.m. ET	Committee on Educational Resources (CER)
Thursday, Jan. 4 9 a.m. CT/ 10 a.m. ET	Committee on Mission and Outreach (CMO)
Monday, Jan. 8 10 a.m. CT/ 11 a.m. ET	Self Development of People (SDOP) Committee
Monday, Jan. 8	Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)
Tuesday, Jan. 9 9:30 a.m. CT	Committee on Ministry (COM)
Thursday, Jan. 11	Committee on Presbytery Administration (CPA)
Friday-Sunday,	Dogwood Acres Confirmation Retreat
Monday, Jan. 15	Presbytery office closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
Tuesday, Jan. 16 10 a.m. CT/ 11 a.m. ET	Committee on Congregational Discernment (CCD)
Thursday, Jan. 18 6 p.m. CT/7 p.m. ET	Statistical Reporting workshop with Stated Clerk Jeannie Dixon via Zoom
Friday-Sunday, Jan. 19-21	Dogwood Acres " <a href="#">Pause</a> " Women's Yoga and Mindfulness Retreat
Wednesday, Jan. 24 10 a.m. CT/ 11 a.m. ET	Racial Justice Subcommittee
Thursday, Jan. 25 9:30 a.m. CT/ 10:30 a.m. ET	Coordinating and Planning Commission (CPC)

