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# The Panhandle Presbyterian

*A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida*



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## Season offers chances for having impact

**A**s we enter December, we are living in what many call the happiest time of the year. Between Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, and Stewardship campaigns (not necessarily in that order), it is no surprise that people are happy as the year comes to an end. There are chances to give thanks, to acknowledge new beginnings, and to give back with love. What is your church doing as we finish 2025?

Hopefully, you are reflecting on the ways the Presbytery has stepped up in love this last year. From packing hurricane buckets, to giving out resources for enhancing a church's Advent season, to helping ministers and congregations weave their way through difficult times, the Presbytery has definitely given back.

Churches that step into the love and hope of Jesus Christ and realize that they can do more with others than alone, should never wonder what the Presbytery has done for them. We are a connectional body that must continue to ask, not what can be done for us, but instead, what can we do for one another, and for the Presbytery, so that the impact we make extends beyond our sanctuary walls. The first step

for this is to make sure your congregation turns in their 2026 Shared Support pledge, doing all that you can to meet or exceed your ask amount. When we put our whole heart into it, we have a chance to do something that generations have struggled to do.

Throughout biblical history, people have not always lived the journey of faith with anticipation for what is to come. Through every generation, people have believed that Christ was going to return, and it did not happen. Many have lost faith because of things not happening the way they wanted. But this is not the message of scripture that leads to a future filled with hope.

In the Book of Revelation, the message that we continually read about is keeping faith in the midst of trouble. Scripture is full of messages that people need to hear to know that a brighter future is ahead, but we must remain faithful – loving God and loving one another. I pray this is what we are doing for the Lord, as a Presbytery, especially with our giving.

Are people seeing a hopeful tomorrow in your journey of faith? In the way you walk, talk, and give –

***Continues on page 2***

## From our Stated Clerk



By  
**Rev. Eric Spoon**

*“Scripture is full of messages that people need to hear to know that a brighter future is ahead, but we must remain faithful – loving God and loving one another.”*

**Continued from front**

Is your life an example of Christ's love for you and the world, that shows you are remaining faithful through it all? Not everything in life must be

doom and gloom, and we have the gift and calling to show the world the positives of Christianity. We just have to make it happen!

Let's do what others have had a hard time doing and trust in

God's timing and love. The Presbytery of Florida is here for a purpose – Let's make it known! In all that your congregation does: give big, give boldly, and give back for a God who loves you and this world!

# THE LADDER WITHIN

## OUR CREATIVE PATH TO RESILIENCE

### WOMEN'S RETREAT 2026



TRINITY  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

RETREAT LEADER  
REV. JEAN HOMRIGHAUSEN

COME DEEPEN YOUR INNER LIFE IN GOD  
THROUGH SPIRITUAL PRACTICES, CREATIVITY  
AND ART FOLLOWING THE LIFE OF JACOB.

Friday, January 23, 5:30 PM  
through Saturday, January 24, 7 PM

**\$75**

Registration begins Dec. 7th

Includes Friday evening Tapas,  
Saturday Lunch and Creative Supplies

*Click Here*



Springhill Suites at  
Pensacola Beach



*Click Here*

to Book your room



## Amid transitions, God's silence provides for preparation

*As the season of Advent invites us to slow down, we pause to honor those who are discerning, seeking or preparing for a new call. The Ministry of Pastoral Transitions offers this reflection for all who find themselves waiting — trusting that God's next step is already in motion.*

Advent begins not with arrival, but with ache. We light candles in the shadows and whisper prayers that sound more like questions: When, O God? Where, O Lord? How long must we wait to know what comes next?

For ministers between calls and congregations between pastors, this season of watching and wondering is not a pause in ministry — It **is** ministry. Waiting is not idleness. It is holy ground where God's next act is quietly rehearsing itself in the wings.

Thomas Long once wrote that faith is learned in the waiting rooms of

life. Those who sit there — résumés in hand, hearts both weary and open — often discover that God's silence is not absence, but preparation. Anna Carter Florence reminds us that when we “preach/live the verbs”, we notice that, even in the stillness, God moves. God prepares. God sends. And those in transition are not lost; they are being readied.

Will Willimon might chuckle here and say, “If you want to make God laugh, tell God your five-year plan.” But beneath the humor lies gospel truth: our calling is not a career ladder, but a pilgrimage. We don't climb it — We're carried along by grace.

Advent teaches us to bless the unknowing. To trust that the God who came as an infant still comes quietly — through search committees, prayerful discernment, and unexpected phone calls that change everything.

To those discerning a new call: Do not mistake

this waiting for delay. The star is already rising beyond the horizon of your uncertainty. To those serving in the liminal spaces of presbytery work, interim roles, and pastoral searches: Remember that you stand midwifing the next chapter of God's unfolding story.

As we draw near to Bethlehem, may we carry this truth like a lantern — That the One we seek is already seeking us. That our waiting is not wasted. That the call of God, when it comes, will sound not like a trumpet, but like a heartbeat — steady, sure, and alive with promise.

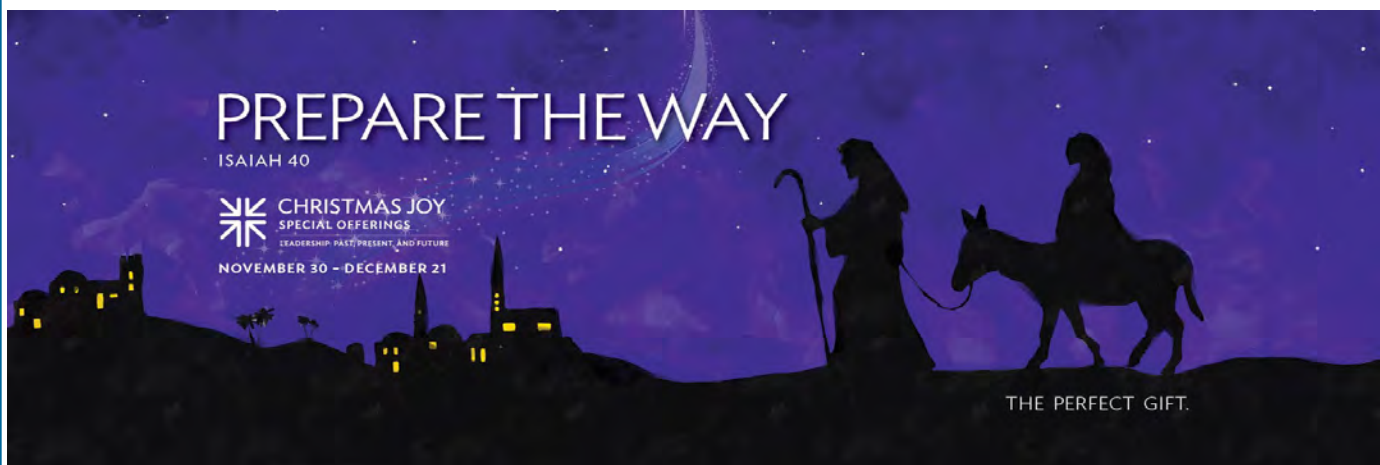
*During this Advent, may every pastor and congregation in discernment find peace in the waiting. May your stillness become your strength, your questions become your prayers, and your prayers become the pathway by which Christ is born anew — both in you and through you.*

## From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



*By Rev. Blair Beaver,  
MPT Vice Moderator  
and 1st, Marianna  
Pastor*

*“Waiting is not idleness. It is holy ground where God's next act is quietly rehearsing itself in the wings.”*



**From the  
Ministry of  
New  
Congregation  
Formation  
(MNCF)**



*By Rev. Dr.  
Nicole Richardson,  
Tide and Table  
New Presbyterian  
Worshipping  
Community Pastor*

*"...pauses  
reminded me  
that new ministries  
are shaped  
as much by  
waiting as  
by momentum."*

**Seed grant and new Wisdom Lab good news from NWC**

**G**race and peace to you as we move toward Advent. November has been a slower, quieter month for Tide & Table—a month of unexpected pauses, holy recalibration, and gentle growth beneath the surface.

The month began with a long-planned scuba diving trip to Belize, a time of deep rest, beauty, and renewing connection to creation. Returning home, I quickly discovered that our scheduled **TidePath** sunrise labyrinth had to be canceled due to chilly temperatures.

That unexpected change set the tone for the month: several key meetings I had hoped would move us forward ended up being rescheduled due to others' unavailability. I'll be honest—this was discouraging at times. And yet, these pauses reminded me that new ministries are shaped as much by waiting as by momentum.

One piece of truly joyful news: **Tide & Table received the \$10,000 Seed Grant from the PC(USA) 1001 New Worshipping Communities Initiative.** This required a bit of extra work after I discovered that the original June application never made it to the right



place due to a technical glitch. But the persistence paid off, and this support will help us continue building a spiritually grounded, justice-oriented community along the coast.

In the rhythms of service, I was grateful to volunteer with **Caring & Sharing** this month. And after seven weeks of rich conversation and exploration, **The Wisdom Lab concluded in November.** This second iteration—pairing Job with *You're Not Listening* by Kate Murphy—was an extraordinary experience with the participants. I'm already preparing for the next year's first installment of Wisdom Lab, which will likely pair a biography with Scripture. My hope is to choose a life story that challenges our worldview and expands our capacity to become deeper, more compassionate witnesses to our own faith.

I also had the privilege of filling the pulpit twice at **First Presbyterian, Lynn Haven**, and look forward to preaching twice more in December, as well as leading their Christmas Eve service. Preaching

during Advent always feels like a homecoming.

Throughout the month, I continued writing my weekly Substack blog, which has become a surprisingly grounding spiritual practice. As for December programming, I'm still discerning whether to schedule an event or allow the month to be a season of listening and rest.

Finally, for pastors and congregations wondering how Tide & Table might support their ministries, here are a few offerings available this winter:

● **Portable Practices:**

labyrinth in the fellowship hall, yoga worship, coffee & contemplation, Stations of Creation walks

● **Retreats:** half-day Sabbath Labs, full-day or overnight mini-sabbaticals, seasonal retreats

● **Clergy Care:** pastor reset days, brief monthly "breath calls," renewal cohorts, and 1:1 integrative coaching

Thank you for your prayers, encouragement, and partnership as Tide & Table continues to take shape—slowly, faithfully, and with hope.

## Lettuce not waste

**L**ove that clever “Lettuce” title and wish I had thought of it. But I copied it from an [article](#) about how food waste contributes to climate change. During the holidays, we certainly create a lot of food waste, so this is a good topic to learn more about.

The article reports that the U. S. Department of Agriculture estimates that over one-third of the food produced in this country is never eaten, wasting resources used to produce, transport, process and distribute it, and much of it is sent to landfills, where it breaks down and generates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. About one-fourth of municipal solid waste in landfills is food that produce an estimated 58 percent of the methane emissions from these landfills.

Double ouch, because that is a startling statistic, given that so many people are hungry and in need of food assistance, and in light of our increasing carbon emissions.

So, preventing waste and proper disposal of waste are good topics to know more about. Let's begin with preventing food waste altogether. We really should focus more on what and how we plan our meals and how much we purchase and try to make sure that we eat it all.

Leftovers are my



favorites, because they help me not have to plan and cook a different meal every night. Food scraps, like avocado skins, apple cores, orange skins and carrot peels can be composted, or as we do, tossed in the woods to share with the critters. That which is not eaten eventually turns into soil.

Our disposal area provides the extra bonus of providing us with tomato and citrus plants, squash and even pumpkin vines. If we really composted it, we would produce rich potting soil. I know some worry about attracting critters, but if they are coming, it is in the dead of night when we are not outside.

The Environmental Protection Agency provides the above chart, which shows the preferred ways to dispose of food waste. The worst things to do with it are to

wash it down the drain,  
put it in the garbage to  
end up in a landfill or  
burn it.

To read more about food disposal and waste check out these articles: [\*From Field to Bin: The Environmental Impacts of US Food Waste Management Pathways\*](#) and [\*From Farm to Kitchen: The Environmental Impacts of U. S. Food Waste.\*](#)

So, as you decorate your home for Christmas, wrap presents, plan festive meals, and celebrate Advent, think about ways that you can reduce your food waste.

## Caring for Creation



*By  
Pam McVety,  
Presbytery  
Stewardship  
of Creation  
Enabler*

*“The U. S. Department of Agriculture estimates that over one-third of the food produced in this country is never eaten...”*





# DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp  
Chipley, FL

## Confirmation Retreat 2026

A supplement to your Confirmation class

Church History

the Bible

Your Faith



Your Church

January 9-11

Worship

Church Polity

### For Middle and High School Youth and their Leaders

This weekend retreat is designed to enhance the confirmation experience for any middle or high school student who is currently enrolled in a confirmation class, has recently completed confirmation, or is about to begin the journey — along with their adult mentors, educators, or pastors.

Join us for a time of faith exploration, fellowship, and fun in the beautiful setting of Dogwood Acres!

Registration  
opens  
November  
15th

When: January 9-11

Where: Dogwood Acres

Who: Middle and High  
School Youth and  
their leaders

Cost: \$180

## Put your feet up and stay awhile at Dogwood Acres



As I visit churches and introduce myself as the director at Dogwood Acres, people almost always respond with a story – one about their children, grandchildren, or children in their church attending summer camp and having a wonderful time. Their first image is of children being happy campers on a hot summer day. And truly, those weeks when we welcome elementary, middle and high school campers are some of our favorites. There is nothing like the sound of children's giggles coming from our hammocks or experiencing the hush when everyone lies down on a parachute to watch shooting stars over Kelly Field. These moments are an important part of Dogwood's identity – but they are only one part of our story.

In fact, Dogwood Acres hosts more adults through the year than we do children or youth. In 2025 alone, we welcomed 15 adult retreat groups – more than 400 adults – to find rest and renewal on our site. This number doesn't include the good folks who come to chaperone youth retreats or serve as worship leaders or nursing staff. About 8 of these adult groups return every year! When I look back over the year, the images that come to mind are:

- Kathy (73), smiling as she meets us on the orange trail after hiking the blue trail.
- Grier (28), arriving at breakfast on her first morning, describing the stunning beauty she saw walking from her cabin.
- Glenn (58), laughing around the fire with people he met only hours earlier.

- Sue and Jana, eyes lifted to the trees, searching for birds.
- Dan kayaking down the stream.
- Twenty “canoe women” from Virginia telling Eric this is the best place they've stayed in a decade.
- Sheldon walking the labyrinth, Anna journaling, and the sounds of singing, praying, and worship echoing across the grounds.

We are not a spa or a luxury resort. But, if you join us for a weekend, you will be fed delicious meals, surrounded by stillness and beauty, welcomed into fellowship, and given space for true rest. And chances are, you'll want to come back.

### From the Ministry of Dogwood Acres (MDWA)



By Christy Williams,  
DWA Director

*“...Dogwood Acres hosts more adults through the year than we do children or youth.”*



## From the Ministry of Representation (MR)



*By Rich Kangas,  
MR Moderator  
and 1st, Lynn Haven  
Ruling Elder*

## Presbytery ministry volunteer opportunities abound

These are some ramblings about people very dear to us in the Ministry of Representation: the folks who volunteer at our presbytery. Right now, it seems like it is “raining vacancies” in the various Presbytery ministries. Vacancies are popping up all over the place.

We have vacancies in the new class 2029 appearing, also some

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

vacancies in class 2027, and class 2028, in the ministries of the Presbytery. There are a ton of reasons for these vacancies, but the bottom line is, we need to fill these voids. The Ministry of

Congregational and Pastoral Care, Ministry of Leadership Development, Ministry of New Congregation Formation, Ministry of Pastoral Transitions and the Ministry of Presbytery Operations can all use help.

People wishing to make things happen, please contact me at kangas265@gmail.com or 850-832-6577. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Save the  
Date!*



*You're Invited!*

*Christmas Eve  
Candlelight Service of  
Lessons and Carols*

*Wednesday, 12/24 at 6:00pm*

*FPC of Havana*  
*213 First St. NE*



*Christmas  
Eve Service*

Gretna and Woodland Presbyterian Churches Invite You  
To Their Traditional Service at an Untraditional Time

December 24 at 11:00 AM  
623 Church St. Gretna, Florida



## MLD tasked with five essential areas of work

**“H**e himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”  
**Ephesians 4:11-12.**

The Presbytery’s Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD) has many responsibilities with which we are charged. Our work involves equipping, training, and resourcing congregational leaders to enhance their congregational ministries to serve the Presbytery of Florida and the greater church.

To that end, we are charged with providing educational opportunities to equip and strengthen the Presbytery and congregational leaders to further the ministries within their congregation during the “Equipping Our Congregations”

segment at each Presbytery meeting.

Of paramount importance within the work of our committee is the direction of those under care of the Presbytery seeking ordination as Ministers of Word and Sacrament in preparation for ministry and to counsel with pastors and sessions regarding such persons pursuing avenues for ministry. We assign liaisons to each inquirer and candidate to pray for, mentor, and guide them toward the process of ordination and ordered ministry.

We also work to train and equip also those individuals seeking to serve our Presbytery as Commissioned Ruling Elders and/or Authorized Ruling Elders for the sacraments. This meets a need in our underserved churches unable to provide the resources for ordained ministry.

In the Mission and

Outreach area, MLD works to encourage congregations to facilitate new mission endeavors around common and shared mission interests.

We do this through recommending to the Ministry Coordinating Council the expenditures of restricted funds from the Emergency Relief Fund, Two Cents a Meal Hunger Fund, Peacemaking Fund, and the Self Development of People Fund. Applications for these funds are [on the Presbytery website](#).

Our fourth area of work involves Racial Justice. This includes promoting an awareness of the Presbytery’s racial justice policy and education on a regular basis of the nature and consequences of racism and effective approaches to antiracism.

Finally, we serve as directors on the Florida Presbyterian Disaster Network (FLAPDAN) along with our sister Florida Presbyteries to prepare for, and provide coordinated relief, when natural disaster strikes.

We covet the prayers of all of our member churches in the work we do.

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

**Isaiah 6:8**

## From the Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)



*By Dr. Greg Seltzer,  
MLD member and  
Northminster,  
Pensacola  
Commissioned  
Ruling Elder*

*“Our work involves equipping, training, and resourcing congregational leaders to enhance their congregational ministries ...”*

**Gloria Deo**  
by Benjamin Harlan and orchestrated by John Purifoy  
**A Service of Lessons & Carols**  
featuring Chamber Orchestra of UWF students  
& Enhanced Trinity Choir  
**+ Sunday  
December 7th  
10:30 AM**  
 **TRINITY**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**PRESBYTERY  
OF FLORIDA**

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All views expressed in this  
publication are not necessarily  
endorsed by the Presbytery  
of Florida as a whole,  
as we remember  
"God alone is Lord of the  
conscience." (F-3.0101)

*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



## DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp  
Chipley, FL

### Retreats 2026

Confirmation Retreat  
January 9-11  
Dogwood Youth Conference  
February 6-8  
Pause Yoga Retreat  
February 27 - March 1  
Dogwood Men's Retreat  
March 6-8



### Summer 2026

High School Week  
June 21-26  
Intro/Discovery/Adventure Week 1  
July 5-10  
Intro/Discovery/Adventure Week 2  
July 12-17