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# The Panhandle Presbyterian

*A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida*



Volume 9, Issue 1

January 2026

From our  
Stated Clerk



By  
**Rev. Eric Spoon**

*"In 2026,  
let this be  
your challenge  
to hold nothing  
back..."*

## NOW is the time to step up and serve

Since we are starting a new year, I want to start on the right foot, so here is a New Year's joke! What's a spider's New Year's resolution? To spend less time on the web.

And now that I have your attention, spending less time focused on the wrong places is what I pray this year will be all about. That is, I hope we will all spend less time on the web (or electronics) and more time focused on being the Presbytery and serving the Lord. And the first step toward doing this is to quickly get your Annual Statistical Report done so you can get off your computer and back to showing the love of Jesus Christ. Have questions about how to get this done quickly, and sooner rather than later, [reach out to me today!](#)

Now, as important as the Annual Statistical Report is – and I cannot stress it enough to get it done early – this is not all that this Presbytery is about. I hope that we all realize there is more to life than spending all day, every day, looking at our electronics, because there are people all around us who need our help. And I hope that we realize that there is more to life than just stressing about what is going on in the

Presbytery. Now is the chance to step up and make things better for all (No more just talking the talk, now it is time to walk the walk).

It is no secret that it seems like, at every Presbytery meeting, there is a request for more people to serve. So why aren't you? If you are serving, thank you! If you are not, is the reason you are not serving because you are waiting for an invitation to do so? Consider this your invitation to [reach out to me](#) (or the [Ministry on Representation](#)) and tell me (or them) where you think you can best be utilized. Unfortunately, I do not know everyone and even less about everyone's strengths, so I need you to tell me what you can do and where you can do it. And if you are unfamiliar with our ministries, tell me (or us) that, and we will be happy to tell you all about them!

We are starting a new calendar year, and a new Presbytery year also is beginning. It is time to get those Annual Statistical Reports completed; to turn off your computer, cell phone, or tablet; and go and get involved by volunteering to serve in the Presbytery and by meeting one another.

**Continues on page 2**

**Continued from front**

In 2026, let this be your challenge to hold nothing back for how you can do more for the

Presbytery of Florida. No more excuses that no one asked you, because I am asking you now. Get those Annual Statistical Reports in, roll up your sleeves,

and let's get to work building this Presbytery now through serving for generations to come.

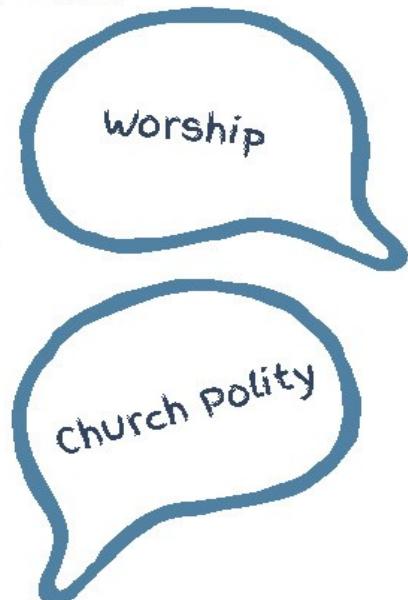
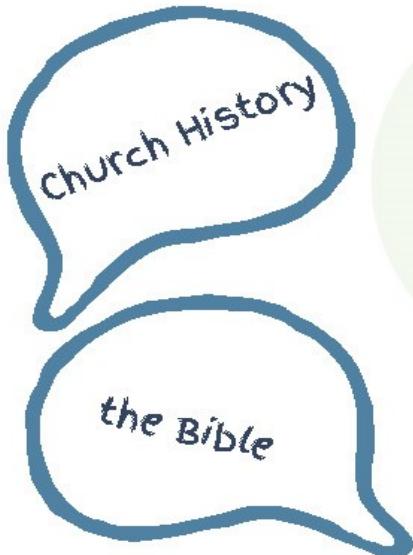


# DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp  
Chipley, FL

## Confirmation Retreat 2026

A supplement to your Confirmation class



January 9-11

### 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

## MPT shares update on congregations navigating transitions

**A**s we step into a new year, the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT) offers this update on the congregations and colleagues across our presbytery who are navigating seasons of discernment and change. January invites all of us to pause, breathe, and listen again for the quiet guidance of God's Spirit.

In moments of transition, this listening becomes especially important. Churches and ministers alike discover that God often does transformative work in the in-between seasons where clarity grows, gifts emerge, and fresh callings take shape.

Several congregations in our presbytery continue faithful work within the pastoral search and transition process. We invite you to hold them in prayer as they seek renewed direction and as they prepare their hearts for the next chapter of leadership.

**First Presbyterian Church, Quincy** continues a careful and prayerful search process.

Pray for unity among leaders, clarity for the PNC, and encouragement for the congregation as they remain open to the pastor God is calling to them.

**Trinity Presbyterian Church, Pensacola** enters the new year with hopeful discernment. Pray for steady progress in their search, for patience during conversations and interviews, and for a shared vision of future ministry.

**First Presbyterian Church, Lynn Haven** is reflecting on their mission and identity as they move forward. Pray for wisdom in decision-making and the strengthening of lay leadership during this important season.

**Parkway Presbyterian Church, Panama City** continues to live out its commitment to mission and hospitality. Pray for energy and imagination as they explore pastoral leadership options and as they listen for God's direction.

**First Presbyterian Church, Tallahassee** begins a significant season of transition. Pray for their leaders and PNC as they enter the early stages of the process, and for the congregation's sense of peace and openness to what lies ahead.

We also remember all ministers who are **seeking a call, in transition, or discerning vocational change**. Whether concluding an interim role, entering retirement, or actively interviewing, ministers in motion carry both hope and uncertainty. Pray that they may feel supported by this presbytery and surrounded by a community that honors their gifts and encourages their next faithful step.

As 2026 unfolds, may we approach every transition with trust. God continues to guide, to renew, and to provide. Let us commit ourselves to praying for one another and to walking alongside each congregation and minister who is listening for God's next word of calling.

## From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



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

*“January invites all of us to pause, breathe, and listen again for the quiet guidance of God’s spirit.”*

**Save the date!**



## From the Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)



*By Rev.  
Cathy Mooney,  
MLD Moderator and  
1st, DeFuniak Springs  
Pastor*

*"The Presbytery of Florida has a number of small congregations that can and do benefit from the leadership of a CRE."*

### So—Who are CREs?

**C**ommissioned Ruling Elders, or CREs, are Ruling Elders who have undergone special training to serve (usually part-time) in mostly rural or small congregations. They are not ordained as Teaching Elders but commissioned to specific pastoral functions.

The Presbytery of Florida has a number of small congregations that can and do benefit from the leadership of a CRE. Elders who feel a special call from God to do more, to serve in a larger way can explore that call through the CRE program.

The CRE relationship is between the Presbytery, the Church in which they serve, and God. They are commissioned for a

particular place and for a particular time.

According to the Book of Order, training for the CRE is left up to each presbytery to set their standards. In The Presbytery of Florida, we recommend **Pathways**, a program lead by Union Presbyterian Seminary. This program includes ten foundational courses, each designed to equip the CRE in the various parts of pastoral leadership.

#### What exactly does the CRE do?

When commissioned to a particular church, the CRE:

► Leads worship and preaches, carrying out the responsibilities of planning worship and properly preparing to preach.

- Provides pastoral care and nurture for their congregation.
- Works with other CREs and ministers in the Presbytery, keeping the connection alive for their congregation.

The trained CRE can also function as pulpit supply when they are between commissions.

#### How does one become a CRE?

- Acknowledge a call from God to serve the church in this way.
- Speak to your church session and get their approval/recommendation for this kind of leadership
- Take the session recommendation to the Presbytery's Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD) for approval and direction and begin the process of coursework.

The Presbytery will assign a mentor, and the MLD will check in with you every now and then to make sure you are moving through the process. There are some other things that need to be done along the way, such as a psychological evaluation and interviews with the Ministry of Leadership Development.

If you believe you are called to this particular ministry, please reach out to the Ministry of Leadership Development at [cathymooney@yahoo.com](mailto:cathymooney@yahoo.com). We meet monthly on the second Monday of the month.



**SAVANNAH PRESBYTERY'S  
J. RICHARD BASS  
School of the Laity**

**MARCH 7-8, 2026**

**Elective Course:**

**SERMON ON THE MOUNT:**

**A VISION OF RADICAL DISCIPLESHP AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY**

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is perhaps the best example of Jesus' core teachings in the gospels, and yet occupies almost no place in the historic creeds or practical Christian life today. It is often deemed high-minded and idealistic, but impractical. In this class series, we will recover this neglected text's radical vision for discipleship and consider its powerful present-day relevance for building alternative, counter-cultural communities of faithful resistance.

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**Suggested Readings:**

- Read Matthew 5-7 carefully and make notes on what thoughts and questions arise.
- Amy-Jill Levine — *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven* (Abingdon Press, 2020)

[www.savannahpresbytery.org/sol](http://www.savannahpresbytery.org/sol)



**Rev. Tom Buchanan**  
Covenant Presbyterian Church  
Athens, GA

## Creation Care overtures coming to February presbytery meeting

We begin the new year on a serious note because, once again, for the sixth time, an overture – “Changing Course for a Green Future” – will ask the denomination to remove all its money from the fossil fuel industry. In addition, a second overture, “The Green Future Endowment Fund” is intended to help victims of the climate crisis. They were written under [Presbyterians for Earth Care](#) auspices by Reverend Fred Milligan, Drew Hill (one of our very impressive young leaders) and me.

Why do we persist in asking the denomination to stop supporting the fossil fuel industry, and now, to help the climate crisis victims? For the same reason that, ten years ago, the world came together and signed the [Paris Climate Agreement](#). For the same reason that 62 faith institutions, in November at COP30, announced fossil fuel divestment commitments. For the same reason that, last July, the [International Court of Justice](#) issued a landmark advisory opinion stating that the states (countries) have legally binding obligations under international law to prevent harm from climate change. For the same reason that world faith leaders participated in a [Global Ethical](#)

[Stocktake for Climate Action](#) last fall and demanded that moral leadership match scientific urgency.

The climate crisis is accelerating, as are the harms it's causing. According to [Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations](#), the world has failed to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 C.

Our denomination's investments are associated with these harms. There is an urgency to addressing the climate crisis that is not matched by the denomination's many responses to it. The unfortunate reality is that the world must phase out the use of fossil fuels quickly. Our more than a decade of talking to the industry may have changed a company process here or there, but it has not convinced the industry to phase out fossil fuels production.

We ask in “Changing Course for a Green Future” for the denomination to declare that our ongoing investments in the fossil fuel industry are incompatible with our mission and goals. We commend the Presbyterian Foundation and the Board of Pensions for reducing the percentage of their fossil fuel investments, and we call on them to divest fully, to proscribe future

fossil fuel investments and to seek out viable renewable energy investments.

Our second overture calls for the establishment of a Design Team to develop a Green Future Endowment Fund proposal to be brought back to the 2028 GA. The fund's purpose is to provide grants to help cut carbon emissions and address the loss and damage suffered by marginalized communities and natural habitats within the U. S. and abroad as a result of climate change.

These overtures are about change and repentance. Repentance requires a change of direction and is more than expressing sorrow for our past actions. It is a means of taking our confession of causing harm seriously with real action that matches the urgency of the science and making amends.

I strongly encourage you to read these [overtures](#). They will be presented at the February Presbytery meeting for concurrence.

### Caring for Creation



By  
Pam McVety,  
Presbytery  
Stewardship  
of Creation  
Enabler

*“There is an urgency to addressing the climate crisis that is not matched by the denomination's many responses to it.”*

**From the  
Ministry of  
Representation  
(MR)**



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

*“Remember, being involved has its own rewards.”*

**All Presbytery's ministries now needing volunteers**

We just finished celebrating Advent, Christmas and bringing in the New Year, and that time of year creates its own distinctive sounds. But, as those sounds fade, the new year starts to create its own sound. Now, the Ministry of Representation is praying for the sound of Presbytery members signing up to fill vacancies on Presbytery ministries.

All ministries have a need for candidates. Here's a list of the ministries and a brief summary of their tasks:

**Ministry of Congregational and Pastoral Care**

(MCPC) – Assist in congregational health and viability by providing resources for the best practices of congregational health, vitality, discernment of ongoing and future ministry direction.

**Ministry of Leadership and Development** (MLD) – Provide guidance and resources for a person to enter the Ministry or become a Commissioned Ruling Elder, provide education opportunities to equip and strengthen all church leaders in their ministries.

**Ministry of New Congregation Formation** (MNCF) – Forming and implementing plans for

location funding and developing new congregations and worshipping communities. Yoking congregations within the Presbytery bounds.

**Ministry of Pastoral Transitions** (MPT) – Works with terms of call for ministers, contracts for interim pastors, approve calls of ministers, submit requests for minister retirement, examine and review ministers seeking entry to the Presbytery.

**Ministry of Presbytery Operations** (MPO) – Support Presbytery in

developing generosity and stewardship in our shared ministry and individual congregations, prepare, adopt and monitor our annual budget, assist congregations in buying and selling or mortgaging church property.

Remember, being involved has its own rewards. You can contact me at [kangas265@gmail.com](mailto:kangas265@gmail.com) or 850-832-6577. I look forward to hearing from you.

**Pastor Reset Hour:  
Between the Seasons**  
**Tuesday, February 3, 2026 | 12:00–1:00 PM Central (Zoom)**

This guided hour is designed for pastors standing between Christmas and Lent. Together we'll move through a gentle threshold practice to:

- release what Christmas required of you
- tend to your body after a season of giving
- listen for what needs to be carried—or left behind—before Ash Wednesday

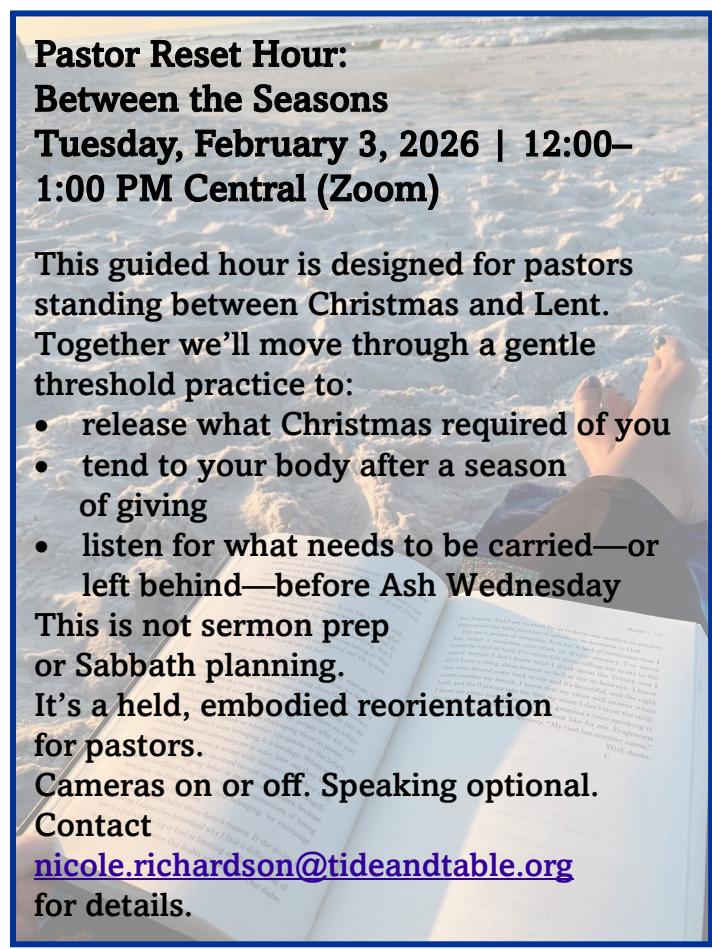
This is not sermon prep or Sabbath planning.

It's a held, embodied reorientation for pastors.

Cameras on or off. Speaking optional. Contact

[nicole.richardson@tideandtable.org](mailto:nicole.richardson@tideandtable.org)

for details.



## "Scouts' honor" brings DWA improvement projects

Can you hear the drills and hammers? The end of 2025 was a flurry of activity; we are excited to greet 2026 with new dining hall bathrooms, a new walk-in cooler, an outdoor water station, a new boardwalk connection and a refurbished archery range! We are grateful to the good folks of First Presbyterian Church, Quincy, for their generosity with our bathroom and kitchen projects. We are also so pleased that two of our campers-turned-resource summer staffers chose Dogwood Acres as the site for their Eagle Scout projects.

Ford Lancaster, from Pensacola, and Tommy Dailey, from Tallahassee, have both attended Dogwood Acres as campers throughout their growing up. As older high school students, they applied to be part of our summer resource staff and participate on the Presbytery Youth Council (PYC). As they neared the time to consider their Eagle Scout project, each of them thought about ways they could complete the requirements for the rank of Eagle Scout while also serving Dogwood. We were excited to work with both on their ideas to improve our property.

Ford's project was to build another section of boardwalk to connect



Cabin 3 to the main boardwalk. This would enable those with limited mobility to access all the primary community buildings and five living spaces without worrying about uneven ground. His experience at summer camp also made him aware of the need for a convenient water station outside of the dining room. In a weekend, Ford and his crew were able to complete both projects.

Tommy's project was to rebuild the archery range area by removing old fencing and then installing new, taller fencing, building two new target frames and installing a back fence with netting to catch arrows before they get lost in the woods. Tommy and his crew came out for full workdays in December to complete this project in time for our busy winter season with retreat groups. Like Ford, Tommy's service on this summer's resource staff gave him the creative idea of how to enhance campers' experiences while at Dogwood.

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



*By Christy Williams,  
DWA Director*

*"We appreciate all the ways our ministry partners find to serve God by supporting Dogwood Acres."*

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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)

**1st Wednesday  
SACK Lunch Conversation**

**(South Atlantic Community Knowledge)**

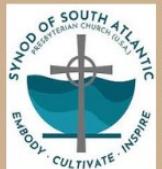
**A monthly zoom for sharing across the Synod!**



**Join, learn and share experience, resources, and best practices on a new topic each month**

**January 7 - COM Leaders**

To register: scan the QR Code or visit [synodofsouthatlantic.org](http://synodofsouthatlantic.org)



**COME AND SEE US**

**IN 2026**

**Presbytery 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**

