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Inside this issue:

- Our stated clerk 3
- Dogwood Acres 4
- Caring for Creation 5
- Ministry of Representation (MR) 6
- Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT) 7

The Panhandle Presbyterian

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Presbytery
of Florida
Furthering the Ministry
of Jesus Christ in Northwest Florida

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Panhandle long-term recovery ongoing

Hurricane Helene hit Florida's Big Bend in September 2024 as a category 4 storm. While the storm's impact was significant, the damage Helene caused in Florida was overshadowed by the strong winds and widespread causing widespread devastation in the southern Appalachians.

The churches and congregations in our presbytery received only minor damage from Helene, but the presbytery, as a whole, did not escape unscathed. Madison County, on the eastern edge of our presbytery, received substantial damage. In part, being a fairly rural county, with a population density of about 25 people per square mile, (Leon County is around 450 people per square mile), the damage was not widely reported.

Currently, there are no



Presbyterian churches in the county. But working with Florida Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Network (FLAPDAN) Executive Director Kathy Broyard, the presbytery was able to secure a mid-council grant from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) to assist a non-profit organization, Starfish Disaster Recovery, with their short-term recovery efforts.

Starfish worked from September and into

Continues on page 2

From the Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)



*By Tim Crawford,
Florida Presbyterian
Disaster Assistance
Network (FLAPDAN)
Board Member and
1st, Crestview
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*"...this is to let you
know ...your gifts
make all the
difference in
the world to
those in need."*

Called Presbytery Meeting

Wednesday, April 8 • 9:30 a.m. CDT/10:30 a.m. EDT

At Dogwood Acres and via Zoom

To consider a request from the Equipping Presbyter/Stated Clerk Search Committee and take action on their report and recommendation for filling the position of Equipping Presbyter/Stated Clerk

Registration required for Zoom participation: [Register here](#)



Continued from front

early 2025 clearing downed trees and removing debris at individual homes throughout Madison County and the Cherry Lake 4-H Camp North of Madison, Florida, where more than 30 trees were destroyed. Starfish even coordinated with a local sawmill to turn some of the centuries-old, downed hardwoods into valuable lumber that would have otherwise gone to waste.

Starfish Disaster Recovery’s work of clearing downed trees and debris is now complete; their work, however, is not. Being a member of Florida VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters), Starfish transitioned their short-term efforts to long-term recovery, working closely with local county emergency management and the Long-Term Recovery Group formed in the

aftermath of the hurricane.

Serving in the roles of case management and volunteer management, they are also making repairs on homes and completing other unmet needs for their clients in the county. To help support this continuing long-term work, FLAPDAN and the presbytery are working with PDA to secure a second grant. Shown here are photos of some of the recent recovery work Starfish has completed.

So, you may ask, “Why is this information important?” This is



significant because it is an example of each and every hurricane recovery effort. It is the people like church work groups that some of you have participated in and organizations like Starfish Disaster Recovery who work – sometimes for years– after the weather reporters and news teams have moved on to the next big story.

It is about all those helping people put their lives back together after a disaster. And most importantly, this is to let you know, when you give generously to organizations like PDA, FLAPDAN, and others, your gifts make all the difference in the world to those in need.

We still have some time before the next hurricane season begins. Let’s pray for another year of fair skies and calm winds. But should the worst happen, know there are those ready, willing, and able to help put things back together.



WE ARE THERE

One Great Hour of Sharing is the single, largest way that Presbyterians come together every year to work for justice, resilience, and sustainability.

PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Want to enliven Presbytery meetings? Try Ministry service

Recently, someone in this presbytery informed me that another individual had expressed to them that Presbytery of Florida meetings are dull. Unfortunately, I was unable to press them on why the person felt this way (or even with whom they were speaking). But, to be honest, there was a time when I probably would have shared the sentiment.

But, since this conversation, I have been wondering what exactly makes our meetings appear “dull” to some people and why, at one time, I felt the same way. And after attending at least four Ministry meetings a month for the last several months, it occurred to me – A Presbytery meeting may

feel dull because the Ministry meetings are so active and lively. And if you have not attended a Ministry meeting recently, then you would not know that much of the work is done before a Presbytery meeting ever happens.

If you did not catch it from the Ministry of Representation’s report at our February 2026 Presbytery meeting, several of our Presbytery Ministries need volunteers, and now is the time for you to volunteer, not wait to be asked. Now is the time for you to step up and get into the action instead of wondering why you need to come to a Presbytery meeting where you feel like nothing happens. Our Ministry meetings handle so much of the

business on behalf of the Presbytery. They plan budgets, find session moderators, help fill vacant pulpits, work with churches without leadership, walk the journey of ordination with those hoping to one day become a minister or certified ruling elder, and do so much more. They work hard and because they work hard, often those at the Presbytery meetings do not have to.

Our new Presbytery year is underway, and now is the time to get motivated and start serving on the smaller level instead of sitting back and complaining about what is or is not happening on the larger scale. We all know that it is easy to complain about what is going on when we are not doing anything. So, maybe in this Presbytery year, it is time to try rolling up our sleeves and making a difference.

I can say for me, getting excitedly involved is what it took to realize that there is more to helping this presbytery than sitting at a Presbytery meeting. And, for me, the dullness went away.

Together we are the Presbytery. Together, we are the ones who will do the work and continue to make this Presbytery function. It is time to do this fully and faithfully – each one of us. What will you do to serve?

From our Stated Clerk



By
Rev. Eric Spoon

“...maybe in this Presbytery year, it is time to try rolling up our sleeves and making a difference.”

Spring Fling! Music & Food

CLASSICAL & LATIN AMERICAN
MUSIC by SEBASTIAN NEW

VOCALS & SKITS by the CHOIR

Covered-Dish Dinner after the
entertainment, provided by the church

FREE! April 19
Sunday – 5:00 PM

First Presbyterian
Church of Havana
213 First Ave. NE

From Dogwood Acres



By Christy Williams,
Director

*“Seeds of faith
are being planted
and nurtured
at summer camp,
at youth events,
and at our
adult retreats.”*

Seeds sprouting new life at Dogwood Acres

This is the season when we are reminded of new life; tree buds are blossoming, the earth is greening, and Easter brings the promise of our own new life in Christ. As a reminder of this, the 450 acres of Dogwood Acres are bursting with beauty, and our ministry is exploding with promise.

At a time when we may feel as though the church is still in a fallow season, Dogwood offers a glimpse of the joy that is to come. This winter, we have exceeded our retreat income by 20% and had only three weekends not fully booked. We already have bookings into 2027.

Our February Women’s Yoga retreat was at capacity – We could not fit in another yoga mat! Along with the crew of regular attendees, this retreat brought 20 first-timers to Dogwood. As March began, Rev. Dr. Sheldon Steen, Christ Presbyterian, Tallahassee’s pastor, led our first men’s retreat, bringing another six first-timers to our site, who were happy to explore their faith and the property alongside long-time Dogwood fans.

Last summer, we increased our camper participation by 30%. This summer, we are on track to continue that pattern of growth. Our theme, “Can You Hear Me Now?”, will focus on the story of Elijah to explore how God still



Students at February’s Dogwood Youth Conference (DYC) gather at the lake

speaks today—through prophets, through prayer, and through the people God places in our lives. It’s going to be an amazing camp season – which also means **we are looking to hire counselors and resource staff.** Encourage a young adult you know to be part of our summer staff family!

Summer Camp brings the hustle and bustle of young campers who are excited to sing songs, learn to shoot a bow, and be part of the evening worship skit. Unplugged for a week, I see campers relax and flourish. Experiencing days anchored in worship and scripture, surrounded by Christian community, children and youth thrive. So do the young adult counselors who join our summer staff. It is thrilling to witness their growth, but even more amazing to see them share their gifts for leadership beyond Dogwood, back at their church or their campus ministry.

At our February Dogwood Youth Conference, a college summer staffer wanted to sit with me and talk about discerning a call to ministry and figuring out a church internship.

At the February Presbytery Meeting, a young woman from Austin Seminary was moving from being an inquirer to being a candidate for ministry. Her faith journey included her involvement at UKirk, interning at Faith Presbyterian, Tallahassee and while at Dogwood as a small group leader for a youth conference, hearing her call to ministry.

The generosity and support of so many individuals and churches helps Dogwood cultivate fertile ground for faith to flourish. Seeds of faith are being planted and nurtured at summer camp, at youth events, and at our adult retreats. And these seeds are bringing new life to Dogwood, to the Presbytery and to the Church.

AI data centers prompt call for faithful creation stewardship

Like you, I am just learning about artificial intelligence (AI) data centers. Much to my surprise, Florida already has over a hundred established data centers, making us the fourth-largest data center hub in the U.S.

I like AI and find it helpful. I have heard that these centers are the backbone of the digital economy. But I was curious about the impact of these centers on creation. What follows are excerpts from different articles about these facilities' impacts.

Currently, they are heavily concentrated in Miami, Tampa, Orlando and Jacksonville. Multiple sources report that they use immense amounts of electricity, plus water for cooling, and generate environmental pollution.

These [data centers](#) are housed in big buildings on large acreage. They contain computer hardware to store and process digital information. Some of the largest [cover more than a million square feet](#) — the size of more than 17 football fields.

They use a lot of electricity. [A typical AI data center](#) uses as much electricity as 100,000 households; the largest under development will consume 20 times more, [according to the International Energy Agency](#) (IEA). The amount of electricity



Source: *Invading Seas*, December 12, 2025: *AI Centers Threaten to Devour Florida's Energy, Land and Water*

needed to operate their servers can lead to higher electric rates and require power grid upgrades to accommodate them, or even [new power plants being built](#).

They use lots of water. They have massive mechanical cooling systems that run constantly, generating noise and requiring millions of gallons of water per day. A single data center can consume up to [5 million gallons of drinking water per day](#).

An article in *Invading Seas*, "[AI data centers threaten to devour Florida's energy, land and water](#)", pretty much summarizes Floridians' many concerns about these centers. Palm Beach County citizens were concerned about pollution, water pumping, potential utility rate hikes and the [sound from the center](#). However, some good news: Florida SB 484, just signed into law, requires that large load customers, like AI centers, must assume their full cost of service, and it

can't be shifted to residential customers.

Clearly, the remaining serious impacts on creation must be addressed. We have options to make these facilities more sustainable by mandating that they use renewable energy and recycle their water. We also need to address land use compatibility, noise and traffic problems. Also, we must keep in mind that AI is just another tool and will never replace our responsibility to use our judgement, creativity and experiences to make decisions.

We have an opportunity to be faithful stewards while embracing this new technology. If you wish to know more, here is a more in-depth view on AI that appeared in *Presbyterian News* recently: [Beyond the AI Hype: AI Expansion, Data Centers and the Church's Duty to Care for People and Creation](#). One key message is that this is a moment that the church cannot ignore.

Caring for Creation



By
Pam McVety,
*Presbytery
Stewardship
of Creation
Enabler*

"We have an opportunity to be faithful stewards while embracing this new technology."

From the Ministry of Representation (MR)



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

Presbytery Ministries benefit from diverse membership

The Presbytery of Florida's Ministries thrive when their members reflect a broad, deep, and diverse group of leaders guiding the work of our Presbytery. Every church in the Presbytery has skilled and talented individuals. The Ministry of Representation needs these skilled, dedicated individuals with a desire to serve.

The following Ministries have vacancies:

Ministry of Congregational and Pastoral Care – 2, Class 2029

Ministry of New Congregation Formation – 2, Class 2027; 1, Class 2028; 1, Class 2029

Ministry of Presbytery Operations – 2, Class 2027; 1, Class 2028

Whether you have experience or simply a heart to serve, there is a place for you on a



Presbytery Ministry. If you feel called to join one of these Ministries and help shape the future of our presbytery, or would like more information contact me at kangas265@gmail.com or phone 850-832-6577.

SUMMER CAMP 2026 REGISTRATION OPEN!

Early Bird Registration 'til April 15

SUMMER DATES!

High School week
June 21-26

Intro/Discovery/Adventure
July 5-10

Intro/Discovery/Adventure
July 12-17



REGISTER AT DOGWOODACRES.ORG

Liaisons assist churches amid pastoral leadership search

The Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT) has been discussing active ways to provide liaisons for the various churches who are looking for interim and permanent pastoral leadership. Each of us has been assigned to the churches who need liaisons to help them through this process. Currently, eight churches within our presbytery are looking for interim or installed pastors. Here are their MPT liaison assignments:

- Trinity, Pensacola (Elder Pam Nulty)
- 1st Quincy (Elder Linda Lovins)

- 1st Tallahassee (Elder Linda Shelley)
- Parkway Panama City (Michelle McDonald)
- 1st Lynn Haven (Interim Pastor Rev. Julie Thompson... WELCOME!!!)
- 1st Marianna (Rev. Mark Broadhead)
- Faith Tallahassee (Elder Linda Shelley)
- Freeport (Elder Sandra Macon)

With a unanimous vote, Rev. Julie Thompson was approved to be First, Lynn Haven's interim pastor. We warmly welcome her and wish her the best in her new ministry there.

The Next Adventure:



Meanwhile, a revised Pulpit Supply List includes 11 pastors extending services to churches in need.

Our ministry members are excited about gathering to nurture growth and help to support the churches seeking pastoral leadership. Please pray for the churches listed here as they navigate their way through the crucial search process.

From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



*By Michelle McDonald,
MPT member and
1st, Quincy
Director of
Christian Education,
Mission and Outreach*



**Worship
& Music
Conference**
Presbyterian Association of Musicians



**WHO'LL BE a
WITNESS?**

PRESBYTERIAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSICIANS
2026 WORSHIP & MUSIC CONFERENCE
JUNE 21-26 & JUNE 28-JULY 3

<https://www.presbymusic.org/conference>

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**Presbytery
of Florida**

Furthering the Ministry
of Jesus Christ in Northwest Florida

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)



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