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# The Panhandle Presbyterian

*A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida*



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

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## Worship highlight of mid-council leadership event

These first few weeks serving as Equipping Presbyter and Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Florida have felt both full and grounding at the same time. There has been plenty of movement, a lot of information, and more than a few moments where I have simply paused and thought, “Wow... this is really happening.”

My first official week in this new role began in Baltimore at the Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center, where I joined others entering mid-council leadership for Presbyterian Leadership Formation (PLF). We spent the week talking about everything from the upcoming 227th General Assembly in Milwaukee to questions about congregational transitions, conflict resources, and the

complicated realities of serving presbyteries faithfully in changing times.

There was a little bit of everything. Some sessions were deeply practical. Others felt more reflective. A few conversations reminded me that there is no single model for leadership in the church right now, and perhaps that is part of the challenge we are all navigating together. Still, the most important part of the week was not the presentations or policy conversations. **It was worship.**

Every morning began in worship, and every evening ended there too. Before discussions about budgets, conflict, or organizational expectations, we prayed together. We sang together. We listened for God

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## From our Equipping Presbyter/ Stated Clerk



By Rev. Mario Bolivar

*“...this work  
is not simply  
administrative.  
At its best,  
it is deeply  
spiritual work.”*



As part of the Presbyterian Leadership Formation (PLF) Class of 2028, Rev. Bolivar, seated second from left, finds grounding in being surrounded by others who understand both the joy and the weight of being called to mid-council ministry.

**Continued from front**

together. Honestly, that may have been the best possible way to begin ministry at the mid-council level. It reminded me that this work is not simply administrative. At its best, it is deeply spiritual work.

I remain grateful to the Presbytery of Florida and the Synod for supporting that experience. It gave me space not only to learn, but also to reflect, breathe, and begin this new call grounded in prayer rather than anxiety.

After returning to Florida, things moved quickly. For those who may not realize it, our family is still living in Lake County while we wait for our home to sell and for Dante and Nico to finish the school year. We are thankful to share that we have placed an offer on a home

in Lynn Haven, contingent on the sale of our current house. So right now, we are living in that strange “in-between” season that many families know well.

Until the move happens, I will continue working remotely and traveling throughout the Presbytery as needed for meetings and congregational visits. I remain fully available, and you can always reach me through the Presbytery office phone system or by email.

Soon after returning from Baltimore, it was time to prepare for our May 16 Presbytery Meeting at Dogwood Acres. I honestly do not know if I have fully processed the kindness and encouragement I received there. The worship, music, prayers, and charges during the service felt spirit-filled, hopeful, and deeply encouraging. More than

anything, the gathering pointed toward a future together marked by purpose, care, and faithfulness.

Then on Sunday, I had the opportunity to complete my first official congregational visit by worshipping with the saints of Gulf Beach Presbyterian Church alongside Pastor Michael Askew. It was a beautiful reminder that the Church is still full of faithful people loving God, serving others, and encouraging one another well.

I hope to visit as many congregations as possible over the coming months. It may take time to coordinate while our family transitions north, but please know this clearly: I look forward to walking alongside you in ministry.

Count it all joy.

# SMALL AND MIGHTY



A Time to Connect and Equip Leaders in Small Membership Churches

Join Us for a Monthly Conversation on Zoom

First Tuesday  
7-8 pm ET / 6-7 pm CT

[www.synodofsouthatlantic.org/small-and-mighty](http://www.synodofsouthatlantic.org/small-and-mighty)

## Assisting in pastoral transitions much like standing in a doorway

Serving in the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT) is much like standing at the threshold of a doorway. We welcome some into new seasons of ministry while sending others forth with gratitude and blessing.

Recently, we had the joy of welcoming Rev. Julie Thompson (First, Lynn Haven) and Rev. Cheryl Montgomery (Member at Large) into the Presbytery, while also blessing the departures of Rev. Dr. Nicole Richardson (Tide & Table New Worshipping Community) and Rev. Emily Proctor (Member at Large). We pray that each



of them will continue to be a blessing to God's people and to those whom God so loves that he gave his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

MPT also received a ministry life reflection from Air Force Chaplain Rob Sugg, who will retire from ministry this August. [His thoughtful reflection, included in the May Presbytery meeting packet](#), is filled with wisdom and the quiet humor of faith that marked his ministry from

beginning to end. He offers a powerful example that a pastor's ministry should not simply fade into personal memory, but be shared for the glory of God and the encouragement to fellow servants in Christ.

As MPT continues to assist congregations in transition, we seek to lower anxiety, foster hope, and help each congregation discern the unique ministry to which God is calling them. In seasons of uncertainty, we trust that God continues to guide the church faithfully through every transition and toward new opportunities for mission and ministry.

## From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



*By Rev. Hanlim Chae, MPT  
Moderator and  
Lafayette,  
Tallahassee Pastor*

# Rooted in Hope

Equipping Leaders for  
Ministry with Older Adults

**OLDER ADULT MINISTRY CONFERENCE**  
**SEPTEMBER 16-18, 2026 KNOXVILLE, TN**

**POAMN**  
Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network

<https://poamn.org/conference/>



## From Dogwood Acres



By *Christy Williams,*  
*Director*

*“ This fall,  
there's something  
here for you —  
and for someone  
you know.  
Begin planning  
your weekend  
away with us.”*

## Gather, grow and go deeper at Dogwood Acres this fall

**D**ogwood is ready for Summer Camp, and fall retreat planning is well underway. While summer brings high energy and activity, fall is a season of intentional rest, restoration, and spiritual deepening.

This fall, we're offering several retreats for adults — **RESET** and **Fork in the Trail** — as well as **Spiritfest**, a middle school retreat for students across the Presbytery to reconnect with their faith and each other. There are open weekends available for church groups and organizations to host their own gatherings as well. Contact [staff@dogwoodacres.org](mailto:staff@dogwoodacres.org), and we can help you plan your own retreat.

**RESET** is a retreat for adults looking for renewal and a spiritual recharge. Step away from the noise of life to reconnect with God and yourself through centering prayer, hikes, a short kayak trip, good food and positive community. Bring your frazzled, leave with your calm, **September 18-20, 2026.**

**Fork in the Trail** is a culinary arts retreat where food and fellowship meet. This weekend is for adults who love to cook or love to learn new skills! Join Keith Baxter, chef and owner of Tallahassee's

Kool Beanz Café, and Dogwood's chef, Sharon Bruner, as they lead participants through creating a meal for your holiday table or just for you to savor and enjoy. Spots will be limited for this **November 6-8, 2026** retreat.

**Spiritfest** is our much-anticipated annual fall retreat for middle school youth that is led by the high school members of the Presbytery Youth Council (PYC). This weekend is filled with worship, small group study, recreation and lots of connecting with other Presbyterian youth across our Presbytery. It is a great way to show the connectional nature of our church. Youth groups will be sent information about this **October 2-5, 2026** event.

This fall, there's something here for you — and for someone you know. Begin planning your weekend away with us. Registrations for fall

retreats will be up on our website on July 1, 2026.

### DWA's 501c3 Progress

At our May 16 Presbytery meeting, the Presbytery voted to approve a Covenant Agreement between Dogwood Acres and the Presbytery of Florida. This is a huge step forward in our progress to becoming a non-profit organization.

We are grateful to all the commissioners who spoke so favorably about their own, or their family's, experiences at Dogwood, and to the whole presbytery for the ongoing support we receive. We are grateful for our continued partnership in nurturing faith and strengthening disciples for their work in the world.

Shown below, March's Men's Retreat is among the faith-, fellowship- and fun-filled new events DWA is offering.

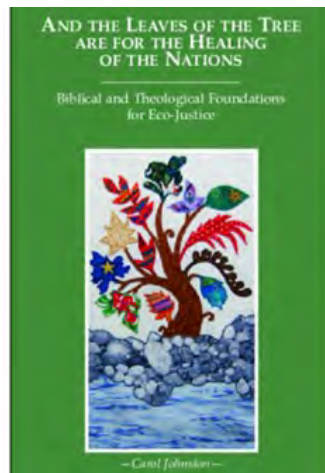


## Caring for Creation “Leaves” theme for 227th GA timely and fitting

This month, representatives of our Presbytery and others from around the country will gather at General Assembly in Milwaukee, WI to discern Christ's will, set policy, and guide the church's mission. The theme this year couldn't be more perfect from my perspective: “The Leaves of the Tree are for the Healing of Nations”, from Revelations 22:2 – because, once again, the General Assembly is being asked to affirm our caring for creation mission by withdrawing all our investments in fossil fuels.

In 2010, the Rev. Carol Johnston, a Presbyterian minister, wrote a paper, *And the Leaves of the Tree are for the Healing of the Nations*, on the biblical and theological necessity of caring for creation, for the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group on the biblical and theological necessity of caring for creation.

Fortuitously, the GA theme reflects the need to protect and heal creation. The “leaves of the tree” in this verse represent all of creation. The “healing of nations” represents human and creation's welfare. These words proclaim our absolute dependence on the health of creation. We cannot exist without a healthy thriving creation. It also



indicates the need to make peace with nature and with each other.

Fossil fuels have historically been important, but now, it feels like everyone in the Middle East is shooting at each other because of fossil fuels. Our brothers and sisters in Cuba are suffering greatly because of the US embargo of fossil fuels from Venezuela. Our daily costs, from food to fuel are going up because of our reliance on fossil fuels. They are the reason our planet is setting records for warmer and warmer temperatures; hurricanes and weather are more extreme; disaster recovery costs are in the billions, and the reason why our area is in an extreme drought.

The church for decades has affirmed that caring for creation is an important mission of our denomination. Previous actions of the GA have affirmed this in multiple ways, but apparently not with the needed

specificity with our investments. We continue to remain substantially invested in fossil fuels which are literally destroying creation.

It is hard to describe how strained our relationship with nature has become or how much our future depends on all of us changing direction now. Thus, the decision made at GA about our investments in fossil fuels is of momentous importance.

Some really good news: The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for the first time ever has recommended approval of fossil fuel divestment. Our Presbytery affirmed the need to stop funding the fossil fuel industry with its concurrence of two 2026 General Assembly overtures “Changing Course for a Green Future” and its companion “The Green Future Fund”.

Now I pray that the General Assembly shows its commitment to truth, compassion, justice and action by affirming the need to change course with our investments.

## Caring for Creation



By  
**Pam McVety,**  
*Presbytery  
Stewardship  
of Creation  
Enabler*

*“These words  
proclaim our  
absolute  
dependence on the  
health of creation.  
We cannot exist  
without a healthy,  
thriving creation.”*

### Presbytery shares in worship, fellowship and business amid God's creation at DWA



At left, attendees at the Presbytery's May 16 meeting at Dogwood Acres Retreat Center and Camp are warmly greeted by DWA volunteers Peri Flanigan and Marilyn Weinell and Program Director Eric Hearn and volunteer Lisa Wilder. Below, from left, Presbytery Equipping Presbyter/Stated Clerk the Rev. Mario Bolivar preaches a sermon titled "In God's Measure, Not Our Own" on the scripture in John 4 during the meeting's morning worship. Then, during his service of installation as Equipping Presbyter, Rev. Bolivar looks on as Presbytery Moderator Dr. Greg Seltzer poses constitutional questions.



Below, from left, Rev. Bolivar invites those present to join in celebrating the Lord's Supper. Fellowship, Tallahassee Pastor the Rev. A. J. Mealor and Northminster, Pensacola Commissioned Ruling Elder and Presbytery Moderator Dr. Greg Seltzer preside as meeting participants partake in communion.



## Presbytery ministry positions unite talents and passions

**W**ant to shape the future? The Presbytery's **Ministry of New Congregation Formation (MNCF)** offers a unique chance to build something from the ground up. This is a great chance to put your passion and talents into action.

Dedicated volunteers are needed to serve this ministry. Ideal candidates would have a talent for organizing, planning or community outreach; a financial, real estate or legal background; or just a desire to shape the future of our faith. You'd review the dynamics of possible areas within the presbytery to gauge the

need for new church development, then help guide new church formation from the initial vision to reality. This ministry normally meets via Zoom on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month at 1 p.m. Central/ 2 p.m. Eastern.

Additionally, the **Ministry of Presbytery Operations (MPO)** has a vacancy. Perhaps you have financial, facilities management or human resources expertise? Then a role in this ministry might be for you. MPO oversees the Presbytery's funds, property and staff



and typically meets via Zoom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month at 2 p.m. Central/ 3 p.m. Eastern.

If interested in serving or learning more about the Ministry of New Congregation Formation or Ministry of Presbytery Operations, contact the Presbytery office at [office@presbyteryofflorida.com](mailto:office@presbyteryofflorida.com) or 850-535-2335.

### From the Ministry of Representation (MR)



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



Above, from left, Dogwood Acres Director Christy Williams and UKirk Tallahassee Campus Minister the Rev. Dr. Matt Frease provide a presentation seeking added financial support for their ministries. Above, at right, During the meeting's resourcing segment, presented by the Presbytery's Ministry of Leadership Development and Racial Justice Subcommittee, Florida Council of Churches Executive Director the Rev. Dr. Russell Meyer highlights the Council's work to address climate-, immigration- and Christian nationalism-related issues. At left, a delicious lunch of Chicken Caprese with sides and strawberry shortcake, prepared by DWA Cook and Hospitality Director Sharon Bruner, is thoroughly enjoyed.

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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)



**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.presbysmusic.org/conference>

1st Wednesday

**SACK Lunch Conversation**

(South Atlantic Community Knowledge)

**12-1:30 pm Eastern Time**



**A monthly zoom for sharing across the Synod!  
Learn and share experience, resources, and best practices  
on a new topic each month.**

June 3 - Earthcare

July 1 - Youth Ministry

August 5 - Grant Writing

September 2 - New Worshipping Communities

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

