

Presbytery Staff
and Officers
are here for you:

Rev. Mario Bolivar
Equipping Presbyter/
Stated Clerk
Mario
@presbyteryofflorida.com

Rev. Eric Spoon
Assistant Stated Clerk
e.spoon
@presbyteryofflorida.com

Dr. Greg Seltzer
Moderator
Pastorgregnpcpensacola
@gmail.com

Christy Williams
Dogwood Acres Director
christy@dogwoodacres.org

Michael Martin
Accountant-Treasurer
treasurer
@presbyteryofflorida.com

Melissa Willis
Administrator
Mwillis
@presbyteryofflorida.com

Inside this issue:

Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)	3
Caring for Creation	4
Ministry of Representation (MR)	5
Dogwood Acres	6
Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)	7

The Panhandle Presbyterian

A monthly publication of the Presbytery of Florida



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

Volume 9, Issue 8

August 2026

I went to GA 227...and all I got was hope

The 227th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has concluded, and in the coming weeks you will find many excellent summaries of the actions taken—constitutional amendments, overtures, budgets, reports, and recommendations. Those decisions matter, but I wanted to share something different.

One conviction stayed with me throughout the Assembly: **the story of General Assembly cannot be told by votes alone.**

What I witnessed was a church gathering around our living Redeemer. I saw commissioners, advisory delegates, volunteers, and staff worshiping, praying, discerning, laughing, celebrating, and wrestling

faithfully with difficult questions. I encountered a church made up of people from different regions, cultures, languages, and experiences, yet united by the conviction that the same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church continues to guide Christ's people today.

During the Assembly, I also noticed how quickly conversations returned to graphs predicting denominational decline. While statistics can help us understand our present reality, they should never become our theology. Numbers describe; they do not define the faithfulness of Christ's Church.

As I walked the halls of the Assembly, I encountered something deeper than

Continues on page 2

From our Equipping Presbyter/ Stated Clerk



By Rev. Mario Bolivar

*"What I witnessed
was a church
gathering around
our living
Redeemer."*



Shown, from left, are Faith, Tallahassee member Bob Lovins, Ruling Elder Commissioner Linda Lovins (Faith, Tallahassee), Teaching Elder Commissioner Rev. Cathy Mooney (1st, DeFuniak Springs), Young Adult Advisory Delegate Dexton Teat (Grace, Panama City) and Equipping Presbyter/ Stated Clerk Rev. Mario Bolivar.

Continued from front

statistics: vitality. I saw people finding their voices, congregations sharing stories of faithful ministry, leaders mentoring one another, and disciples committed to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

This does not mean we ignore real challenges. Membership trends, financial realities, and cultural changes deserve our attention. But they should never become the only story we tell. Our calling has never been to win a demographic race; it has always

been to proclaim Christ, love our neighbors, make disciples, and trust God with the harvest.

I am deeply grateful for those who represented the Presbytery of Florida so faithfully: commissioners Linda Lovins and Cathy Mooney, Young Adult Advisory Delegate Dexton Teat, overture advocate Pam McVety, and observer Bob Lovins. They represented our presbytery with grace, humility, and faithfulness.

As the Assembly has now adjourned, the ministry returns home. My prayer is that we continue to be a presbytery

rooted in prayer, shaped by Scripture, attentive to the Holy Spirit, and known not merely by our numbers, but by the depth of our faithfulness and the vitality of our witness.

This article is an adapted reflection for the Panhandle Presbyterian. If you would like to read my complete report, including additional observations and reflections, I invite you to [visit my Substack](#) or read my [227th GA report to the August 11, 2026 presbytery meeting](#).



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

SWOT Happens!

Help Shape Our Future Together

Your input will guide our conversation and help us grow stronger as a presbytery in service to Christ.

 **COMPLETE THIS SHORT FORM**
Takes 5-10 minutes

 **YOUR VOICE MATTERS.**
OUR PRESBYTERY GROWS.

 **TOGETHER, WE FURTHER**
THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Beloved Presbytery of Florida! I am still getting to know you and, as we prepare for our August 11 educational session, “SWOT Happens!”, I’d love to hear from you.

Consider investing a few minutes to complete this brief survey. Your responses will help guide our conversation as we explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges facing our Presbytery, with a focus on grants and resources, healthy ministry policies, and leadership opportunities and will allow me to know you even more.

Please complete the survey by Aug 5th, 2026:

<https://forms.gle/ELabd6rnoTWnnmEZA>

Thank you for helping us learn, grow, and discern God's future together.

Count it all joy,

Rev. Mario Bolivar, Equipping Presbyter and Stated Clerk

Journey of the Spirit bears much fruit

What happens when a soul has been longing for God to show the way to lead, listening through life's journey to find the way to respond? A phone call to supply preach. A discovery that a tiny church has a personal connection. And a congregation where Spirit is stirring.

In 2021, First Presbyterian, Milton was found to be 'low-energy and low-morale' on their Holy Cow! survey. But Spirit was stirring in ways unseen. That phone call to Deborah Potter was God's way of connecting her longing with what Spirit saw growing at FPC, Milton. Deborah felt at home the moment she stepped into the church and later learned her great-grandmother and great-aunt had been active members in this congregation.

By 2023, so much had changed at First, Milton that a new survey was needed. The results were the opposite of the 2021 results, and the growing congregation began to ask

questions that guide them to this day: Who are we as a Christian community? And what would the local community miss if we were gone?

The answers reshaped their ministry. With courage born from faith and a deep desire to become a Beloved Community, they embraced God's call to be a refuge for people who had felt wounded or alienated by their past experiences of Christianity. They committed themselves to serving their neighbors in tangible ways, weaving themselves into the fabric of the community through love and hospitality.

They started a small garden. They provided space, food and support for an outreach street ministry serving the most vulnerable. They fed the community and each other. Members shared openly and honestly, and more people came to join this special community. Friends and neighbors participate in creative and unique ways – serving immigrants, supporting the

disabled, and welcoming the outcast. Discovering the joy of laughing, loving, sharing and serving together.

As Deborah engaged with this congregation, her desire to do more and learn more grew. She turned to the Presbytery for guidance on her journey and found the path to Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE). We will celebrate the culmination of that journey at the Presbytery meeting on Tuesday, August 11.

Deborah has been leading for God all her life. Becoming a CRE is the next chapter in her service. The Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD) is the Presbytery team that seeks to develop leaders to serve God in all levels and all aspects of church life. MLD strives to find the path that is responsive to your needs and God's leading.

Where is the Holy Spirit calling you? If your heart has been listening for God's next invitation, perhaps now is the time to answer. Like Deborah, you may discover that the path has been unfolding all along—and that God is preparing you to join in the Spirit's transforming work.

Oh, and FPC, Milton is feeding people the night after the Presbytery meeting (August 11), so bring a dish for those in need to share. This special congregation wants to show their neighbors that people from Pensacola to Monticello care about them!

From the Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)



*By Susan Byram,
MLD member and
1st, Pensacola
Ruling Elder*

*"Where is
the Holy Spirit
calling you?"*



Love and Lights, one of First Presbyterian Church of Milton's many community outreach events, will be held again November 7, 2026.

Caring for Creation



By
Pam McVety,
*Presbytery
Stewardship
of Creation
Enabler*

*"Twelve years
of advocacy is
a very long time."*

227th General Assembly adopts divestment overtures

On June 29, the 227th General Assembly made a historic decision to remove the great bulk of PC(USA) investments from the fossil fuel industry and establish a Green Future Endowment Fund. These were the two overtures our Presbytery concurred with earlier this year: *Changing Course for a Green Future* and *The Green Future Endowment Fund*.

By adopting *Changing Course*, the Assembly called on the Presbyterian Foundation and the Board of Pensions to remove investments from roughly 50 fossil fuel companies by 2030, or as soon thereafter as prudent management allows, and to cease making new investments in those companies. The green endowment fund will provide grants to congregations and communities affected by, or adapting to, climate change, helping them move toward a greener future.

This decision was supported by the advocacy of thousands of faithful Presbyterians, the

formation of Fossil Free PCUSA, the leadership of Presbyterians for Earth Care (PEC) and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, presbyteries voting 147 times for divestment and more than a decade of General Assembly action for climate justice.

Several developments at this Assembly strengthened support for these overtures. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) offered a policy, also adopted at this General Assembly, urging the PC(USA) to pursue the quickest and most efficient transition away from the production, distribution, and use of fossil fuels.

ACSWP also endorsed the divestment overture. The Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) issued a joint statement with PEC affirming that both its shareholder engagement report and the divestment overture should be adopted.

Another important development was the formation last fall of

CANOPY—the Creation Action Network for Presbyterian Youth—under PEC's leadership. CANOPY members and Youth Advisory Delegates (YADs) advocated impressively for divestment. Their voices were passionate, thoughtful, smart, and compassionate, offering a hopeful witness for the future of the church.

Together, these actions helped place both overtures on the consent agenda, which was approved in plenary on June 29.

Selling our stocks will not solve the climate crisis, but it does remove the church's financial support from the fossil fuel industry and withdraws a measure of that industry's social license. It is a public witness to our values and to our solidarity with those most vulnerable to climate chaos, while freeing funds that may be redirected toward ethically produced renewable energy.

And by the way, the two-year-old whose photo I held up for the Fossil Free group photo at the 2014 General Assembly, shown at left, is now 14 years old and taller than I am! Twelve years of advocacy is a very long time. Thanks to all of you who supported what seemed like an impossible but faithful ask.



Want to shape the future? Serve at presbytery

WYou want to shape the future? Serving at Presbytery might be your answer. Presbytery service offers many areas for putting your passion and talents into action.

For the Presbytery to provide resources to congregations in a timely manner, talented volunteers are needed. Every church in the Presbytery holds the solution. Each church has skilled and talented individuals.

The Presbytery needs volunteers to help make it “fire on all cylinders”.

Ideal candidates might have talents for organization or planning, a heart for ministry, or a financial, real estate or legal background, and especially, a desire to shape the future. Whether you have experience or simply feel called to serve, there is a place for you to grow in faith and leadership.

Some present needs are: Ministry of New Congregation Formation, Ministry of Presbytery Operations, Permanent Judicial Commission and

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Presbytery Vice Moderator, class 2027. If you feel called to a place in one of these ministries, to become part of what God is doing in our presbytery, or you'd like to know more about any of these roles, please contact the Presbytery office at office@presbyteryofflorida.com.

From the Ministry of Representation (MR)



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

COME FIND REST

September 25-26, 2026

Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Columbia, South Carolina



Augie Gil
Festival Director

Interest sessions led by Rev. Emily
Mooneyhan & Rev. Melissa McNair-King



Alicia W. Walker
Keynote Speaker

Church musicians and worship leaders are invited to join PAM's South Atlantic and Puerto Rico Region for a weekend of singing, learning, and rest. Through workshops and rehearsals, we will explore how to incorporate sabbath within ministry, and leave refreshed, encouraged, and supported for the work we are called to do.



Visit presbymusic.org/south-atlantic
or scan the QR code for more information



Presbyterian Association of Musicians
**South Atlantic and Puerto Rico
Region** | [PRESBYMUSIC.ORG/
REGIONS](https://presbymusic.org/regions)

From Dogwood Acres



By Christy Williams,
Director

"These are the stories of transformation, meaning and love that keep us doing all the hard work..."

It's not just about the numbers

The success of any program doesn't lie in the numbers; it lies in people's experiences. Following Dogwood's summer camp program, we ran all the numbers; but, more importantly we heard and witnessed people's growth, their joy and their growing faith.

We heard stories from campers and their parents about a first time away from home that built confidence and maturity; about campers who were nervous to attend without a friend, but who quickly made friends and blossomed; and about campers who wondered about who their counselor would be and if they would feel accepted, and came home raving about how they were cared for and encouraged, not only by their counselor, but by the staff.

"My boys loved all of it. They have talked about their counselor and how he was the best. They talked about swimming and the friends they met. They had a blast! They keep asking if they can go back. Thank you for taking care of them."
Parent of first-time campers

These are the stories of transformation, meaning and love that keep us doing all the hard work to make the summer camp experience memorable and meaningful. We don't

just teach archery or how to paddle a canoe – We encourage independence, cultivate positive friendships and root our days in faith-based living. These things make an enormous difference beyond the week of camp.

Thank you for praying for our counselors and our year-round staff. Thank you to our volunteer nurses, chaplains and landscapers: Sandy Kuhn (Lafayette, Tallahassee), Nancy Repplinger (Christ, Tallahassee), Denise Pentecost (Lafayette, Tallahassee), Julie Thompson (FPC, Lynn Haven), Becky Bryan (FPC, Pensacola) Taylor Allbaugh (Faith, Tallahassee), and Brant Copeland (retired pastor).

We are excited about the amount of positive feedback we have received and about the wonderful folks we had the privilege of working alongside. But, in case you are a numbers person, here are some statistics for you:

► Our camper population rose 14.7% this summer.

► Our camper population represented 16 churches in the Presbytery.

► With your help, we were able to offer 27 scholarships to camper families.

► FPC Tallahassee's new Awards Program allowed 7 campers from underrepresented communities to attend

and 2 additional counselors to be hired.

► Trinity Pensacola; Christ Tallahassee; FPC DeFuniak Springs; Faith, Tallahassee; and FPC Milton all ranked highest with numbers of campers attending Dogwood this summer.

► Out of 12 counselors, 9 had been campers at Dogwood, and out of that 9, 3 served on the Presbytery's Youth Council (PYC) leadership team.

► Counselors represented 6 churches in the Presbytery: Faith, Tallahassee; FPC, Tallahassee; Trinity, Pensacola; FPC DeFuniak Springs; Gulf Breeze; and Christ, Tallahassee

FPC Milton's newsletter said it best: *"They (campers) talked about swimming in the pool and the lake, playing games, making art, lying in a dark field at night looking up at the constellations spreading out above them, sharing cabins with friends both old and new. Simple things. Ordinary things. And yet exactly the kind of things that plant something in a young person that keeps growing long after the summer is over. Dogwood Acres IS good soil. The Presbytery has been tending it for generations. And the fruit of it showed up in those kids' faces on Sunday morning."*

New chapters for two churches, others' searches continue

August brings us joyful news from First, Tallahassee and First, Milton: both congregations are beginning a new chapter as they welcome their new pastoral leaders.

This is a time to rejoice and give thanks to God, who never forgets those who place their trust in God's faithfulness. As the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT) has walked alongside these congregations, whether for a brief season or throughout their long search, we share in their joy. It is both a moving and rewarding moment to witness another chapter of God's work unfold for the sake of God's kingdom.

At the same time, we remain mindful that several other congregations in our presbytery are still in seasons of transition. I invite our entire Presbytery family to keep these churches in prayer as they continue to discern God's

will and clarify the unique mission God has entrusted to them.

While MPT works diligently to move each search process forward as efficiently as possible, faithful discernment cannot be rushed. Seeking God's will requires both prayer and patience, and every step of the process is designed to help congregations and pastoral candidates discern whether God is calling them into ministry together.

Every Pastor Nominating Committee naturally hopes for prompt responses and approvals. Yet the waiting itself can become a gift when it is embraced as an opportunity to deepen prayer, reflect on God's vision for the congregation, and prepare hearts to welcome new leadership with love, unity, and humility.

Welcoming a new pastor is not the end of the journey—It is the

beginning of a new adventure of faith. As First, Tallahassee and First, Milton embrace their new pastors, my prayer is that pastors and congregations will serve alongside one another faithfully, always following Christ, our Good Shepherd.

For those congregations still awaiting their next pastor, may this season become a time of spiritual renewal. May each member encourage one another, remain steadfast in hope, prepare their hearts for the leader God is calling, and commit themselves to participating fully in Christ's mission for their congregation.

Congratulations, once again, to First, Tallahassee and First, Milton. May God richly bless your shared ministry and may the Holy Spirit continue to guide every congregation in our presbytery according to God's gracious purpose.

From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



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

*"Seeking
God's will
requires both
prayer and
patience ...*



DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp
Chipley, FL

Upcoming Retreats

Reset Adult Retreat

September 18-20

Fork in the Trail Cooking Retreat

November 6-8

Pause Yoga Retreat

February 26-28

Dogwood Men's Retreat

March 5-7

SpiritFest Middle

School Retreat

October 2-4

Dogwood Youth

Conference

February 5-7

Summer 2027

High School Week

June 20-25

Elementary/Middle

School Session 1

June 27-July 2

Elementary/Middle

School Session 2

July 11-16

**More Details and registration at
dogwoodacres.org**

**PRESBYTERY
OF FLORIDA**

Mailing address:
P. O. Box 7
Chipley, FL 32428

Physical address:
3368 Harmony Rd

Phone: 850-535-2335

E-mail:
office@presbyteryofflorida.com
Website:
www.presbyteryofflorida.net

Ministry Coordinating Council
Elder Mary Hodges
mary37@comcast.net

**Ministry of Congregational
and Pastoral Care**
Elder Linda Lovins
artsedlin@gmail.com

Ministry of Dogwood Acres
Rev. William "Bill" Lamont
gbpcpastorbill@gmail.com

**Ministry of Leadership
Development**
Rev. Cathy Mooney
cathymooney@yahoo.com

**Ministry of New Congregation
Formation**
Rev. Dr. Sheldon Steen
sheldon@cpcusa.org

Ministry of Pastoral Transitions
Rev. Hanlim Chae
pastorchaehl@gmail.com

Ministry of Presbytery Operations
Rev. Dr. Raymond Guterman
dwguterman@gmail.com

Ministry of Representation
Elder Rich Kangas
kangas265@gmail.com



**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)

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.

August 5 - Grant Writing
September 2 - New Worshipping Communities
October 7 - Courageous Conversations
November 4 - Systemic Poverty

To register: scan the QR Code or visit synodofsouthatlantic.org



What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice,

...to love kindness

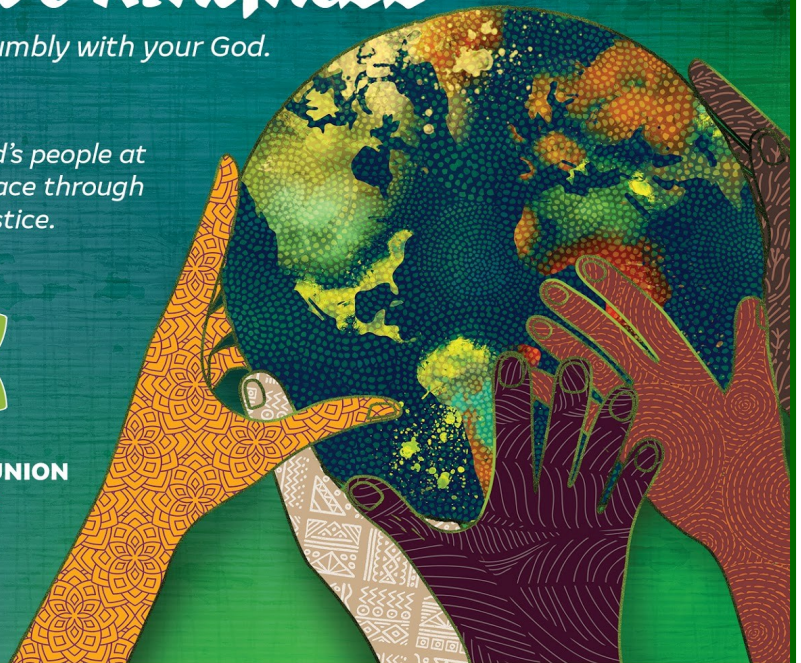
and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

*Reconciling God's people at
the Table of Grace through
ministries of justice.*



**WORLD COMMUNION
OFFERING**



Please give generously—for when
we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

