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The Panhandle Presbyterian

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

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October 2026

12 things I've learned in 12 years of ordained ministry

Last Friday, September 18, was my actual **Ordinary**—12 years since I was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. I spent some time that day thinking about these years and finish unpacking in our new home in Panama City, FL. Anywho, between the honey-do-list and lemonade, I was thinking about pulpits, fonts, and communion tables, memorial services, funerals, hospital rooms and Session meetings, celebrations and conflicts, mistakes and apologies, hellos and some really difficult goodbyes.

I had some ideas, which I share impromptu on a Live video on Facebook. But then I decided to write down the 12+ things ministry has revealed to me and share them with you—not because I have figured ministry out (HA!), but as a way of celebrating these years of ministry and this continuing journey of **stumbling upward toward Jesus**.

1. The Church belongs to Jesus.

Not to the pastor, Session, Presbytery, biggest giver, longest-tenured member, or loudest voice. We are stewards. The Church belongs to Christ.

Remembering that can be both freeing and inconvenient!

2. People rarely need me to have the perfect words.

Seminary taught me many words. Ministry has taught me when to stop using them. Sometimes the most faithful ministry is simply showing up, listening, crying, laughing, and praying.

3. Loving people doesn't require agreeing with them.

Some people I deeply love see the world very differently than I do. Christian community may be less about agreement and more about learning to tell the truth while refusing to stop loving one another.

4. Conflict doesn't necessarily mean something has gone wrong.

Sometimes conflict reveals what everyone has been carefully avoiding. The question isn't whether Christians will disagree. We will. The question is whether we can disagree without forgetting who we are—and whose we are.

5. The pulpit is borrowed space.

It isn't mine to settle scores,

Continues on page 2

From our Equipping Presbyter/ Stated Clerk



By Rev.
Mario Bolivar

*"...I decided to
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Continued from front

prove I'm right, or show everyone how much I studied. People entrust preachers with something sacred. Twelve years later, I approach that responsibility with more humility—or at least I hope I do.

6. Funerals have taught me a lot about living.

At the end, people rarely talk about titles, accomplishments, or church arguments. They remember: *She showed up. He made me laugh. She loved me. He was kind.* Maybe we spend too much time worrying about things nobody will mention at our funeral.

7. Children understand more about God's Kingdom than we realize.

They ask the questions adults have learned not to ask, laugh at inappropriate times, notice who's sitting alone, and regularly destroy my carefully planned children's sermon. Holy chaos!

8. I cannot save the Church.

I cannot fix every congregation, conflict, or person—and God never asked me to. My calling is faithfulness. The Holy Spirit was working before Mario arrived and will continue long after Mario is gone.

9. My family is not an accessory to my ministry.

There will always be another email, meeting, or crisis. My children will only be children once. Sometimes faithfulness means answering the phone. Sometimes it means putting it down and being Dad.

10. "I was wrong" is essential pastoral vocabulary.

Ordination didn't make me infallible. I've spoken too quickly, waited too long, misunderstood people, and made decisions I'd make differently today. Leadership sometimes sounds like: *I don't know. I was wrong. I'm sorry.*

11. The Church is people.

Buildings, budgets, programs, polity, committees, and strategic plans matter—but only because people matter. Church is the widow, the questioning teenager, the exhausted parent, the 80-year-old saint, and the child running down the hallway.

12. Grace is still amazing.

Twelve years haven't made me more impressed with my ability to hold everything together. Quite the opposite. Yet somehow, again and again... **grace.**

I'm still learning, some might say reforming. Still making mistakes. Still laughing--that's a prerequisite. Still asking questions. Still loving Jesus. And after seeing the Church at its breathtaking best and deeply human worst, I still love the Church—perhaps less romantically, certainly more realistically, but more deeply. Twelve years of ministry and stumbling upward toward Jesus. All I can say, **God has been faithful. Count it all joy!**



**Everybody's wearing a mask.
It's time to take it off.**

This October, middle schoolers get to find out who God made them to be, and discover the real them is worth being seen.

October 2-4, 2026

**Contact Eric
to register**

eric@dogwoodacres.org



DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp
Chipley, FL



MPT approves manual, welcomes new ministers

The Ministry of Pastoral Transitions has had a busy month in September. Significant modifications to the MPT Manual have been approved. The revised version is now available.

The Rev. William Arnold began his ministry at First Presbyterian Church of Quincy on September 13. That same day, the Rev. Mark Phillips was formally installed as pastor at First Presbyterian of

Tallahassee. And the Rev. Cheryl Montgomery began her interim ministry at First Presbyterian of Marianna on September 1. Welcome to all of them!

In other business, MPT approved the transfer of Trinity Proctor to Flint River Presbytery.

Shown at left, from left, the Rev. Mark Phillips is installed as First Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee's Pastor in a Sept. 13 service, with Equipping Presbyter/Stated Clerk the Rev. Mario Bolivar presiding.

From the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions (MPT)



*By Ed Nickinson,
MPT member and
Trinity, Pensacola
Ruling Elder*



November 6-8

\$250. Is the all-inclusive fee for lodging, meals, cooking demos, tastings, take-homes, retreat center activities- come eat, drink, share beloved recipes, ask your questions, meet good people and be merry!

Join **Keith Baxter**, Chef and Owner of Kool Beanz Cafe in Tallahassee, and **Sharon Bruner**, Chef and Director of Hospitality at Dogwood Acres for a scrumptious weekend!



DOGWOOD ACRES

Retreat Center and Summer Camp
Chipley, FL

dogwoodacres.campbrainregistration.com

Registration
Open
Now!

From the Ministry of Leadership Development (MLD)



By
Dr. Greg Seltzer,
MLD member;
Northminster,
Pensacola
Commissioned Ruling
Elder (CRE); and
Presbytery Moderator

*"...our MLD
takes seriously
our charge and
responsibility to
the women and
men who enroll
as Inquirers ...*

MLD works with those who feel called to ordained ministry

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." **2 Timothy 2:15.**

One of the major responsibilities of the Presbytery's Ministry of Leadership Development is to direct those under care of our Presbytery seeking to be ordained as Ministers of Word and Sacrament in preparation for ministry under the requirements of our PCUSA Book of Order (G.-206).

In addition, the MLD is charged with counseling pastors and sessions regarding those persons who wish to pursue ministry for ordination. These responsibilities were subsumed by MLD after the Presbytery's Strategic Plan was implemented and reorganized the functions, responsibilities, and nomenclatures of committees.

You may recognize and remember our previous title being that of CPM, or Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Regardless of title, our Book of Order requires a body within each Presbytery to labor in the above function. And as such, our MLD takes seriously our

charge and responsibility to the women and men who enroll as Inquirers and come before our committee seeking discernment and future ordination in keeping with the Apostle Paul's encouragement in the preceding 2 Timothy passage.

The first step in the process begins with the Inquirer phase. There are specific requirements for this phase including: The applicant be a member of a sponsoring congregation for at least six months and be active in the life and work of that congregation. All of the specific requirements are listed in the Ministry of Leadership Development Manual of Policies and Procedures.

The requirements were developed in mind of the view of the process of discernment for those who may feel a call to ordained ministry within our denomination and seek to explore that sense of call and celebrate their possible gifts for ordered ministry. This is fundamental to the process going forward for the entire period of Inquiry and Candidacy, leading to being examined and approved to seek a call. An important person in this journey is the position of Liaison. The Liaison is a member of the MLD who counsels the

individual applicant during all phases of the process. This includes working with the Session, counseling the applicants during their seminary education, seeking financial resources to aid their studies, receiving regular reports on their educational progress and most of all partnering with the applicant on a regular basis of prayer during the discernment process.

The MLD stands ready to work with all presbyters and sessions with individuals who may feel the call to serve the Church as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. This includes those who may seek to possibly become a CRE (Commissioned Ruling Elder) in order to serve an underserved church in our Presbytery. However, that is the story for another day.

Volunteer footprints represent the body of Christ

We are the Presbyterian Church (USA), your church and mine. We are the community where we live, your church and mine. We belong to Christ, you and I. The footprint you and I make from our church to the community, our church to the Presbytery, our church to the Synod, or our church to the General Assembly, represents the body of Christ.

The Lord has given special talents to the members of this Presbytery. Each church

has skilled and talented individuals. Remember, just as your church needs volunteers, the Presbytery needs people to step up from our churches and serve. These folks help to expand the footprint through their work on Presbytery ministries, councils, and as representatives beyond the Presbytery. Presently, the Presbytery has areas in need. They are: the Ministry of Presbytery Operations, the Ministry of Pastoral Transitions, the Ministry of New

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Congregation Formation, the Presbytery Judicial Council and an alternate Synod (Minister) Commissioner. Being involved has its own rewards. If you are interested or need more guidance, please [contact the Presbytery office](#).

From the
Ministry of
Representation
(MR)



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

Save the Date!

PRESBYTERY OF FLORIDA

FALL STATED PRESBYTERY MEETING

.....

 **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2026**

 **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF QUINCY, FL**

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

*Starting at
9 am CT/
10 am ET*

Caring for Creation



By
Pam McVety,
*Presbytery
Stewardship
of Creation
Enabler*

"We stand at a crucial moment, when the future entrusted to us depends on the choices WE make now..."

Learning more about renewable energy offers hope

The climate news is sobering. The United Nations' September 2 report, "Limiting Overshoot," warns that the world will soon cross the 1.5-degree threshold, making some harms unavoidable. Yet this is not only a time for fear; it is a time for faithful action. Together, our daily choices can bear witness to hope and help turn the world toward healing.

The report says temperatures can still be brought down and global goals achieved, but only through **immediate and sustained cuts** to carbon emissions and removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. In plain English: We must do much more, much faster. The "**WE**" is you and me—all of us. This moment calls us to turn from fossil fuels toward renewable energy with courage, urgency, and moral clarity.

We stand at a crucial moment, when the future entrusted to us depends on the choices **WE** make now—especially how quickly we embrace clean, renewable energy. An easy way to learn more about all this is to join First Presbyterian, Tallahassee in person or on Zoom for a three-week renewable energy series this November. [Register here.](#) This class also meets in person Sundays, 9:30–10:30

a.m. Eastern Time, in the church's Westminster Room. All are welcome.

This series will inform and equip us to embrace the growing renewable energy transition and prayerfully discern how our churches can become signs of hope, justice, and faithful witness in the climate crisis.

November 1 – "The PCUSA's Response to the Growing Climate Crisis."

Pam McVety will introduce the series, update climate science, and summarize General Assembly actions and guidance. She is a retired biologist, Creation Care Enabler for the Presbytery of Florida, member of Fossil Free PCUSA, Presbyterians for Earth Care Advocacy Team, and First Presbyterian Church.

November 8 – "The Future of Energy and the Technology That Supports It."

Dr. Patrick Love will examine the rapid shift to renewable energy, what is realistic, and why carbon emissions are not falling fast enough. Dr. Love is a physicist, climate science lecturer at FSU's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, author, and Chair of the ReThink Energy Citizen's Advisory Committee to

Tallahassee's Clean Energy Plan.

November 15 – "How We Can Make a Difference in the Transition to Clean, Renewable Energy."

Dr. Dan Terpstra will lead a discussion on how people of faith can prophetically model a meaningful transition to renewable energy. He holds a PhD in Chemistry from Florida State University, built a career in computer science, helped launch fossil fuel divestment efforts in the PCUSA, served as the first moderator of Fossil Free PCUSA, helped found Third Act groups, and is a certified Electrification Coach for Rewiring America.

Recommended reading and listening before the series:

["Here Comes the Sun"](#) by Bill McKibben

Podcasts: Dave Roberts's ["Volts"](#) and ["Outrage and Optimism."](#)

For questions, contact me at pammcvey@hotmail.com.

*Please join Trinity Presbyterian Church for our Annual Women's
Retreat with Rev Gail Henderson-Belsito*

The Road to Emmaus: Making Our Way Home

January 29-30, 2027

Springhill Suites, Pensacola Beach

**Register by January 17, 2027*



*\$78 via Square or
\$75 cash/check*



*Springhill Suites
Pensacola Beach*



Rev. Gail Henderson-Belsito

Reverend Gail Henderson-Belsito (PCUSA) is a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a traveler, a dreamer, and a beloved child of God. She served as the Associate Minister at Caldwell Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, for five and a half years before answering God's call to serve the larger church as a Free Range Pastor - using her gifts in preaching, teaching, keynote speaking, and workshop leadership more broadly. Gail has extensive experience as a teacher of journaling as a spiritual discipline and enjoys watching people write their way towards freedom. Through her formation as a spiritual director, she listens to and with others as they deepen their relationships with God and themselves. Having traversed several major life challenges, including a personal cancer journey and raising a child with bipolar disorder, Gail counts it as an honor to accompany others through the valleys and shadows of their lives. Her greatest joy is walking with God's beloved children on their journeys toward authenticity, belonging, faith, and hope.

**Introducing the
2027 PW Women's
Retreat Speaker**

**Reverend Gail
Henderson-Belsito**

**The Road to Emmaus:
Making Our Way Home
Jan 29-30, 2027**

I believe God is always drawing us deeper
—into love, into mystery, into belonging,
into a Nevertheless kind of HOPE.



For additional information contact Stephanie Peterson at
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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)

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

...to love kindness

and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8



WORLD COMMUNION
OFFERING



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Chipley, Florida

130th Homecoming Celebration

1896 – 2026

"Celebrating 130 Years of God's Faithfulness"

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026



WELCOME HOME

Registration, Welcome & Opening Prayer
Game Night & Fellowship

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026



CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

Church History Tour
Our Presbyterian Heritage Presentation

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026



WORSHIP TOGETHER

Celebrating 130 Years of Ministry
Worship Service

A weekend of fellowship, memories,
and giving thanks for 130 years of God's faithfulness.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

