



**Our Vision - Our Mission**

To spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to our community and the world.  
To be an inclusive downtown community of faith that seeks to embrace everyone in growing spirituality.

**Dr. D. Ronald Watson, Jr., Pastor**

Churches grow. Churches shrink. Churches open. Churches close. Opening and growing makes us believe that God is with us. Shrinking or closing makes us believe that something went wrong.

In the plant world, things grow. Things die. When a tree reaches full maturity, it begins a dying process which brings new life to the forest. We are at peace with the process that we learned in school. We are fine talking about life and death in terms of plants, but not about churches. What am I saying? Is our church dying? No. Don't be alarmed, or better yet, fear not. But I am saying that First Presbyterian Ocala has been changing for some time now. We tend to measure our churches by membership, which is funny when you think about it. One can be a member of a church and not be particularly involved, and one can be particularly involved without being a member. But we hold membership with great reverence, so much, in fact, that we tend not to revise the number of members as frequently as we should because we only want to see church membership grow. We believe that a growing church, or at least a stable one, is a healthy and happy church. But the rolls were being "cleansed" during the time I arrived, and the membership "dropped" from 909 believers to about 650. Now the church is shrinking/has shrunk. Now we are asking what went wrong. What is God up to?

I am not convinced that anything went wrong at all, but I am convinced some things changed. Our denomination answered questions it had struggled with for decades. Some left who did not appreciate the outcome of that struggle. On the local level, ministers came and went, but this always happens. Something else happened to make the church smaller, and I'm not sure what. I have my own measurement, which is hardly scientific, to measure a church's health, namely, attendance on Easter Sunday. Christmas has so many people coming and going, but by and large, Christians try to be in "their" church on Easter Sunday, whether they are members or not.

Easter Sunday Attendance at First Presbyterian Ocala for the Last 16 years

2002	761	2011	711
2003	673	2012	600
2004	731	2013	546
2005	672	2014	585
2006	745	2015	538
2007	714	2016	552
2008	822	2017	423
2009	804	2018	485
2010	688		

This data, though kept with the best intentions, is probably a bit flawed, but, we can assume, generally accurate. If graphed, it would show that the church "peaked" in attendance about ten years ago. Attendance tells the story of how many people came to church. I will say this about the 423 souls who attended Easter Sunday of 2017. They are committed, and this is good.

Attendance is no way to measure the success or failure of a church when we are talking about the church and its mission. Our benevolences grew every year over this period. New ministries began. The love of Christ was known. God was worshiped in many powerful ways. But all who love this church and what it stands for want to see new growth. If we go back to the plant world, we know that one way to bring on new and better growth is pruning. The church has been pruned, a painful but perhaps necessary process. Only God knows.

Are we ready for what comes next? Our Session is going on a retreat to Epworth by the Sea in St. Simons Island, GA January 4-6. Ruth Elswood, our outgoing Parish Associate, has graciously agreed to conduct services for us that Sunday here in Ocala. We will be spending the first weekend of the new year together as a Session, planning a new roadmap for our church, one that I hope will bring new growth. Let's be clear: our growth needs to be spiritual (becoming closer to God) which is very difficult to measure. Something good happens when people feel like they are growing spiritually in their church. If this and only this is achieved, everything else will surely follow according to God's divine will.

Happy New Year! Ron



## Rev. Ruth Elswood, Parish Associate

### Endings and Beginnings



Dear Friends in Christ,  
I have been blessed beyond measure over this past year to serve this loving congregation as your parish associate. I began my ministry here during Advent, 2017, and, as a new year begins, my service here is now coming to a close. Lon and I have made the decision to move from Gainesville to St. Petersburg where we have spent a lot of time recently. I have just been approved by the session of the First Presbyterian Church of St. Petersburg to serve in ministry there as parish associate. I will be eternally grateful to Ron for so graciously asking me to minister alongside him throughout 2018. While I am excited by new opportunities to serve the Lord, I am

sad to leave the many friends I have made here at First Ocala. You have taken me into your hearts and allowed me to be with you in times of illness, loss, and grieving. I will never forget the way you have opened your hearts to me and made me a part of this beloved community of Christians.

Most of you know that my daughter, Charlotte, just spent six difficult months serving in the military in Iraq. I know that several of you have had sons and daughters serving in a similar way in dangerous places. The prayers of so many friends have meant more than I can ever express during this time. This is a praying congregation and to know that a loved one is remembered in prayer is a tremendous comfort. One of my seminary professors used to say that when we remember someone in prayer, we actually “re-member” them; that is, we bring them back into membership of the beloved community. Charlotte is safe and out of Iraq now and, as I write this, is expected home for Christmas. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your prayers. Prayer is indeed powerful. I will be keeping you all in my prayers in the New Year and beyond.

Ruth

**Happy New Year to One and All!**  
**The church office will be closed on**  
**January 21st in observance of**  
**Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.**

Attendance				
Worship services	11/25	12/2	12/9	12/16
8:15 a.m.	32	38	42	
9:30 a.m.	79	80	85	
11:00 a.m.	103	122	118	311
Total	214	240	246	311

## David Bedenbaugh, Music Ministries

### We look Forward to a New Year of Music that Unites our Hearts together in Christ!

Did you know that as we sing together in worship, we literally become one in heart? Researchers in Sweden studied the heart rates of choir members as they sang together. Their findings published in *Frontiers in Neuroscience* explain how heart rates become synchronized when people sing together.



The researchers measured the changes in the choir members' heart rates. When the choir began to sing, their heart rates slowed down.

And they learned it takes almost no time at all for singers' heart rates to become synchronized. As people sing together their heart rates fall into a shared rhythm guided by the song's tempo!

*"If you have any encouragement from your being in union with Christ, any comfort flowing from love, any fellowship with in the Spirit, or any compassion and sympathy, then complete my joy by having a common purpose and a common love, by being one in heart and mind."*

Philippians 2:1-3

## Session Briefs

### SESSION BRIEFS – NOVEMBER 18, 2018

Received Glen, Leslie and Reinhardt Switzer into membership by Transfer of Letter from Fort King Presbyterian Church, Ocala, Florida. The Switzer family is re-activating their membership here at First Presbyterian.

1. Received Maria Vasquez into membership by Profession of Faith.
2. Mourned the death of Diane Andrews on November 4, 2018.
3. Learned that the church van had sold for \$7,500.00.
4. Approved having a "Blue Christmas" service on December 12, 2018.
5. Approved having a congregational meeting on December 2, 2018, for the purpose of electing the 2021 class of Elders and Deacons.

### CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the following who were elected at the congregational meeting on December 2, 2018:

#### Deacons

Class of 2021 – Evelyn Longo  
Alice Russell  
Donna Winfree

#### Elders

Class of 2019 – Van Akin  
Class of 2020 – Bill Futch  
Class of 2021 – Jeff Baker  
Cindy MacKay  
Mary Moore  
Janie Scott  
Joe Vorwerk  
Peggy Wiechmann

Thank you to the 2019 Nominating Committee for their work on preparing the slate of nominees. Committee members are: Rusty Juergens, chair, Savannah Bennett, Elaine Cox, Evelyn Weaver, Nita Williams, and ex officio members Rev. Ron Watson and Rev. Natasha Sudderth.



# January Birthdays

2 Joyce Heenie	10 Adam Schuler	16 Sandra Dailey	21 Erin McClary	26 Mina DiGeronimo
3 Gwen Peterson	Bobby Richardson	17 Claudia Markam-Ahl	23 Randy Briggs	Laura Moore
Masha Knepp	Howell Winfree	18 Grietje Lewis	24 Linda Butscher	27 Sid Varner
Dirk Lewis	Rhonda Kirk	Sue Brawner	Chris Bissett	Kathy Hart
4 Sheila Kelley	Michelle McDoniels	Trish Mosby	William Cone	Graham Moore
5 Steve Koch	Molly Jank	Lora Barrett	25 Gene Wiechens	Steve Taylor
Lauren Hart	12 Leslie Wiechens	19 BJ Hafner	Kathy Kaufman	28 Mary Moore
7 Dorothy Behrens	Austin Adams	Ramona Gant	Kelsey Adams	29 Lamar Knepp
Lyn Rainbow	14 Maria Myers	Thomas Essick		Russell Dingman
8 Jerry Rost	15 Luella Nazaruk	20 Austin Dailey		30 Roger Mason
	Tammy Wildy	Steve Cieplinski		Bill Futch
	Joyce Baker	Anne Cieplinski		31 Paulette Johnson
	Lilli MacKay			Aly Bowen



First Presbyterian Church Ocala gives thanks for the life of Barbara Brown, a longtime member who joined the saints of light on December 9th.

With believers of every time and every place, we rejoice that nothing in life or death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## PRAYER LIST

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Ruth Albright</b> ( <i>Brentwood at Fore Ranch, please call before visiting</i> ) | <b>Betty Ann Jones</b> ( <i>Margaret Trump's sister</i> )       |
| <b>Kayla Ali</b> ( <i>granddaughter of Yvonne Simms</i> )                            | <b>Gisela Lehner</b>  |
| <b>Brian Baker</b>   | <b>Anna Marie Miller</b> ( <i>Hawthorne</i> )                   |
| <b>Brent Barber</b> ( <i>Gera Fleming's son-in-law</i> )                             | <b>Gloria Miller</b> ( <i>Hawthorne</i> )                       |
| <b>Andy Boyer</b> ( <i>Fran Gilchrist's son-in-law</i> )                             | <b>Maria Myers</b> ( <i>Hampton Manor</i> )                     |
| <b>The Brown Family</b> ( <i>for the death of Barbara Brown</i> )                    | <b>Ray Newhouse</b> ( <i>Pat Bishop's brother</i> )             |
| <b>Randall &amp; Linda Deyton</b> ( <i>Pickard family prayer concerns</i> )          | <b>Brenda O'Quinn</b> ( <i>Elaine Cox's sister</i> )            |
| <b>Kathy and Terry Donovan</b> ( <i>Nita Williams' friends</i> )                     | <b>Charlene Preston</b>   |
| <b>Ellen Drummond</b> ( <i>Brookdale</i> )   | <b>Dave Proctor</b> ( <i>Sue Straub's son-in-law</i> )          |
| <b>The Durning Family</b>  | <b>John Reynolds</b> ( <i>Suzy Heinbockel's brother</i> )       |
| <b>Maranell Fleming</b>  | <b>Janice Schafer</b> ( <i>Palm Garden</i> )                    |
| <b>Jamii Fuseler</b> ( <i>the Pickards' niece</i> )                                  | <b>Wes Schultz</b>  |
| <b>David Guest</b>   | <b>Bill Shirley</b>   |
| <b>Gary Harward</b>  | <b>Betty Jeanne Spencer</b> ( <i>Lady Lake Specialty Care</i> ) |
| <b>Maxine Heinbockel</b> ( <i>John Heinbockel's mother</i> )                         | <b>VonHayes Switzer</b> ( <i>deployed with the Navy</i> )       |
|  | <b>Rich Valvo</b> ( <i>Rusty Juergens' friend</i> )             |
|  | <b>Jeannie Vincent</b>  |
|  | <b>Sally Williams</b>   |

# Membership News

**On November 18 we welcomed five new members into the First Presbyterian church family.**



The Switzer family is well known to many of the FPC family as they were all members previously, so they are being welcomed back. **Glenn, Leslie** and sons, **Reinhardt** and **Baldwin**, all joined by transfer of letter from Ft. King Presbyterian. Another son, **Von Hayes**, is currently in the Navy in Jacksonville, but is also a member, having maintained his membership over the years. The Switzer family attends the 9:30 service and reports they are happy to be back at First Presbyterian. Welcome Home, Switzers!



Before joining our church, **Maria Vasquez** visited First Presbyterian with her friends, the Dolins. She comes to the United States by way of Honduras over 30 years ago, first living in New York and then in Ocala for the past 14 years. She and her husband, Geovanni, have three sons - Christopher, Joshua and Aaron. Maria also has one grandson, Gabriel. Maria is happy to be with First Pres and looks forward to becoming involved with her church family. She attends the 11:00 service. Please give her a warm welcome.



**2018 Giving Tree was a Huge Success!** Thank you all again for the wonderful outpouring of your generosity in sharing your many blessings! All the requests were fulfilled and even more money was donated so that we were also able to help two needy families and the



Domestic Violence Center, in addition to Project Hope, Skill Day Center, Marion County Senior Services, and SoZo Kids. All of this was made possible by the devotion, energy and love of an amazing group of women, who pitch in where help is needed: Margaret Baker, Sue Brawner, Carol Carpenter, Cathy Edwards, Cheryl Fante, Lannie Mercer, Vicki Roberts, Becky Schatt, Ann VanDenburgh and Jarl Hagood.

*Thank You!*



## FPC Thanks You

Thank You!

..... *Thank you* Sincere thanks to all of you who participated in the **2018 Advent Readings and Lightings**. This year's volunteers were such a wonderful part of our Advent season. Please thank them yourselves when you see them and encourage more people for next year's Advent season to volunteer. It is a fulfilling way to prepare yourselves for Christ's birth. Thank you once again, Evelyn Longo, coordinator.

..... *Thank you* Many thanks to all of you who participated in the **2018 Interfaith Suppers!** The following members and their circles, Deacons, Bible study friends, and neighbors who contributed to this year's supper program: Mary Dingman, Wendie Moore, Nadene Howard, Cindy MacKay, Lee Ann Drake, Lannie Mercer and Deacons, Ann and Bobby Richardson, Roger and JoAnn Brandt, Nita Williams and Circle 3, and John and Suzy Heinbockle. Thank you all for sharing your blessings with so many others! There are still a few spots left to fill in the 2019 calendar, and it is always the 2nd Thursday of the month. Please call Jarl Hagood for more info 352-867-9372.

..... *Thank you* The **beautiful archway and window greens** decorating our sanctuary, were donated, in the spirit of Christmas, by William Russell, Donnie Slone, William Rainbow, John Hagood and John Peterson families.



Join us every Wednesday night for a **Family Fellowship Dinner at 6:00** in the fellowship hall.

**Covered Dish**

Bring a covered dish and gather for good food and fellowship and invite a friend. If you can bring a little extra, that wonderful! If you have dietary restrictions, we hope you will still join us and bring something for yourself. Each of us will pitch in and do what we can to make this weekly event a success; cook, clean, organize, spread the word, or bring members who cannot drive.



Most importantly bring your joy! What a gift it is to have time to sit together and get to know one another as fellow Disciples of Christ.



Out to Dinner Group will be having

January Dinner at

**Latino's**

2030 S Pine Ave, Ocala

On January 17th,  
5:30 p.m.

**All are Welcome!**

RSVP to Susan Raffa

352-620-8087

By January 14th

# Presbyterian Women, Pat Greaves, Moderator

As we close 2018 and look forward to 2019, a very Happy New Year to all Presbyterian Women. If you're not a member of a Circle, I urge you to make a New Year's resolution to choose a Circle and get involved in PW. Select a day/time that suits your schedule and join a Circle at one of the times listed below. We are studying from the Horizon's Bible Study book *God's Promise, I Am With You*, by Amy Poling Sutherland. Study books are available from the Contact person listed below or contact Pat Greaves, Moderator, at 236-0716. Come and join in Christian fellowship this New Year.



THE COMBINED CIRCLES' CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON held on Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, was very enjoyable. A big *Thank You* to Tom Weaver for leading our study. Tom does an excellent job each month mentoring our Bible Moderators. The topic for January will be in Lesson Five in our Study Book (page 49), "God with Us When We're Powerless." Thanks to all of you who pitched in to help make it a success.

THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN OF THE ST. AUGUSTINE PRESBYTERY, will be held on Saturday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at Trinity Presbyterian Church, 156 Florida Park Drive North, Palm Coast, 32137. Deadline for registration is January 7<sup>th</sup> with an \$18 fee. There will be a \$5 late fee after that date. Please contact Pat Greaves at 362-0013 if you're interested in attending.

Presbyterian Women Circle Meetings for January 2019 Bible Study and Fellowship with your Sisters in Christ					
	Date	Time	Meeting Place	Contact	Phone
Bible Moderator Mentoring	Thursday, January 3	5:30 p.m.	Room 1	Tom Weaver	622-6028
Coordinating Team Meeting	Thursday, January 3	7:00 p.m.	Room 1	Pat Greaves	236-0716 or 352-362-0013
Circle 1	Tuesday, January 8	2:00 p.m.	Conference Room	Esther Arango-Palencia	732-6626
Circle 3	Monday, January 21	10:00 a.m.	8140 NW 46 <sup>th</sup> Street	Shirley Cochran	351-1681
Circle 4	January 8	6:30 p.m.	Conference Room	MaryBeth Rivers	625-3372
Circle 7	January 8	11:00 a.m.	Choir Room	Susie Marta	304-5416
Circle 8	January 8	2:00 p.m.	Room 1	Lois Clardy	622-3053

Presbyterian Women's Program Meetings for January 2019 Ways to Serve with your Sisters in Christ					
Program	Date	Time	Location	Contact	Phone
Prayer Shawl Ministry	Thursday, January 24	1:30 p.m.	Conference Room	Liz Diener-Dickmann	732-6368
Stress Free Book Club Selection for January <i>The Unexpected Guest</i> By Agatha Christie	Tuesday, January 22	1:30 p.m.	Conference Room	Nita Williams	237-6789
WeCare Sewing Ministry	Monday, January 28	9:30 a.m.	Room 1	Evelyn Weaver	622-6028



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The Church office will be closed on December 25th and 26th as well as January 1st, New Year's Day.

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FPC will have one service at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, December 30th.

## Part of the FPC Ocala 2018-2019 Concert Series



*Wed. January 16<sup>TH</sup> at 6 p.m*

### KINGS BRASS CONCERT

World class entertainment for the whole family.  
Freewill Offering. **The King's Brass have performed over one hundred concerts each season with three trumpets, three trombones, a tuba, keyboards, and percussion.**

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