



PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY



Presbytery Weekly E-Newsletter ~ March 12, 2021

From the General Presbyter

Dear Friends,

For the last several weeks I have asked for responses from churches around the presbytery about the ways they are already showing some of the marks of a vital congregation. Today I am sharing four responses from First Bonita Springs, Bee Ridge, Christ Church of Longboat Key, and Peace in Lakewood Ranch. Sharing ideas is a great way to spread creativity and stimulate new thinking in other churches. Please continue to send me articles about your creative work for the gospel.

Blessings,
Melana

Note: I continue to work mostly from home. If you want to contact me, please call my cell number rather than the office, or email me. Thank you. Cell number 417-489-0024.

Good News from Congregations

First Presbyterian Church of Bonita Springs

For nearly 20 consecutive years, First Presbyterian Church of Bonita Springs has been the location for the Great Banquet of Southwest Florida. But, in this year of COVID-19, this special event had to be postponed.

What is the Great Banquet? The Great Banquet is a structured weekend designed to strengthen and renew the faith of Christians and make Disciples. Through a combined effort of laity and clergy, the Great Banquet focuses on the renewal of the church. The Great Banquet, like its counterparts, Cursillo, Emmaus and Tres Dias, examines Christianity as a lifestyle. For three days, guests live and study together in a worshipful time of singing, prayer and discussion. Guests participate in the daily celebration of Holy Communion and examine more fully the presence of Christ in His body of believers. They personally experience His grace through prayer and acts of a loving, Christian support community.

Each year, during the month of February, two weekend movements are planned, one for men and one for women. With the many challenges of staying in compliance with all the protective measures recommended and required to prevent/control the spread of COVID-19, the decision was made to postpone these spiritual encounters. This was a very emotional and difficult decision to make on behalf of our growing Great Banquet Community of over 750 members. So, to keep the spirit of the Great Banquet alive and its discipleship thriving, a special event was held on February 11. All Community members were invited to experience a Great Banquet

Celebration with good and plentiful food, Holy Communion, and the words and experiences of how Disciples encourage and build God's kingdom.

What is the purpose of the Great Banquet? The mission of the Great Banquet is to know Jesus as Savior and Lord and to make Him known. To live a life of grace and to respond to higher levels of Christian discipleship becomes the purpose of the Great Banquet. So, on February 11, 2021 many gathered to remind ourselves and each other of God's love for us and to continue the momentum of making Disciples through the teachings and experiences of the Great Banquet. The next Great Banquet weekends are scheduled and planning has begun for February 10-13, 2022 (men) and February 24-27, 2022 (women).

Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church, Sarasota

Pastor Terri Jo at Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church wanted our Lenten journey to begin with a reflection on our lives and God's Gift of Grace which promises us transformation and resurrection. What began as an experiential, personal and meaningful service designed for perhaps another time, a time when normalcy reigned over all church events, including Ash Wednesday, became so much more.

For the past year, planning for any church service has had to include all precautions that have been implemented to keep us safe and healthy during the pandemic. Planning for Ash Wednesday was no exception. Physical steps included moving the service outside, with all that that entails – location, lighting, chairs, social distancing and, of course, speculation on the weather. Plan A was created as well as the ubiquitous Plans B, C and even D. How to reconcile dispensation of ashes with social distancing began as an insurmountable obstacle, but planted the seed of an idea which transformed our normal somber, Christ centered Ash Wednesday service into a participatory, joy filled, Christ centered celebration filled with Worship, Bible readings, music, the beauty of God's world, and the warmth of fellowship.

During a year of so much sacrifice and loss, Pastor Terri Jo was wrestling with planning Lent, after all, 'It feels like we have lived Lent all year long!' But then God's promises communicated through the hymn "In The Bulb There Is a Flower" jumped off the page and into her heart. It then became a Lenten theme- one that articulates the hope we have in Christ whose powerful redemptive work, even if we don't see it and are unaware, like the mystery of how:

- a flower emerges from a bulb;
- promises of transformation that look like butterflies emerge free from the confining and dead-like cocoons;
- resurrection victoriously arises from death;

We planted lily bulbs and remembered our God whose hands played in the dirt to create us, and whose hands will receive us one day. But in the meantime, Christ is busy doing the redemptive work in our lives, preparing us, as the hymn goes, for a final victory, which will remain unrevealed until its season, except to God's eyes.

Spread out in our parking lot, surrounding a simple lectern, we listened to our Pastor, our friends and the sounds of birds. We watched the sun set, the swaying branches in the trees and the first stars of the evening. We felt the dirt of the earth now smudged on our hands and foreheads, we planted flower bulbs within the dirt and watched the life-giving water be poured over the bulbs we planted now hidden to our eyes. We meditated on the hope we have in Christ who is at work in our lives, cultivating life and resurrection.

Christ Church of Longboat Key

Christ Church of Longboat Key has not let Covid get in the way of assisting Hope Seeds International. In fact, because of Covid, we have found ourselves with extra time and instead of bellyaching about it we have put our efforts forth in a positive way.

Hope Seeds is a Christian organization which provides packets of garden seed to impoverished areas of the world. These seeds are distributed by missionaries along with the Gospel Message of Hope and educational materials. Last year Hope Seeds sent over 557,993 packets to 13 countries valued at over \$1.6 million dollars.

During Covid, over 70 Christ Church members and friends have come together Monday afternoons in Fellowship Hall and packed over 115,000 seed packets. These along with the gospel message of hope which is included in each family pack will assist over 11,000 families. Those uncomfortable about coming to Church take home gospel messages to fold and affix labels to envelopes.

If you wish to learn more about how your Church can become involved with Hope Seeds by volunteering or funding, please contact Hope Seeds' Executive Director David Balsbaugh at 941-228-5660.

Peace Presbyterian Church, Lakewood Ranch

We say at Peace (Lakewood Ranch) "Worship plus two is what we do!" and remind congregants, whether they are members or not, that the best way to have a meaningful life in the church is by serving. We suggest that "worship plus two" means that you are serving or connecting in at least two ways beyond worship. Ideally, one of those is nourishing you and one is your sharing to be a blessing to others inside or outside the congregation. Sometimes there is overlap between what nourishes you and what blesses another.

FEMA Announces \$140 Million for Emergency Food and Shelter Program

By FEMA External Affairs

FEMA announced \$140 million in funding will be available to communities across the country to assist with feeding and sheltering.

Congress made \$125 million available for Fiscal Year 2020, and this year the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) National Board is including an additional \$15 million from funds that have not been used from prior grant years. FEMA awarded the \$125 million to the National Board, which is now allocating the funds, combined with the additional \$15 million, to qualifying jurisdictions (counties and cities).

Program funding assists local organizations dedicated to feeding, sheltering and providing critical resources to people with economic emergencies, including our nation's hungry and homeless populations. These funds are designed to help people with non-disaster related emergencies and can be used for a broad range of services, including mass shelter, mass feeding, food pantries and food banks, utility bill payments to prevent cut-offs, rent/mortgage payments to prevent evictions/foreclosures and transition assistance from shelters to stable living conditions.

Eight percent of this year's allocation will be made available to states that will make funding determinations to aid people in jurisdictions with needs that may not be reflected in the National Board's qualifying formula.

The National Board is chaired by FEMA with representatives from American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA, The Jewish Federations of North America, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, The Salvation

Army and United Way Worldwide. United Way Worldwide, selected by the National Board as its Secretariat and Fiscal Agent, is also responsible for the daily administration of the EFSP.

EFSP funding is allocated to qualifying local jurisdictions based on a formula using the most recent national population, unemployment, and poverty data.

A state-by-state list of the eligible jurisdictions and award amounts is available at the [United Way website](#).

Save the Date: April 27, 2021

Leading the Church into the Post Covid World

Presenter: Rev. Tod Bolsinger

Sponsored by the Synod of South Atlantic

Misión Peniel: a Ministry of Peace River Presbytery

Web Site: www.misionpeniel.org

As a mission of the Presbytery, we rely on the churches of Peace River Presbytery for 100% of our budget. Thank you for your faithful support of this presbytery ministry.

For the latest updates, visit us on Facebook (Mision Peniel), Instagram (misionpenielimmokalee) and subscribe to our quarterly newsletter via our website.

Contacts:

Rev. Miguel Estrada, Pastor – miguel@peacriverpresbytery.org

Ruth DeYoe, Mission Coordinator – ruth@peacriverpresbytery.org

Job Opportunity

First Presbyterian Church of Port Charlotte is seeking a part-time, 8-10 hours per week, Financial Secretary. Must have experience in accounting procedures and practices, handling payroll, and financial record keeping. Contact the church office at 941-625-5045 for additional information.

Presbytery Calendar: March 2021

You may view the entire calendar on the Presbytery web site: www.peacriverpresbytery.org

Please email corrections or additions to lori@peacriverpresbytery.org

Thursday, March 4

Mision Peniel Team (10:30 am by Zoom Conference)

Monday, March 8

Presbyterian Women Spring Retreat

Virtual World Digital Task Force (2:30 pm by Zoom Conference)

Tuesday, March 9

Committee on Ministry (9:00 am by Zoom Conference)

CCC Team (2:00 pm by Zoom Conference)

Wednesday, March 10

Committee on Preparation for Ministry (10:00 am by Zoom Conference)
Stewardship Work Group (2:00 pm by Zoom Conference)
Human Resources Team (3:00 pm by Zoom Conference)

Monday, March 15

Outreach and Nurture Team (10:00 am by Zoom Conference)

Thursday, March 18

Finance Team/Board of Trustees (9:30 am by Zoom Conference)

Team, Committee, and other meetings are being conducted via Zoom Video Conference until further notice.
Please check the web site calendar regularly for additions or changes.

Covenant Partners of Peace River Presbytery

Click on the links to visit each ministry's web site:

- Beth-El Farmworker Ministry – Wimauma: www.beth-el.org
- Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center: www.cedarkirk.org
- Presbyterian Homes & Housing Foundation of FL: www.phhf.com

Prayer Needs

Please pray for:

- Rev. Dr. Harry Schill – “...for God’s mercy to shrink the bile duct tumor so that surgery can be done.”
- Rev. Dr. Kathi Wiggins and Family – loss of her younger brother
- Becky Beckwith and Family – loss of husband, Jim Beckwith (past Moderator of Presbytery and Committee on Ministry member). Address for Becky Beckwith: 617 Woodlawn Drive, Bradenton, FL 34210
- The Congregations and Pastors of Peace River Presbytery
- Our Nation
- The Congregations and Pastors of Peace River Presbytery
- Beth-El Farmworker Ministry (in Wimauma)
- Misión Peniel Farmworker Ministry (in Immokalee)
- Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center
- Dan and Elizabeth Turk, PCUSA Mission Co-Workers in Madagascar

Churches of Peace River Presbytery

Go to [Peace River Presbytery Churches](#)

to visit each of the church's web sites.



The Presbytery Newsletter is a weekly publication of Peace River Presbytery.
If you wish to be unsubscribed from the distribution, or if you know someone who would like
to receive the newsletter, please contact Lori Doyal at the Presbytery Office:
lori@peacriverpresbytery.org or 941-426-8421, ext. 401.