



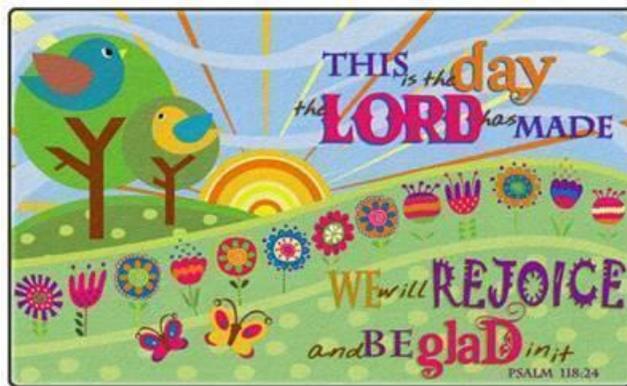
# PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY



## Weekly Presbytery Letter ~ January 5, 2018

### Breathe – Beginning a New Year Graham Hart – General Presbyter

Christmas is past. The New Year with its possibilities is yet to be born. What we have is today. The Psalmist (118:24) said it best: *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*



So how do we do that? How do we deal with our tendencies to day-dream about “what if” or focus on “if only”? How do we do with our sometimes irrational fears about the future, as well as our well-founded concerns? How can we avoid our human tendency to be consumed by ANTS (i.e. Automatic Negative Thinking)? How can we live this day, fully present and fully alive?

There is a story that comes from the avant-garde Burning Man Festival in Nevada ([see article in Psychology Today](#)) about a telephone booth placed in the middle of this annual festival. The sign on the booth says: Phone line to God. A woman steps into the booth and asks God: "How can I live more in the moment?" For her, “life” was being drowned out by anxiety, fear, inner negative self-talk, self-doubt, and the noise of the world around her.

"Breathe", came the reply.

One of the exercises in Mindfulness Training ([click here for video](#)) is to learn to pay attention to one’s breath; for in doing that we can be more fully present and aware, and not reactive and distracted. Many of us have been taught that when angry, count to 10 before we say a word we regret. In short, breathe. When we remember to do that, we have a chance not to get swept away in the emotionality of the moment.

So, as we begin this year, as individuals, members of congregations and Peace River Presbytery, I invite us to breathe.

Why? There is so much change happening within our world, politics, and even church, that we find ourselves anxious, figuratively or literally short of breath; maybe our blood pressure has gone up and our coping skills gone down. We wonder with Chicken Little “if the sky is falling”:

- the stocks markets are up, but we fear it will soon come down;
- our political party is in power, but we fear it could soon be undone;

- or we have concerns about the current administration and fear a new executive order or early morning tweet will unravel everything we know and love.

I do not want to make light of the deep concerns we all have, and acknowledge that what, for one person is an anxiety producer, is for his/her neighbor, friend, son or daughter a soothing and hopeful balm. So, despite our differences of perspective, what is a helpful, life-giving response? What can we do?

Bruce Wismer, one of the pastors at Pine Shores in Sarasota, and a member of the National Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team, who has been one of our denomination's first responders to some of our nation's worst human caused disasters (i.e. shootings), has reminded me and others in stressful times: "just breath". When we are stressed, literally we don't breathe, which then physically increases all of the stress related hormones that are not good for us.

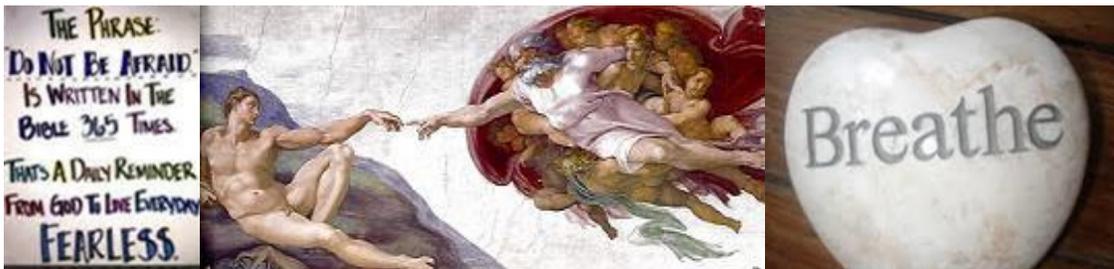
In scripture, the root word for breath and spirit are the same. In the beginning, the spirit (breath) of God hovered over the place of the deep (i.e. darkness and chaos), and brought light and life and order. In the beginning, God breathed the breath of life into human kind. So what might God be telling us in this time? Breath ... pay attention to the breath of life ... make space for the Spirit of God to be present and work ... figure out how to be in the moment with God in that moment. Breath.

So, as we face significant shifts in societal and cultural norms and values, breathe.

As we face challenges in our congregation, breath.

When we wonder what is God up to in the world ... breath ... God is at work as God has been for a long time.

Breath is not an excuse to do nothing, but it is a way for us to live into the admonishment of scripture to FEAR NOT. All is not lost, all will be found. As the Confession of Faith states: in life and in death we belong to God.



Note the phrases "don't be afraid", "do not fear", or "fear not", which was the word the angel brought to a young girl named Mary, occur several hundred times in the Bible. Why? When we let fear dominate, we cannot be present in the moment and we will miss what God is doing in our world and lives.

So, as we begin this year, we can rejoice that when we focus on that life-giving breath (i.e. the cool air coming in and warm out breathed out), we may find that we are better able to:

... clear our minds and hearts to discern what God is up to,

... not be so anxious,

... enable ourselves to see - what in our pre-occupation with the future or rehearsing the past - we missed.

This is the day the Lord has given you and me, let us be glad and rejoice in it. As always, I would love to hear your thoughts.

*Thanks be to God who continues to be our rudder to guide us in the way, and wind (breath) that sends us on our journey!*

*Graham*

Graham Hart

General Presbyter

[graham@peaceriverpresbytery.org](mailto:graham@peaceriverpresbytery.org)

## ARTICLES of INTEREST

*(selected by Graham Hart)*

### [Looking back with lament, and forward with hope](#)

Religion News Service: Richard Mouw is inclined to do a lot of lamenting as he looks back on 2017. But at present many of the year's most hopeful occurrences are likely hidden from our view.

### [The 99 best things that happened in 2017](#)

If you're feeling despair about the fate of humanity in the 21st century, you might want to reconsider, Quartz reports. Here are 99 of the [best stories from 2017](#) that you probably missed.

### [2017 has been a rough year for evangelicals](#)

NPR: As 2017 ends, evangelical Christians in the United States are suffering one of their periodic identity crises.

### [Can evangelicalism survive Donald Trump and Roy Moore?](#)

The New Yorker: A new generation of churches, more diverse and confounding political categories, may abandon the label but remain committed to its historic beliefs, Timothy Keller says.

Religion Dispatches: [Dear Timothy Keller: The 'evangelical' problem isn't pollsters](#)

### [Fighting gentrification with the Holy Spirit](#)

Pacific Standard: A small church in Minneapolis is working to stave off the effects of rising neighborhood housing costs by unifying communities through religion.

### [As you travel, pause and take a look at airport chapels](#)

The Conversation: We often rush by without looking, but America's rich spiritual and religious life is reflected in these sanctuaries.

### [The private prophet: Mormon Church President Thomas Monson dies at 90](#)

NPR: Thomas S. Monson, president and prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, died Tuesday night at the age of 90

### [The NRA's assault on Christian faith and practice](#)

Religion & Politics: On issues related to gun violence, safety, and regulation, evangelicals clearly need, and deserve, a more theologically robust discussion.

### [The GOP's theology of debt](#)

Religion News Service: Republican views of debt embody a secular theology rooted in America's Puritan past, Mark Silk says.

## ... FROM the PRESBYTERY OFFICE ...

1. Church Treasurers, Finance Chairs, or Clerks of Session, please return your completed "Estimate of Giving" Form for 2018 by January 16<sup>th</sup> to Lori Doyal, Financial Secretary and Administrative Assistant. The form can be mailed or emailed ([lori@peaceriverpresbytery.org](mailto:lori@peaceriverpresbytery.org)). These forms were mailed, as part of a packet of information, to each church office (to the attention of the Treasurer or Finance Chair) in November. If you need the form re-sent via email, please let Lori know by email or phone (941-426-8421, ext. 401).

2. Clerks of Session or Church Offices, please send your updated list of Ruling Elders to Lori ([lori@peacriverpresbytery.org](mailto:lori@peacriverpresbytery.org)), to be included in the Presbytery's newsletter email distribution list. Include name, email address, and class.
3. The *Presbytery Directory* (formerly *Handbook*) is being updated for 2018. As soon as it is completed, Lori will send notification to you with the link to the Directory on the web site.
4. The next Stated Meeting of Presbytery will be held on Thursday, February 22, at First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota. A mass, combined choir will be featured! Watch for an invitation to your choir and details from Rev. Bill Teng, PRP Planning Team Moderator.

## BETH-EL FARMWORKER MINISTRY, INC.

*A Ministry to the Farmworkers in Wimauma*

[www.beth-el.org](http://www.beth-el.org)



PO Box 860 | Wimauma, FL 33598

Phone: 813-633-1548 ext. 223

Web: [www.beth-el.org](http://www.beth-el.org)

[January Newsletter](#)

*Beth-El is looking for donations of furniture for its office and dental clinic.  
Please contact their office if you have desks, tables, or bookcases.*

## CEDARKIRK CAMP & CONFERENCE CENTER

*A place apart to build up the body of Christ in love.*

[www.cedarkirk.org](http://www.cedarkirk.org)

*Thank you for supporting Cedarkirk and holding this ministry in your prayers for the last 45 years.  
We look forward to witnessing God's handiwork here in the years to come!*

For additional information, please contact the camp office at (813) 685-4224 or visit [www.cedarkirk.org](http://www.cedarkirk.org).

## MISION PENIEL

*A Ministry of Peace River Presbytery to the Farmworkers in Immokalee*

[www.misionpeniel.com](http://www.misionpeniel.com)

### **Staff Contacts:**

- Rev. Miguel Estrada, Pastor, P: 239-633-2181, E: [migustrada@hotmail.com](mailto:migustrada@hotmail.com)
- Ruth DeYoe, Mission Coordinator, P: 386-793-6151, E: [ruthdeyoe@gmail.com](mailto:ruthdeyoe@gmail.com)
- General Email: [misionpenielpeacriver@gmail.com](mailto:misionpenielpeacriver@gmail.com)

### **Addresses:**

- Facility Address: 208 Boston Ave., Immokalee, FL 34142 (not for mailing)
- Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1204, Immokalee, FL 34153
- Mailing Address for Contributions\*: Peace River Presbytery, 5600 Peace River Road, North Port, FL 34287

### **\*Contributions to Mision Peniel:**

- Mail to: Peace River Presbytery, 5600 Peace River Road, North Port, FL 34287
- Checks can be made payable to Peace River Presbytery or to Mision Peniel.
- Please note *Mision Peniel* in the memo section.

- Contributor information is provided to Mision Peniel each month.

## PRAYER NEEDS

### Please pray for:

- Rev. Dr. Jim Berger and Family, in the loss of his 97-year old father, Robert Berger, on New Year's Day. Pray for Jim as he is up north now making arrangements.
- The communities affected by Winter Storm, Grayson.

### Please continue to pray for:

- Rev. Dr. Bruce Porter and Family, in the loss of his sister.
- Rev. Dr. Daniel Pendergrass and Family, in the loss of his wife, Kathy.
- Jim and Becky Beckwith, and their son, Greg – health
- Rev. Dr. Lou Thompson – health
- Phil Kuehl (husband of Rev. Elizabeth Kuehl, Faith, Cape Coral) – health
- Robert Dennis (son of Rev. India Dennis) – mental health issues
- The communities, across the U.S. and Puerto Rico, recovering from the hurricanes and fires
- 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
- Les and Cindy Morgan, PCUSA Mission Co-Workers in Bangladesh

### PRESBYTERY PRAYER GUIDE: JANUARY 2018:

January 7	<u>Peace River Presbytery</u> 37 Congregations and 131 Ministers
January 14	<u>First Presbyterian Church, Arcadia</u> Pastor: Rev. Bill Teng Email: <a href="mailto:pastor@FirstPC.church">pastor@FirstPC.church</a>
January 21	<u>First Presbyterian Church, Bonita Springs</u> Pastor: Rev. Dr. Doug Pratt Email: <a href="mailto:dpratt@fpcbonita.org">dpratt@fpcbonita.org</a>

	Associate Pastor: Rev. Steven Grant Email: <a href="mailto:sgrant@fpconita.org">sgrant@fpconita.org</a> Associate Pastor: Rev. Bradley Rogers Email: <a href="mailto:brogers@fpconita.org">brogers@fpconita.org</a>
January 28	<u>Braden River Presbyterian Church, Bradenton</u> Pastor: Rev. Glenn Buzbee, Jr. Email: <a href="mailto:revglennb@gmail.com">revglennb@gmail.com</a>

### **PRESBYTERY CALENDAR: JANUARY 2018**

You may view the entire calendar on the Presbytery web site: [www.peaceriverpresbytery.org](http://www.peaceriverpresbytery.org)

All meetings are at the Presbytery Center location in North Port, unless otherwise posted.

**Monday, January 8**

Nominations and Representation Committee (10:00 a.m.)  
 Planning Team (12:00-4:00 p.m., beginning with lunch)

**Tuesday, January 9**

Committee on Ministry (9:00 a.m.)

**Wednesday, January 10**

Committee on Preparation for Ministry (10:00 a.m.)

**Thursday, January 11**

Finance Team / Board of Trustees (9:30 a.m.)

**Monday, January 15**

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Day  
 Presbytery Offices Closed

**Thursday, January 18**

Steering Committee (9:30 a.m.)

**Thursday, January 25**

Congregational Vitality Team (12:30 p.m.)

### **CHURCHES of PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY**

Please visit our web site, [www.peaceriverpresbytery.org/churches](http://www.peaceriverpresbytery.org/churches)

Click on the city, then the church, to visit their web site.

