

## Central Florida Presbytery and Its Relationship to Pineda Presbyterian Church

The presbytery is the second of the four councils of the Presbyterian Church (session, presbytery, synod, general assembly). The presbytery is composed of all the congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also known as teaching elders) within a geographical district. Central Florida Presbytery covers Marion, Sumter, Lake, Volusia, Seminole, Orange, Osceola, Brevard, Indian River, and Okechobee counties. Ministers are members of presbytery, not of individual churches. Presbytery includes ministers who serve outside of a church, such as: chaplains (hospital, military, prison, educational); administrators (for example, an Executive Presbyter); retired ministers.

The Book of Order (G-3.0301) states that presbytery has responsibility and power to:

- Organize, merge, dismiss, and dissolve congregations, in consultation with their members
- Oversee congregations without pastors
- Establish and dissolve pastoral relationships
- Guide the preparation of those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament
- Ordain and install ministers, dissolve relationships, and dismiss members
- Provide oversight of congregations without pastors
- Exercise pastoral care for the congregations and members of presbytery
- Counsel with a session concerning reported difficulties within a congregation
- Assist congregations in developing and participating in mission
- Act upon requests from congregations seeking to take action regarding real property

The mission statement of Central Florida Presbytery is a good summary:

“To equip, strengthen and support congregations in their ministries in service to Jesus Christ, and To unite congregations in discipleship, mission and fellowship in order to work together to accomplish the tasks that no one congregation can accomplish alone”

Let’s look at some specifics for Central Florida Presbytery and Pineda.

The connectional nature of the presbytery was at work from the very beginning of Pineda, when it was started by Presbytery as a new mission development. Presbytery provided resources and oversight of the congregation until it was large enough and financially strong enough to be chartered as a church, around 1986, including purchase of the original property (front parcel). Members of other presbyterian churches in the area, such as Eastminster, and Trinity, took the bold step of leaving their former congregations to start the new ministry of Pineda, eventually becoming charter members.

Presbytery has helped Pineda each time we’ve needed to find a new pastor, by appointing a moderator of session, helping find supply pastors and an interim or bridge pastor, providing guidance for the PNC through a Committee on Ministry (COM) liaison, and then installing the new pastor.

The installation of a new pastor at a church is both a time of worship and of celebration for the presbytery as well as the church. The service is led by a commission established by presbytery composed of pastors and elders from other churches, and all churches in the presbytery are invited to attend.

Presbytery provides resources to help churches work together to accomplish tasks that no congregation can accomplish alone. Some examples of this are the educational opportunities such as COLE (Church Officer Leadership Training) and FISH (Fresh Ideas Start Here) offered each year. Presbyterian Women, while not reporting to Presbytery, works with Presbytery to host events such as the annual women's Bible study kick-off and disaster preparedness seminars. When outside speakers are brought to Presbytery meetings, Presbytery usually arranges for a full-day presentation or seminar on the another day, to allow congregations and members the opportunity to dig deeper. Another example of working together is PYC, the Presbytery Youth Council, made up of high school juniors and seniors from across the presbytery who plan and lead activities for junior and senior high youth. Our son Matthew served on PYC and it provided not only leadership experience, but also the opportunity to connect with other Christian youth, especially important for those from churches without a large youth presence.

Mission is another area where Presbytery helps churches do more together. Whether it is local mission - such as sponsoring gleaning for Second Harvest Food Bank- or global mission - such as pooling resources from many churches to install a Living Waters system in Cuba - the presbytery makes it possible for us to participate in projects that we could not do alone. The Cuba Partnership is another example - and goes beyond our presbytery to connections with other presbyteries. Presbytery, through the Cuba Leadership Team, coordinates visits from Cuban pastors and elders both within our presbytery and in cooperation with Baltimore presbytery in scheduling visits and sharing in the costs of hosting the visitors, airfare, medical insurance, etc. BIRP does the same thing on a smaller scale for the annual Brevard-Indian River Presbyterians mission week.

Another important function of presbytery is to provide pastoral care for ministers and congregations. When we need someone to talk to about events or issues in our lives, we can go to our pastors for counseling, whether short-term or long-term. Often we don't even call it "counseling", just "I need to talk about..." But where do pastors go in the same situation? Presbytery pastors the pastors, often through the Committee on Ministry (COM). COM's Pastoral Relations subcommittee also provides opportunities for pastors in geographical clusters to meet together for fellowship and support. If problems arise within a congregation, the session can ask the COM to help or mediate. This happens more often than most people realize, because each situation is treated with great discretion, compassion, and love by a very small team. The fact that most situations are resolved quietly and effectively is a testimony to its success.

Sometimes problems are too big to be handled quietly, as when a church splits or decides to leave the denomination. In these cases, the presbytery assigns a commission to work through the issues with the congregation, and to provide pastoral care for members who choose to stay in the

presbytery, and must find or form another congregation. You probably heard of some congregations in our presbytery who left the denomination a few years ago, but you probably didn't hear of the congregations which thought about leaving but, after working through the issues with presbytery, decided to stay.

These are only a few of the ways in which the presbytery executes its responsibility and power. Just as Pineda's session works through ministry teams and committees, so does Presbytery. I've already mentioned the COM. Some of the other committees are Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Leadership Development, Church Development, Mission Development, Property, Stewardship, Budget, Endowment, Bills, Overtures and Minutes, Committee on Nominations. The Nominating Committee is always looking for people willing to serve on one of the committees. I encourage you to consider serving - you'll get to know folks from other congregations and gain a new appreciation for Presbytery and our presbyterian connections.