



Dear Siblings in Christ:

Let's be honest – sometimes this church business can wear us out. One of my great-grandfathers owned a sawmill, and he was also an elder in his church. Reflecting on things, he once remarked to my father, "Eddie, churchin' is a helluva lot harder than sawmillin'." Boy was he right. That reality is of course what lies behind our encouragement to our congregations to provide a sabbatical for pastors.

But it's not just pastors who get tired while walking in the way of Jesus, is it. Every saint who strives to be faithful will sooner or later feel the weight of it all, and we can be tempted to just sit down and let somebody else handle things. This is when it's so important to remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:29-30 "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

There's a lot to unpack here, but surely one of the implications is that if we are unduly burdened by following Christ then maybe we're doing it wrong. The first thing to check is whether or not we're secretly resisting the yoke itself. One of the earliest cries to escape our lips is this: "You're not the boss of me!" A yoke clearly illustrates that the one yoked is not in fact free, but bound in tandem with another. What we often fail to grasp is that none of us are ever truly free of being yoked; bound, if you will, to someone or something else. Even if we believe we are "following our hearts," we are deluded if we think that doing so is not in itself a form of bondage. The reason is that our hearts are not trustworthy, being warped, to one degree or another, by the sin and brokenness that are inborn in each of us. So following our hearts is like chasing a mirage in the desert; the shimmering vision is always just out of reach, and meanwhile we grow more parched and unsatisfied.

Jesus offers us the only hope of finding "rest for our souls," and that is to take his yoke upon us. It was the practice to yoke an immature animal with an experienced one, so the younger might learn from the older. So Jesus seeks to come alongside us for the journey of life, to show us how to live in a way that brings rest. Contrary to the way of this world, the way of Jesus is undertaken in gentleness and lowliness, which seems awkward at first, but when practiced brings not only rest but joy.

So if your way of living these days leaves you burdened and not rested, it's worth examining how your yoke is situated on your shoulders. Of course, we need to be sure we are in fact yoked to Jesus and not someone or something else, but it's also possible to wear his yoke improperly. Do we let him lead us and teach us, or are we still striving to be in charge of our lives? Are we "keeping in step with the Spirit" or running ahead (or sideways, or backwards!)? Maybe we should just let Jesus be truly Lord as well as Savior, and see how that works. A light and easy burden, with rest along the way, is what Jesus has promised. Let's take him up on it.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Ed Rees

Hurricane Helene Recovery in Augusta, GA

Covenant Presbyterian Church in Augusta, GA has traditionally sent a work mission team to help with storm recovery each year. We rely on Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to help us decide who needs the help and put us in contact with churches to host us during the week. We never anticipated PDA coming to our hometown of Augusta, or staying home to help with storm recovery. PDA is here, helping our Augusta neighbors. Our work mission team plans to “stay home” this year and work September 8 – September 12 in Augusta. We hope to send several teams to different sites around our city to help people get closer to getting back into their homes. Many of us have had damage to our own homes as well. It is our hope that this will help us listen compassionately and share in the work of restoration as we attempt to be the hands and feet of Christ for those we meet.

Help Us Stay Connected!

Have a story, event, or ministry update to share? We invite submissions for the NEGA Presbytery monthly newsletter from clergy, congregations, and ministry teams.

Please submit articles as Word documents (.doc or .docx), including a title, author's name, and role. Photos or graphics are encouraged as separate attachments.

Deadline: 15th of each month for publication at the end of that month. To repeat content in a future issue, just send a quick reminder.

Send submissions to newsletter@negapby.org.

We also love sharing church news on our NEGA Presbytery Facebook page, so send us your events and celebrations—we'd love to highlight the good work happening in your community!

Ordination Anniversaries

We celebrate and give thanks for the NEGA clergy marking ordination anniversaries this month. The Clergy Care Committee encourages you to hold these individuals, their families, and their ministries in your prayers.

Jeff Cain
Martha Courie
Boyd Lien
Melvin Lowry
Shon Peppers
Blaine Walker
Dana Waters

Remember the mustard seed? The yeast? The shepherd boy?

God chooses small things to make a big difference! Our small churches make a big difference in the lives of their members, in their communities, and in the beloved community!

SMALL AND MIGHTY
A Time to Connect and
Equip Leaders in Small
Membership Churches

Leaders of small membership churches in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina are invited to the Association of Smaller Congregations (ASC) Monthly Zoom Conversation

First Tuesday of the Month, 7-8 pm EDT / 6-7 pm CDT via ZOOM.

Register to Receive the Zoom Link. You will receive information and the zoom link about each month's conversation, and then choose to attend if you are interested in the topic and/or available that month.

<https://form.jotform.com/251396018295159>



August Leadership Event Recap: A Day of Growth and Connection

Our August Leadership Event was a resounding success, bringing together leaders from across the Presbytery for a day filled with energy, encouragement, and shared vision. The gathering offered a meaningful balance of equipping, fellowship, and inspiration.

Each training session provided practical tools and thoughtful guidance to strengthen the ministry of local congregations. The spirit of community was evident everywhere—laughter echoed through the halls, conversations deepened around tables, and there was a shared sense that the Holy Spirit was at work among us.

The strong turnout and overwhelmingly positive feedback reminded us of how valuable these times of learning and connection can be. Many participants expressed a desire for more opportunities like this in the future, and we are excited to build on this momentum as we look ahead.

We are deeply grateful to all who made this day possible and especially to our gracious hosts at Madison Presbyterian Church. Together, we celebrated not only what God is doing in our churches today but also the hope of what is yet to come.



"I Signed Up for What?"

Stepping into leadership within the church is both a calling and a privilege. For many new officers, taking ordination vows can feel weighty, full of meaning, and perhaps even a little overwhelming. What do these promises really mean, and how do they shape the way we serve God and the church?

On Saturday, September 20, at 10:00 a.m., Oconee Presbyterian Church will host a special training event to help answer those questions. Rev. Steven Barnes, Pastor of Oconee PC, will guide participants in a thoughtful and engaging conversation about the meaning and impact of ordination vows. This time together is designed especially for new elders and deacons, but all who are curious about the vows we take as leaders in the church will benefit.

Our Presbytery's Stated Clerk, Rev. Jacob Douylliez, will also be present to lead an informational session specifically for clerks. His presentation will provide helpful guidance, updates, and encouragement for those serving in this important role.

This gathering will be a wonderful opportunity not only to learn, but also to connect with others who are serving in similar ways across our Presbytery. More details about how to register will be shared soon—we hope you will mark your calendars and join us for this meaningful day of equipping and fellowship.



Job Openings

We are pleased to share two ministry opportunities in our Presbyterian community. **Oconee Presbyterian Church** is seeking a Director of Children, Youth, and Outreach Ministries. This is a vibrant role for someone called to nurture faith across generations while strengthening community outreach. Visit www.opcusa.org for the full job description. To apply, send your resume or PDP and a cover letter to Rev. Steven Barnes, Pastor and Head of Staff, at steven@opcusa.org

First Presbyterian Church, Gainesville, is seeking a Director of Children's Ministry. This role averages 20 hours per week with slightly more time during seasonal events. Interested candidates may contact Rev. Lee Koontz, Senior Pastor, at leekoontz10@gmail.com for more information or next steps.

**NEXT STATED
NEGA PRESBYTERY
MEETING
OCTOBER 21
NACOOCHIE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
SAUTEE**