

JAN 2026

THE LATEST @ PRINCE OF PEACE



ENEWS Be sure to watch for enews from our congregation and staff. Sign up by contacting the church office today!

FACEBOOK Follow us on Facebook and please share worship online with friends.

WEBSITE Our website will have updates and links to our online worship services. poplargo.org

THESE CHANGING TIMES

I remember being on a guided kayaking excursion in the lowcountry of South Carolina some years ago. Pr. Rachel and I had been to Hilton Head Island several times - it was a favorite spot for vacations because I knew it so well and the familiarity allowed us to relax. On this occasion, we were kayaking out in the saltwater marsh area, and the guide was talking about some of the local wildlife. I was half-listening to the guide field questions from others who were with us, but mostly, I was looking around, relying on my own observations. That's when I saw a strange sight: a flock of wading birds I'd never seen in that area before on any previous trip.

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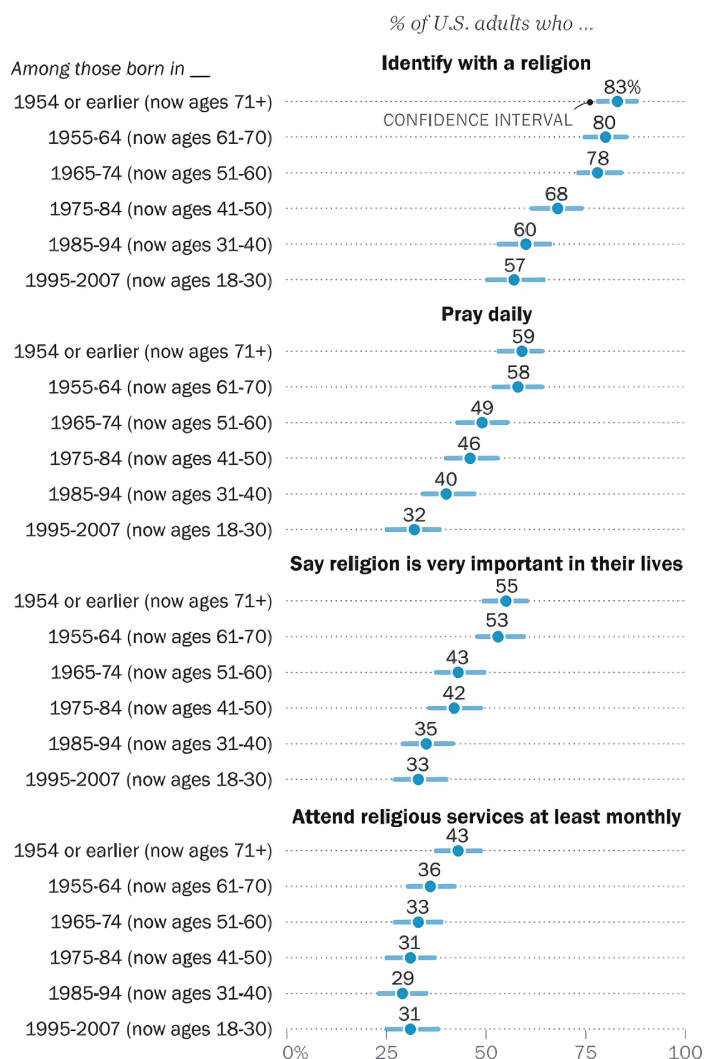
THESE CHANGING TIMES *Continued...*

The birds were sort of pink with round, flat beaks. Having just seen a documentary about birds, I remembered the name ‘roseate spoonbills’. I asked our guide whether this was common because I had been to that area probably ten times or more, and their presence struck me as totally out of the ordinary. The guide told us, “Yeah, those guys are regulars around here these days. They come up from Florida because it’s too hot down there, and they find new

food sources in these waters. They’ll go back during the winter, but they’re becoming South Carolinians. Manatees are coming, too.”

We have a changing climate. The causes of this are complicated and the effects do not look terribly positive. However, the changes will bring about new opportunities, too. That’s the way it works with all change - something is lost, while something else is gained.

In the U.S., young adults are less religious than older adults



Source: Pew Research Center's 2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Religion has experienced a significant change in this country, and not just due to the pandemic. A recent publication from the Pew Research Center reports that the biggest shift among participation in this country might be attributed to generational differences, rather than any other factor.

Among those above the age of 71, 83% of respondents identify with a religion. That number drops for every ten less years of life, getting smaller in each subsequently numbered decade (see the chart). Frequency of prayer follows that pattern. The number of people who say religion is very important in their lives drops, too.

Attendance at religious services on a monthly basis breaks that trend somewhat, but notice how low the numbers are across all age groups, regardless of the trend. Less than half of the people responding to the survey - in any age group - report attending religious services on a monthly basis. If you ever attend worship at Prince of Peace and feel like you don't know as many people as you used to, perhaps this is part of the reason!

These two reports - a man in a kayak and one part of one survey - are not by themselves indicative of anything, but they support a larger point: change is coming. Regardless of whether we feel prepared for it or not, change is on the way. Change has never stopped being a present reality, and however

exhausting it sometimes feels, we might consider: could it bring some good?

Taking the larger view of history, church attendance has never really been as strong as it was in the post-WWII era. Some church historians are beginning to suggest that we are not declining, so much as returning to the level of attendance that represents the true average. This does not mean church is unimportant, but it certainly invites us to take a long look at the model of church we have in mind. Specifically, what are we aiming to do in our serving? Whom do we seek to serve? What might they be looking for, if they are looking at all?

The spoonbills relocated for food and comfort. People do the same thing. In fact, I just learned that's a massive part of the story of this county! If one looks at the census data for Pinellas County, the story basically tells itself.

| Year | Population | % Change +/- |
|------|------------|--------------|
| 1920 | 28,265 | |
| 1930 | 62,149 | 119.9% |
| 1940 | 91,852 | 47.8% |
| 1950 | 159,249 | 73.4% |
| 1960 | 374,665 | 135.3% |
| 1970 | 522,329 | 39.4% |
| 1980 | 728,531 | 39.5% |
| 1990 | 851,659 | 16.9% |
| 2000 | 921,482 | 8.2% |
| 2010 | 916,542 | -0.5% |
| 2020 | 959,107 | 4.6% |

Clearly, there was a time when people started to flock to this area in massive numbers. The first wave seemed to follow one of the major wars, and then the

second wave followed the next war (acknowledging air-conditioning certainly played a major role in the population explosion in the 50s).

Then, once almost all of the land was occupied, expansion slowed massively as the 20th century gave way to the 21st. So, when we think about the changes this climate has faced in recent years, and consider also the changes we are likely to continue to experience, all of that information suggests we are not done changing anytime soon.

For my part, I take this changing landscape as an opportunity for growth. Growth is never 'off the table' when we are adapting to change. And that is what we must do - adapt.

The lesson of the spoonbill is not to simply relocate to South Carolina - trust me, we've been there, and things are changing there, too.

The lesson of all creation, when it faces change, is to adapt to the changing environment. Paul does this in his ministry, modeling for us that adaptability and discipleship go hand in hand:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. [1 Cor. 9:19-23]

As you prepare to start a new year, I invite you to consider what change might be needed here at Prince of Peace for us to adapt and continue our gospel ministry. Then, I pray you will be a part of that change, as we continue in faith together.



Pastor Gregg

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PASTOR RACHEL'S REMARKS

I have known from the beginning of this call that Prince of Peace is a generous congregation. From monthly donation drives and First Fruits gifts, to welcoming community organizations into our space, this congregation is clearly dedicated to serving those in need and committed to looking outside ourselves to offer help.

However, the outpouring of generosity I have seen this week has been truly amazing. This week, we finished both our double-month Rez House donation drive and our Angel Tree project. Being here, watching the piles of gifts and donations grow, has been a gift unto itself, and if you haven't had the chance to see what this looked like, I hope I can paint a bit of a picture for you.

On Thursday, Dec 11, Pr. Gregg and I joined a caravan 5 other full cars on a trip to Rez House, where we unloaded box after box after box of canned goods, rice, oil, jackets, hats, peanut butter, flour, and more. The tables outside the Rez House pantry were overflowing with our 6 carloads of supplies. Then, Pr. Bruce and Pr. Margarita graciously showed our group around the property, sharing about the numerous ministries they support throughout the week, and giving thanks for the opportunity to serve their community in this way. They told us that this was the fullest the pantry has ever been before Christmas; more families than ever will be served in this season, by items given in part by our congregation.

We've been watching the Angel Tree gifts come in over the last couple Sundays, and each time I would walk over to the Sanctuary, I would see that items had arrived. Finally, Kevin asked if he could move the gifts for us, as the sheer quantity of presents in that space could impede the exit in case of a fire! Having helped fill out the many tags for the angels, seeing those papers transform into boxes and bags of trucks, jeans, shoes, art sets, dolls, and gift cards was inspiring! There were 48 children represented in those tags – 48 children who will wake up to find their Christmas wishes fulfilled on December 25, without their families needing to struggle to make it happen. Each of those gifts is a symbol of love, and of the generous outpouring of every person who took part in this project.

I know there are many more moments of generosity happening in our congregation, in our families, in our neighborhoods this season, as well. I am grateful for each of these moments and the gifts they bring, and I find that often, moments of generosity lead to more giving – something about seeing the difference a gift given in love can make invites us to give even more freely. And as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, who was given to us freely, the most generous gift we will ever receive, I am thankful that Prince of Peace takes generosity to heart. If you've noticed generosity recently, I hope you'll make a point to tell me, or anyone else, about it, so that we can rejoice and be inspired together!



Pastor Rachel

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727.585.9969

DEC CONGREGATION COUNCIL

- + Reviewed goals set by each Commission for 2025, noting progress made towards each and several accomplishments
 - + Approved nomination of Chloe Tyner as nominee for Youth Council Member in 2026
 - + Reviewed and approved a new Summer Camp Funding Policy
 - + Continued discussion on plans for Nursery and COC building
 - + Progress with camera project - aim to implement new system in Q1 2026
 - + Approved \$500 First Fruits donation to Pinellas Lighthouse for the Blind
 - + Conveyed our appreciation for the hard, faithful work of Council President Kaye Marudas, who completed her term of office
-



SUN, JAN 4 / 7PM / SANCTUARY FEAST OF LIGHTS

Epiphany is a day to recall this marvelous and mysterious account of magi from the East [as in very far away] following a star at its rising which has fascinated us for generations. They were seeking a newborn king. Here we mark this day with seasonal songs, readings that capture the whole experience of our Lord's earthly parents, and music that stirs our hearts to praise. Following worship, we'll enjoy seasonal treats at a Wassail party in the Parish Hall.



JAN 4-8, COLLECTING FOOD FOR HOPE VILLAGES FOOD COLLECTION

Our First Sunday Food partner for January is Hope Villages of America (formerly RCS). Bring canned goods and other non-perishables to worship on January 4 or during the week through January 8. Thank you for your support of this vital ministry which provides food for thousands of families in need across central Pinellas County!



SUNS, JAN 4, 11, 25 / 10AM / COC, PEACE GENESIS OLD & NEW

Church Anew begins with many Genesis stories and with a hope that each video will share a fresh witness. We can wonder how the Bible might be made new in each of our lives! This is a 7-week series that Dianna Voss and the dynamic presenters will facilitate. Through these stories, we will explore boundaries. Looking for a new start in the new year? Well, we are ready to welcome that and you!



WEDS, JAN 7, 14, 21, 28 / 6PM / COC, PEACE HYMN STUDY

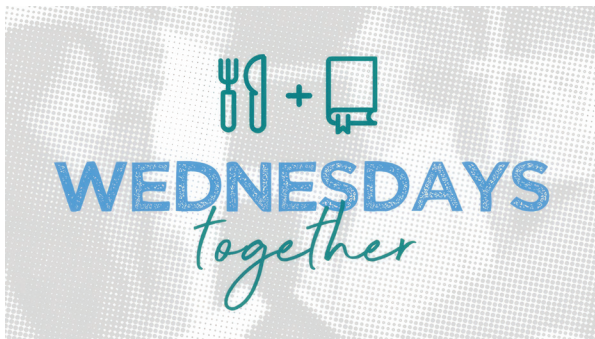
This series is a study of the background, writers, composers, and meaning of well-known hymns. Pastor Landeen will lead the study with plenty of time for discussion!

Jan 7: Stories behind some favorite Christmas hymns

Jan 14: Women hymn writers and composers

Jan: 21: Negro Spirituals

Jan: 28: Hymn written under difficult circumstances.



RESUMES JAN 7 / 5:15PM / PARISH HALL WEDNESDAYS TOGETHER

Wednesdays Together mark the center of our week at Prince of Peace. Dinner is served at 5:15pm (\$6/adults, \$3/kids), then we move to activities for youth and children, as well as adult Bible Study, at 6pm. Choir rehearsal follows at 7:30pm. Please join us for a delicious meal and good conversation!

Please join us on Jan 21 at 7:07pm for Prayer Around the Cross.



SUN, JAN 11 / 12PM / SANCTUARY ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

This notice serves as the official announcement of the Prince of Peace 2026 Annual Business Meeting. In that meeting we will elect new Congregation Council members, 2026 Nominating Committee members, and Endowment members, as well as vote on the 2026 Spending Plan for Ministries.

To vote on these items, voting members must be present (C10.05), so we hope you will make plans to join us: Sunday, January 11, 2026, following 11am worship.

Voting members are confirmed members who have, during the current or preceding calendar year, communed in this congregation and made a contribution of record to this congregation. (C8.02.c)

Seasonal members, who are voting members of other congregations of this church, who have been approved by the Synod and Congregation Council to have 'seasonal membership', may vote at this meeting, provided they will not, within two calendar months, vote in another congregation where they have membership. (C8.02.e)

More information will be presented between now and the meeting, so keep an eye on the Prince of Peace e-news and other publications for more details.



SUN, JAN 18 / 10AM / COC, PEACE

GOD AT WORK IN TANZANIA

Pam & Dick Landeen's friend, Paula Lofstrom, is a missionary in Tanzania. We welcome her to our adult Sunday school class to learn about God at work in this east African country on the Indian Ocean and how we might join that mission. You will be blessed to listen, learn, and get involved.



SUN, JAN 18 / 3PM

ASTRALIS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Join us for a delightful afternoon of music for flute and strings featuring works of modern composers as well as leading classical composers such as Mozart and Dvorak. All concerts are free. A reception follows in the Parish Hall.



THURS, JAN 22 / 7PM / PARISH HALL

BOOKED FOR DESSERT

The book selection for January 22 is "The Paris Wife" by Paula McLain. All are welcome to join the group for lively conversation, fellowship and refreshments whether or not you have read the book. Contact the church office for information.



FRI, JAN 23 / 10AM / PARISH HALL

CARD PRAYER MINISTRY

We gather to write loving cards to those who are ill, recovering from a medical event, or need encouraging words of faith and love. We meet the fourth Friday of each month in the Parish Hall. Any questions, please contact Debbie Freedman or the church office.



ELW Hymnathon

SAT, JAN 31 / 8AM-8PM

HYMNATHON: TWENTY YEARS OF EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP

Join Shawn Thomas on the bench as we celebrate this landmark anniversary of our hymnal. We'll sing one stanza of all 654 hymns. Come when you can, leave when you must!



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DEC BAPTISMAL ANNIVERSARIES

| | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Sharon Lawson | Grace Lounsberry | Dottie Archiletti | Samuel Watson |
| Carolyn Reslink | Gary Neal | Jacqueline Dersom | Jayme Watson |
| Curtis Wold | Allen Koths | Pamela Landeen | Allison Bozinski |
| James George | Debra Freedman | Kent Zoller | James Helland |
| Noah Byrne | Gene Reynolds | Sandy Pardue | Jaxson Potts |
| Kevin Murphy | Karen Reynolds | Scott Temple | Thomas Loesch |
| Patricia Wells | John Wuertz | Linda Rowe | Roger Barr |
| Mary Larsen | Mike Malcom | Alyssa Camacho | Sally Barr |
| Faye Belskey | Lida Fehl | Patricia Pierce | |
| John Lounsberry | Donna Herter | Mary Jean Scholl | |
| Penny Lounsberry | Percy Peltzer | Vivian Fruehling | |



WEB poplargo.org | **FACEBOOK** @POPLargo | **ON YOUTUBE**

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