

# THE SPARK

May 2025

Embodying Love - Demanding Justice - Transforming the World

YOU ARE INVITED TO

# SPRING POTLUCK

May 4 | 12 p.m.

We'd love to get to know our neighbors! Join us for a relaxed and friendly potluck lunch—a chance to share a meal, meet folks from the neighborhood, and enjoy good conversation.

**Riviera Presbyterian Church**  
5275 Sunset Drive  
in Fellowship Hall

Sunday Worship at 11 am  
[www.rivierachurch.org](http://www.rivierachurch.org)





# MELANIE'S MESSAGE

May 2025    Embodying Love - Demanding Justice - Transforming the World

Riviera Presbyterian Church  
5275 Sunset Drive  
Miami, FL 33143  
(305) 666-8586

11:00am Sunday Worship Service  
Office Hours M - R 9:30-6:30 pm  
Sunday 9:00 - 1:00 pm  
[www.rivierachurch.org](http://www.rivierachurch.org)

Connect with us on social media  
@RivieraChurch

All The People  
Ministers

Rev. Melanie Marsh  
Pastor

[Rev.melanie.marsh@gmail.com](mailto:Rev.melanie.marsh@gmail.com)

Dr. Walter Busse  
Director of Music  
[rivierapresmusic@gmail.com](mailto:rivierapresmusic@gmail.com)

Diana Florez  
Church Bookkeeper  
[rivierapresfinance@gmail.com](mailto:rivierapresfinance@gmail.com)

Barbara Prieto, CCA  
Certified Church Administrator  
[rivierachurch@gmail.com](mailto:rivierachurch@gmail.com)

Session Members  
Gerardo Avitia  
Karen Collier  
Laura Fothergill  
Angela Galbreath  
Amparo Hernandez  
Michele Ready  
Kathy Stults  
Cris Sweeny

Beloved Community,

After a long and weary Lenten Season, after a Joyous Easter that is gone before we know it, it's nice to just sit still and reflect on the season that we've left behind. As we settle into spring, may these words from poet Mary Oliver guide us into the next journey of our year and lives, wherever it may take us:

"Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

Many Blessings,

Rev. Melanie

# CONGREGATIONAL CARE

The Congregational Care Committee is dedicated to providing care, support, and prayer for individuals and families in all stages and circumstances of life. Rooted in a spirit of community and service, this ministry fosters meaningful connections and ensures that no one walks alone. Through thoughtful systems of support, we seek to nurture, encourage, and care for every generation of our church family—coming together as siblings in Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Don't hesitate to contact Karen C at [kc33134@aol.com](mailto:kc33134@aol.com) if care is needed.

# FELLOWSHIP



THEOLOGY  
**uncorked**

Will meet on June 8th  
at 5:30pm

[Unseen Creatures Brewing & Blending 4178 SW 74CT 33155](#)

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION-ADULTS

## Hybrid Adult Bible Study at Riviera Presbyterian Church

Come as you are and bring your questions—our Adult Bible Study is a space for open hearts, thoughtful conversation, and spiritual growth. Whether you're deeply rooted in scripture or just beginning to explore, you'll find a welcoming community ready to journey with you through the stories, challenges, and wisdom of the Bible. Let's grow together in faith and understanding.

Sundays at 10:00 am in the Church Library; child care provided

Zoom Meeting ID: 894-7650-2156 Passcode: 333227

**The Women's Study Group** will meet on May 15 at 7:30 pm via Zoom. Reach out to Karen C at [kc33134@aol.com](mailto:kc33134@aol.com) for login information.

# MISSION

## Office of Immigration Issues

The PC (USA) Office of Immigration Issues helps the church in the U.S. respond to the movement of all God's people. Initially established by action of the 216th General Assembly (2004), the office provides advice and counsel to mid councils and congregations with immigration issues and resources members can use to advocate for more just immigration laws and processes. See info on Legal Services, Advocacy & Accompaniment, Refugees & Asylees, Sanctuary, and Family Care Plan.

[PCUSA Immigration Assistance](#)



## Have You Taken Control of Your Health Today?

Life Line Screening will be here at Riviera Presbyterian Church on Friday, May 9, 2025 offering safe, painless, non-invasive preventive health screenings that are typically not a part of a routine physical. To be more proactive about your health for yourself, your family and your community, please register for these health screenings today. Please refer to the attached flyer to get more info about how you can sign up.

There is no time like the present to take action!

Three ways to register:

- Call toll-free: 1-888-814-0466 promo code HSCA001
- Online: <https://www.lisa.social/hscq>
- Text: the word circle to 216-279-1607

# Mission - Welcome The Melissa Institute

## From Community Roots to Collective Reach: The Melissa Institute Finds a New Home at Riviera Presbyterian Church

Riviera Presbyterian Church is pleased to welcome The Melissa Institute (TMI) to our shared campus. Now housed within the sanctuary building, TMI brings with them a legacy of compassion, expertise, and a deep commitment to building safer, more resilient communities. As they settle into their new home here at Riviera, we're excited for our church family to get to know them and to celebrate the meaningful work they're doing, both within our walls and throughout the wider community.

The Melissa Institute is a nationally recognized nonprofit with deep Miami roots and a simple but powerful mission: to prevent violence by promoting research-based solutions that keep our homes, schools, and communities safe. As neighbors, we have a unique opportunity not only to learn about their work, but to participate in the important conversations and programs they are leading, many of which are open and free to the public.

### A Mission Born of Pain, Sustained by Purpose

TMI was established in 1996 in memory of Melissa Aptman, a Miami native who was tragically murdered just two weeks before graduating from Washington University. In response to their grief, Melissa's parents, friends, and a network of dedicated violence prevention experts turned their heartbreak into action. Together, they built an organization that helps bridge the gap between research and application. Nearly 30 years later, the Institute continues to honor Melissa's legacy by educating professionals, supporting families, and offering community-centered programming that tackles some of the most pressing issues of our time. From bullying and domestic violence to trauma and digital misinformation, TMI serves as a curator of knowledge and a hub for evidence-based interventions.

### Meet the TMI Team

As TMI begins this new chapter at Riviera, we invite you to get to know the friendly and committed staff members:



Dr. Etiony Aldarondo, Executive Director, is a nationally respected clinical psychologist and educator with decades of experience in trauma-informed care, mental health advocacy, and community-based solutions.

Cristina Fonseca, Office Manager & Communications Coordinator, ensures that TMI's operations run smoothly while keeping the public informed and engaged.

Derby Peck, Office Assistant, provides behind-the-scenes support to keep their programs running with care and precision.

Although small in size, the TMI team works with a wide network of experts and collaborators across the country and around the world. Their Scientific Board is made up of internationally known scholars and practitioners in the fields of psychology, education, and violence prevention, many of whom offer continuing education training through TMI's programs.

## What Does TMI Do?

TMI's work falls into three main categories:

### 🧠 Research

Each year, TMI awards the Belfer-Aptman Dissertation Scholarship to doctoral students whose research contributes to the field of violence prevention. Their work often goes on to inform national policy and community-based practices. TMI also produces accessible publications and training materials on trauma, resilience, digital safety, and more.

### 🎓 Education

With guidance from their Scientific Board, TMI provides continuing education courses and professional training to teachers, psychologists, counselors, social workers, and school officials. These sessions are approved by a wide range of credentialing bodies and are available both virtually and in person. TMI also partners with local schools and community groups to offer free trainings on trauma-informed care, bullying prevention, and youth mental health.

### 🤝 Community Engagement

At the local level, they lead the Trauma-Informed Care and Resilience Network of Miami-Dade County in partnership with the Miami-Dade County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which provides tools for social service providers, nonprofits, and educators to better support those affected by trauma. They also honor changemakers through the Suzanne L. Keeley Community Service Award, given annually to individuals or organizations doing exceptional work in violence prevention and community healing.

## Responding to the Digital Age: The Social Media Safety & Mental Health Initiative

In recent years, The Melissa Institute has responded to a new and growing challenge: the impact of social media on youth mental health. With concerns raised by the U.S. Surgeon General and the United Nations, TMI launched the Social Media Safety & Mental Health Initiative to help families, schools, and communities navigate this evolving digital landscape.

One major component of this initiative is Project Real USA, an evidence-based program designed to teach students how to spot fake news and misinformation online. Originally developed in the U.K., the Project Real curriculum is now being adapted for U.S. schools under TMI's leadership. On May 1st, Dr. Yvonne Skipper, the program's creator and a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Glasgow, will visit Miami to meet with local schools interested in bringing Project Real USA into their classrooms.

You're Invited to The Melissa Institute's 29th Annual Conference: 🧑🏻‍🎓 The Social Media Challenge: Research-Based Strategies to Protect Minds and Strengthen Communities

We're especially excited to share that The Melissa Institute's 29th Annual Conference will take place virtually on Friday, May 2, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with FREE registration for the public. This full-day event brings together leading experts from the U.S., U.K., and Canada to explore how social media affects young people's mental health, and what we can do about it.

🌟 Featured Speakers Include:

- Dr. Mitch Prinstein, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at John Van Seters and Chief Science Officer of the American Psychological Association (APA).
- Dr. Yvonne Skipper, creator of Project Real and senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow.
- Dr. Donald Meichenbaum, one of the founding figures in cognitive-behavioral therapy and TMI's Scientific Director.
- Experts from Police Scotland, Education Scotland, and York University's bullying prevention network.

Whether you're a parent, teacher, counselor, or concerned community member, this conference is an opportunity to learn from world-class experts and connect with others who are passionate about building safer, healthier communities.

**📍 Event Details:**

When: Friday, May 2, 2025

Where: Zoom

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. EST

Cost: Free for general public | \$60 for CE credits

Learn more and register by scanning the QR code or visiting: <https://melissainstitute.org/29thannualconference/>

Together, WE are making a difference!

Riviera Presbyterian Church is thrilled to be part of this next chapter in The Melissa Institute's journey. Their presence among us is not only a reminder of the healing power of faith and action, but also a call to deepen our own commitment to peace, justice, and community. Whether it's attending the upcoming conference, connecting for a conversation, or simply learning more about what they do, we hope you'll take a moment to welcome TMI into our shared space, and into your hearts.

To learn more, explore their free resources, or sign up for future events, visit the [🔗 TMI Link Library](https://linktr.ee/themelissainstitute): <https://linktr.ee/themelissainstitute>

The Melissa Institute  
(833) 448-3864 | [info@melissainstitute.org](mailto:info@melissainstitute.org)

9am-4pm  
May 2, 2025  
Via Zoom

SCAN ME

THE MELISSA INSTITUTE

REGISTER NOW!

FREE!

SECURITY ONLINE MISFORMATION SECURITY ONLINE SAFETY TRUST CRITICAL THINKING

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TRUST TRUST

TM's 29th Annual Conference  
**The Social Media Challenge**  
Research-Based Strategies to Protect Minds  
and Strengthen Communities

THE SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

# SPF: STEWARDSHIP/FINANCE/PROPERTY

## SPF updates:

### Property:

- We are busy at work with the installation of a new fire alarm system, and certification by the county. To be completed in May.
- Gate repairs for the east parking lot also underway.
- New Pressure washer purchased and new ring system installed, just a few of our many improvements.

### Finance:

- Want to volunteer?? We are looking for a couple people to assist with the quarterly audits. Takes about 2 hours on Sunday morning about every 3 months

### Stewardship:

- Thanks to Angela for helping us celebrate our 100% per capita drive goal, with ice cream cones after church on Palm Sunday.
- We need an energetic volunteer to head up the upcoming stewardship campaign for 2026.
- Want to join our SPF team??? We'd love to have you. See Kathy, Butch, John, Rey, Tania, Barbie, Diana, Melanie!!!! We meet 2nd Wednesday of each month at 5:00 pm via zoom.



# APRIL @RPC



**Congratulations to Walter on being honored as the April 2025 Teacher of the Month—what a celebration at the Panthers game!**

