

THE SPARK

August 2025 Embodying Love – Demanding Justice – Transforming the World



RIVIERA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10 DURING WORSHIP

Blessing of the Backpacks – Sunday, August 10 at 11:00 am

As we prepare for a new school year and work season, join us on Sunday, August 10, for our annual Blessing of the Backpacks during worship.

Whether you're a student, teacher, administrator, or professional, all ages are encouraged to bring your school backpacks, work briefcases, tote bags, or even lunchboxes to receive a special blessing.

This is a time to reflect, pray, and mark the start of a new chapter with hope, encouragement, and community support. Let's begin the season grounded in grace and surrounded by love.

We can't wait to bless your bags and all that they carry into the year ahead!



MELANIE'S MESSAGE

August 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
Connect with us on social media
@RivieraChurch

All The People
Ministers

Rev. Melanie Marsh
Pastor
Rev.melanie.marsh@gmail.com

Dr. Walter Busse
Director of Music
rivierapresmusic@gmail.com

Emma Cottrell
Faith Formation & Outreach Director
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Certified Church Administrator
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Clerk of Session
Kathy Stults

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

Beloved Friends,

Our community is growing! This summer we've welcomed two new members to our staff. If you haven't had a chance yet, I cannot wait for you to meet them. They both bring so much wisdom, energy, and joy to the work that they do, and to our life together in this place.

Carol Naivera wears many hats in the community, but here at Riviera she is serving as our part-time Bookkeeper. You may recognize Carol as a local musician! She plays the flute and has shared her gift of music with our community in the past. You can find Carol in the office on Sunday, Monday, and Thursday afternoons.

Emma Cottrell is our new full time Director for Faith Formation and Outreach. She has worked in youth & family ministries, as well as in early childhood education, and has served and led in countless church and local ministries in her home town of Atlantic Beach, Florida and beyond. You can find Emma at the church Sunday through Thursday most weeks, and around the community at other times!

I invite you to join me in welcoming both of these wonderful women to our church family, and to share with them our joy at their arrival.

Many Blessings,
Rev. Melanie

CONGREGATIONAL CARE

You're Invited: Recenter & Reconnect

The Congregational Care Committee initiated a conversation with our friends at the YES Institute to explore ways we can support one another through these challenging times. We're excited to invite you to an interactive learning series designed to recenter our well-being, strengthen community, and build resilience.

Please RSVP to reserve your spot. This workshop is open to all members and friends.



RESILIENCY, SELF-CARE & WELL-BEING

CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS
IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

We invite you to join one or both sessions
after Sunday service in the RPC Library:

Sunday, Aug 24 • 12:30 – 1:30pm

Sunday, Aug 31 • 12:30 – 1:30pm

Light lunch served • Facilitated by YES Institute

This year, many people are noticing increased anxiety, stress, and fear in their everyday life experience. National and global tensions, and other fast-moving societal changes, are challenging our sense of normalcy. We invite you to join us for an interactive learning series to recenter our well-being, strengthen belonging and community, generate empowerment, and prioritize self-care practices.

LEARNING OVERVIEW

- Protective well-being practices.
- Effective techniques to manage stress and regulate emotions.
- Self-care and wellness principles for resiliency amidst uncertainty.

To RSVP, please email:
rivierachurch@gmail.com



For additional details or questions, contact YES Institute
info@yesinstitute.org • 305-663-7195

MISSION

From Mission Committee—

Currently, we are faced with a discernment issue: what is our community's faithful response to the creation of the controversial detention center (dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz") in our backyard?

In order to seek clarity, Rev. Melanie Marsh and I attended a town Hall hosted by Mossaic Miami at The Green Space Miami entitled "This is Home" which featured leading voices on the front lines of immigrant justice and advocacy. One of the speakers was Sui Chung, Executive Director of Americans for Immigrant Justice. She spoke powerfully about the urgent need for intervention. Other speakers included Gaby Pacheco, CEO, TheDream.US; Gepsie Metellus, Executive Director, Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center Awaiting Confirmation; Dr. Raul Hernandez, Resident Immigration Specialist at, Coral Gables Congregational United Church of Christ.

The evening program was not easy to listen to and these leaders were all distressed and burned out. My conclusion was these leaders and the people they serve need our solidarity more than we can imagine. Thankfully, on July 17, 2025 the PCUSA's Office of Public Witness hosted a Zoom Webinar*, that offered some training on advocacy at the state level. In particular, I was struck by the theological framing provided by Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland. She approaches advocacy with the belief that . . . democracy is rooted in Imago Dei, the Image of God. In the creation story in Genesis, God says to the heavenly host who have been witnessing the previous creation spectacle, "Let us make humankind in our image." And so it was. Our images, our faces are reflections of the creator, every human face matters. Every face is beloved. How much more so does every face count and deserve to participate fully in our democracy.

That's where it starts in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. From there and through the entirety of the Bible, the arch of scripture is a constant pursuit of justice. If you're a regular reader of the Bible you will have regularly encountered the mention of widows, orphans, and sojourners. God is constantly instructing God's people through the prophets and the gospels to care for these folks. But why them? What's so special about these 3 categories?

The patriarchal culture that defined ancient Mesopotamia, the place where the Bible took shape, only granted status to the men in the community. A widow is a woman without a man, an orphan is a child without a father, and a sojourner has no status because he's not from around here. And yet, God constantly says, take care of these people. Treat them like you would treat your own family, creating a web of justice around people who have no rights granted to them by the cultural norms of the day.

We have to translate that same quest for justice into our current conditions. We have to understand the norms, and sometimes the laws, that are disenfranchising people and creating unjust conditions. Whether it's voting rights, redistricting reform, fair courts, it's all a piece of the same whole.*

Taken from <https://ncchurches.org/2022/09/democracy-rooted-in-imago-dei/>

As we continue to discern our response, the Session recently approved a motion coming from the Mission Committee to adopt a formal statement condemning the Everglades Detention Center on these humanitarian grounds, but also decrying the other negative impacts of the hastily developed camp on the sensitive Big Cypress environment and the local indigenous communities that live in the Everglades. We will share the statement with you as it is developed.

*"What's Next? Shifting the Faithful Fight to State Budgets"; See, <https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2025/7/18/taking-fight-states>

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Women's Study Group will gather on Zoom on Thursday, August 21 at 7:30pm.
Please reach out to Karen Collier for details kc33134@aol.com

WORSHIP, MARKETING, MEMBERSHIP



Attention Music Lovers...

Ukulele Ensemble Practice will resume every second Sunday of the month, starting Sunday, August 10, at noon, following the 11 am Service.

New and returning members welcome! All ages and experience levels are welcome to join.

If you've ever wanted to learn a musical instrument, this is your opportunity.

A ukulele will be provided for you to borrow free of charge if you don't own one.

Hope to see you there!!

Walter

