

## **Devotion, Week of September 13, 2026**

**Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

I am serving as the East Presbytery Regional Connector for communications. There are 18 churches in the East Region of the Presbytery, and all of them have congregations less than 100 people except for 2. That reflects the makeup of the national church. 70% of the 8304 congregations in the PCUSA have less than 100 members. Only 8% have more than 300 members. But that 8% accounts for 46% of the membership, which is 1,019,003 as of 2025. Philadelphia reflects the majority of PCUSA congregations with 71 members.

The national church has shrunk slightly since 2024. 30% of members who quit coming to church during COVID never returned. Our numbers reflect the reality of almost all mainline Protestant churches in the U.S. We are a mostly white (87.7%), and older denomination (35% over age 70 and 25% 56-70). Only 4% are under the age of 17. So what does that mean for the children in our country? Are they going to church? And if so, where? Informal guesses are that many are going nowhere, and of those that do go, they attend large, often nondenominational churches where there is a large, expansive children's program. Parents often join churches not based on denomination, religious doctrine, or location, as much as what types of programs are offered for their children. Ask young parents at one of these churches what religious affiliation the church has, or its primary doctrines, and they literally will not know.

I grew up in the largest church in my hometown, First Baptist, with 1500 members. We didn't have sports programs back then, but we had plenty of church school, music, and mission programs. We had six children's choirs starting with 3-4 year olds, and the youth choir sang for every Sunday night service. Additionally, we participated in choir competitions across the state. I was busy, with choir, Sunday night services, and special Wednesday night Bible study programs. Church was a central part of my life. When my family joined a new Presbyterian church when I was 16, that busyness continued, although the church had about 150 members.

But today, church competes with lay activities on Sunday, like soccer and softball games. Small churches compete with large churches that have extensive programs for children and youth. We small congregations soldier on with our aging population and shrinking budgets. So how do we survive? With love for each other, mission programs that we generously support, and small but meaningful worship. After all, we are the core of the Presbyterian church, it turns out. We may be small, but we are mighty!! So thank God for your service. We are a small family, but we are a beloved family of God.

*Jeanne*