Celebrate Florida

The United Church of Christ in Florida

...and Celebrate Memorial, Flag and Independence Days

June-July 2021

DON'T GO TO CHURCH
BE THE CHURCH

As we vaccinate ourselves toward a newer version of normalcy, we are beginning to assemble in our churches for worship and events more than had been the case even a few months ago. Virtual gatherings continue to have a place in our church life. Our friends at the ***United Church of Gainesville*** *might say we're still somewhat in a time of "virtch" – or virtual church. Even with more in-person worship and events, many of our congregations are deciding to keep aspects of virtual worship as it has proven popular with some and remains an effective way to maintain connection with snowbirds, visitors and the home-bound – "vurchers" as* ***Coral Gables Congregational UCC*** *calls those who choose to attend church virtually.*

If there were any silver linings at all in the pandemic, perhaps one has been the creation of "new" ways to stay in touch, and several of our churches are focusing on further developing a "media ministry." ***Hope UCC/Rockledge*** *is one of those churches. As they say: "Here is our dream: An inclusive, vibrant worship service for all people, from your couch or from the pew! When we get back to in-person worship in the Sanctuary, we will continue to provide access to our worship services through Zoom."*

Here are a few glimpses into what our congregations have been doing recently as we transition from "virtch" to our next iteration of church – the marriage of some of the same-old/same-old with the new.

Members of the **United Church in Tallahassee** threw a drive-by double baby shower on Saturday, April 3 for two church families – one whose son was born on February 13 and the other's boy expected in May. The families were showered with lots of love. **Baby Saxon Charles** already is set with all the baby items he needs and those wishing to donate gifts could do so to Brehon Family Services but **Baby Rezaei** is registered.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City has been enjoying a steady group of congregants for worship in the Sanctuary and on Zoom. The church has completely upgraded its WiFi system, new microphones and computers have been purchased and efforts are being made to make the Zoom experience as good as it can be.

...continued on page 2

The Status of In-Person Worship

With the population becoming increasingly vaccinated, many more churches are opening up — to varying degrees — for in-person Sunday worship. Here is what we've learned recently about this transitioning process. Because so much remains in flux as the CDC regularly updates protocols and advisories, some of the following information may have changed by the time you read this as certain changes in church policy require a meeting of the church council. Regardless, apologies for any errers, misteaks and dated info. The good news? We are moving toward our new normal!

Bal Harbour — Church by the Sea

The church has decided to experiment with a limited in-person worship service once a month to avoid the expenses entailed meeting every Sunday at their temporary location at the St. Regis Hotel. In-person worship on upcoming Sundays June 6, July 4 and August 1 will be at the St. Regis with reservations required and following pandemic protocols. The remainder of the Sunday worships in June, July and August will be only online as they currently have been.

Boca Raton — Church on the Hill Congregational UCC

Sunday services are in-person at 10am and may be viewed on the church website.

Brandon — Faith Family UCC

Faith Family UCC/Brandon decided to return to in-person worship beginning May 16, sanitizing the church and maintaining safety protocols, while providing simultaneous livestreaming.

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Those so inclined at **Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour** can join a Zoom gathering on Wednesday mornings for knitting and spiritual discussion at its Prayer Shawl Ministry.

Need a "new" location for your Sunday service? On May 2 **Rev. Booth Iburg** invited **Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach** congregants to a live service in Gulf Breeze out on the deck of her home.

On March 20, **Hope UCC/Rockledge** celebrated a grand day for a grand lady. Approximately 25 cars comprised a caravan filled with well-wishers, signs, balloons and happy birthday greetings for **Ethel Osterwise** on her 104th birthday. Then, on Saturday, April 17, **First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen** celebrated member **Lily Hardin**'s 100th year with a drive-by birthday party outside the Lake Helen Villa Clubhouse, waving to all (pictured here with family) and handing out cupcakes. The order was "No gifts" — but those wishing to honor her were invited to bring a non-perishable food item, which were donated to Outside the Gates Food Pantry. By the end of the day she had received over 100 cards.

One of the Tuesday evening "Conversations with Bob" on Zoom at the **UCC/Fort Lauderdale** asked the question, "Where would I have been in the 'Jesus Crowd'"? Participants were invited to imagine themselves transported back in time when Jesus lived on earth. You are not a Christian because the Church did not yet exist. You would have been in a crowd who heard this Rabbi, Jesus, teaching through one of his parables. How would you have reacted?

Celebrate FLORIDA

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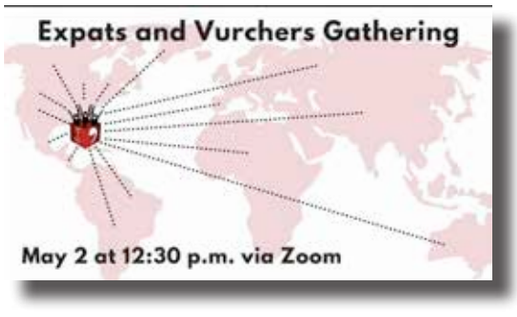
The Lunch Bunch at **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton** has not allowed the pandemic to totally ruin their Wednesday lunches. Since April 2020 the loyal group has been lunching via Zoom for 40-minute gatherings. They see each other, share new recipes, activities, family news, books being read and generally enjoy the company of one another.

When we say "Whoever you are, you are welcome here..." do we really mean it? This was the question posed at a book study at **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park** of *True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace* by Brandan Robertson. The Zoom con versations were held on Sunday afternoons between May 2-June 6, led by **Chance Martinez-Colon** (a member of **Spring Hill UCC** and a Member in Discernment).

Naples UCC offered members an opportunity to reflect on COVID-19 in an in-person and Zoom gathering, "Reflections on the Pandemic: Dark Clouds and Silver Linings" on Wednesday morning, May 20. As described by facilitator **Rev. Dr. Deb Kaiser-Cross**: "It's a good time to reflect together on how the pandemic has changed us. What were the hardest aspects of this experience? What were the silver linings? How are we different as individuals and as a community? Where did we find God? And where might God be leading us? Join us (in person or virtually) to share your own experience of living and learning through the coronavirus pandemic." Helpful links were provided. Click here:

- Six Predictions for the Post-Pandemic Church
- What the History of Pandemics Can Teach Us About Resilience
- Out of the Pandemic
- Chances for Another Future
- More Americans Say COVID-19 Has Strengthened Religious Faith
- In Their Own Words, Americans Describe the Struggles & Silver Linings

During each Sunday during the month of May, interested members of **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** gathered on Zoom to hear the life-stories and faith-journeys of their members with a different speaker each Sunday. Congregants are from all over the globe, from different religious traditions and backgrounds, yet they find themselves joined together as a congregation. So this was an opportunity to learn more about church "siblings." Also there was a Zoom gathering of "vurchers" on May 2. A "vurcher" is someone who attends church virtually, and this meeting afforded the chance to check-in with expat and vurcher members scattered across the globe.



There is Spiritual Support Group at **First United Church of Tampa** that meets via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month. For those who may be feeling a little overwhelmed by it all, it's an opportunity to focus on wellness with maybe a little poetry, music, Scripture and prayer – and just sharing. The password to join the conversation? Uplift.

Last year at the beginning of the pandemic, the **United Church of Gainesville** participated in the Federal Payroll Protection Plan program through which it was granted a forgivable loan of $113,000 to help cover the cost of paying staff during the first 10 weeks of the pandemic. At this juncture, with the close of the 2020 fiscal year and the opening of the loan forgiveness process, the church sought congregational feedback regarding next steps. A brief educational video was provided and church members were invited to attend one of two listening sessions where the Board of Business heard feedback (e-mails to the Moderator were an option). The congregation will be voting on whether to return to the government the funds that were spent from the PPP loan or to empower Church Council to appoint an ad hoc committee to develop proposals, administer or disburse the 2020 fiscal overage that resulted from the PPP assistance.

Spring weddings at the* Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton *were a reality

continued from page 1

Coral Gables — Coral Gables Congregational UCC

April 11 was the first Sunday in over a year that congregants at CGUCC gathered for worship in the Sanctuary. Planning for a full opening was in place through leadership from **Mark Wolfe** (church's COVID administrator) and **Dr. Steve Weirich** (parish physician for COVID) as well as the care and guidance of the Executive Church Council and the Board of Congregational Life. On Sunday, April 25, there was a Zoom meeting for a time of reflection on the "church of the new now," sharing what new practices will be in place, what to expect and how to roll out this special time in such a way that it will be beneficial for everyone, whether present or virtual. Regular in-person worship in the Sanctuary began May 2 at 9 and 11am; pre-registration and check-in was required with masks and physical distancing. Spanish language worship is available at 10am in the Chapel.

Dunedin — Faith UCC

Following the resumption of outdoor activities at Faith UCC, June 9 has been set as "Re-opening Sunday" with masks required at least through the end of June.

Fort Lauderdale — UCC/Fort Lauderdale

UCC/Fort Lauderdale initiated in-person worship in the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday. Since then no reservations or tickets have been required; congregants must adhere to CDC protocols. The service continues to be available via YouTube Live and on the church's website.

Fort Myers — Fort Myers Congregational UCC

Fort Myers Congregational UCC has set the date for in-person worshipping no earlier than August 1. Ahead of that date, arrangements are being made to install Plexiglas shields in the church office, at the welcome center and in front of both the pulpit and the lectern. In addition, supplies such as masks, hand sanitizers and other cleaning solutions are being purchased in order to members, church staff and visitors safe.

Fort Walton Beach — Eternal Hope UCC

The in-person service is at 10am (CST) and is broadcast live on the church Facebook page, where it is also posted by Noon. Due to the distance from the church of many members, virtual "attendance" is convenient.

Gainesville — United Church of Gainesville

The United Church of Gainesville returned to in-person worship, with conditions, beginning on Sunday, March 28, and by the end of April continued with worship on the Courtyard and limited seating in the Sanctuary, Reimer Hall and the West Wing, again with conditions. On May 23 they moved into the Sanctuary with remote viewing from other parts of the campus (with distanced and masked seating). The livestream option remains.

Lake Helen — First Congregational UCC

The Church Council at First Congregational met and decided that it would reopen for services on Sunday, May 23, regardless of vaccination status. Reservations are required and temperatures are taken; pews are marked for safe seating arrangements with a limited capacity of 38. Changes will be made going forward as deemed appropriate. Options are under consideration for those not wishing to be present in-person.

Miami — Christ Congregational UCC

Sanctuary worship began on May 2, following pandemic protocols. Most recently services have been held in the Garden Chapel but with the advent of uncomfortably warm weather the decision was made to move inside.

Naples — Naples UCC

Naples UCC returned to worship in the Sanctuary on April 18 (limited to 100 per the two services, masks expected with temperature checks and social distancing)

New Smyrna Beach — UCC/New Smyrna Beach

May 2 was the first Sunday congregants could gather for in-person worship in the Sanctuary of UCC/New Smyrna Beach. The invitation requires registration and proof of vaccination. The service is also on Zoom.

North Port — North Port Community UCC

The church has been open since July 19, 2020 with services at 10am. Reservations are not required. Social distancing and use of every other pew is observed. Masks are required, temperatures are taken. Services are available via YouTube about 30 minutes after the conclusion of the in-person service.

Orange City — First Congregational Church

At First Congregational UCC/Orange City, in-person worship is at 10:30 and also on Zoom.

Orlando — First UCC

The church has returned to in-person worship at 10am. The service can also be followed on Facebook.

Pensacola Beach — The Beach Church

Onsite worship returned in September, and the church Sanctuary is open for in-person Sunday worship at 9am. Seating is limited to 50% of capacity (equals 125); no reservations are required and masks are highly recommended. A podcast of the Sunday service is available the previous Saturday on the church website.

Pinellas Park — Good Samaritan Church

Good Sam will begin hybrid (in-person/virtual on Zoom and livestreaming) on June 27 (no reservations necessary) and fellowship will take place in the Courtyard. A survey of the congregation suggested 20-30 people will choose in-person and the remainder online.

Port Charlotte — Pilgrim UCC

Pilgrim returned to in-person worship in September 2020. Mask wearing and physically distancing is observed, sitting in every other pew of the Sanctuary; attendance is manageable and reservations are not required. Both the 8am traditional and 10am contemporary services are livestreamed and posted on Facebook, Vimeo and the church website.

Punta Gorda — Congregational UCC

As of the end of March, Congregational UCC had in-person worship (limited to 30 and with reservations for the unvaccinated and continuing to follow CDC guidelines)

Rockledge — Hope UCC

Hope UCC is planning a "soft opening" of the church this summer.

Sanibel — Sanibel Congregational UCC

Limited in-person (with masks) services outdoors and in the Sanctuary were underway at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** until mid-April. The last outdoor service took place on April 25 and Chapel services at 7:45am and Sanctuary worship at 11am began May 2 with social distancing and screening by the Parish Nurse.

Sarasota — First Congregational UCC

First Congregational UCC began in-person worship in the Sanctuary on March 28. Outdoor services are also offered on the Wendling Terrace at the Oasis Center. Services are available on the church website, Facebook and YouTube.

Sarasota — St. Andrew UCC

In-person Sunday worship is at 10:30am; people are encouraged to call ahead and let the front office know they are attending, but it is not required. Masks and social distancing continued into May with restrictions easing. The service is also online by accessing the church website and is also on FacebookLive.

Sebring — Emmanuel UCC

At Emmanuel UCC the Sunday service is livestreamed on Facebook at 10am and posted later in the day on YouTube and the church website.

Spring Hill — Spring Hill UCC

The in-person worship at Spring Hill is at 10am and reservations are required. Another option is to listen live in the church parking lot on a car radio. The service is uploaded to YouTube later in the day.

St. Augustine — United Church UCC-DoC

In-person worship with social distancing began at the United Church/St. Augustine on May 23, welcoming those who have been vaccinated with a virtual option for those not yet ready to gather.

St. Pete Beach — Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC

Pass-a-Grille Beach is offering in-person Sunday worship at 8:30am outside on the Pavilion (no masks required). The 10am service is in the Sanctuary (masks not required once seated, with spacing between groups, and no singing by congregants); this service is also live-streamed on the church website. Registration is no longer required for either service. These guidelines went into effect mid-April.

St. Petersburg — Lakewood UCC

A Zoom meeting on April 6 and an in-person conversation after worship on April 11 took place at Lakewood UCC to discuss how to proceed regarding opening up. After considering the thoughts and views of the congregation, it was decided that for the month of May services would continue to be held with the doors and windows open. The services began at 9:30 when it is slightly cooler. There will be a new plan in June when it is hoped most of the congregation will have been vaccinated.

Tallahassee — United Church in Tallahassee

The Zoom services continue at 10am at the United Church and are later posted on the church website.

Tampa — First United Church of Tampa

Sunday's service at First United is at 10:30am via Zoom and later may be viewed on the church website. The Spanish language sevice is at Noon.

Winter Park — First Congregational UCC

Sanctuary worship has begun at First Congregational UCC. Reservations and masks are required, seats are assigned, completed questionnaires are turned in at check-in and printed guidelines are provided ahead of time.

Webinar Shows Churches How to Stay Online as They Reunite In Person

BY HANS HOLZNAGEL
UCC NEWS, MAY 2

As COVID-19 wanes and your church regathers in person, stay online, too — even if you're on a budget.

That was the advice of two ministers and a video expert in a pair of United Church of Christ webinars.

First form a team and set your church's goals, Part I advised. The Indiana-Kentucky Conference hosted "So You Want to Build a Hybrid Worship Experience" on Zoom and YouTube April 22 and 29. The discussion is available now for free on YouTube. The Conference is encouraging churches to share both parts widely across the UCC and beyond.

Hybrid worship is possible on a budget, as Part II explained.

To be sure, the webinars touched on the technical side of going live from a Sanctuary. They covered cameras, microphones, software, switchers, cables and online platforms — from the simple to the high-end.

Session One, Time and Talent

Session Two, Tools and Tech

> The Indiana-Kentucky Conference hosted "So You Want to Build a Hybrid Worship Experience" on Zoom and YouTube April 22 and 29. The discussion is available now for free on YouTube. [See graphic above]

But, just as important, they emphasized:

Why it's a good idea to blend in-person worship with an online component — permanently.

How to form a team, make plans and pull them off affordably.

The need to address "two congregations" at once: the people there in-person and those at home. For many worship leaders, this requires a new consciousness — and takes practice.

"How we best serve all"

Vaccines offer "glimmers of hope" that churches will meet in-person again as the pandemic passes, Indiana-Kentucky Conference Minister Chad Abbott said. But churches wonder "how we best serve all of God's people — those that are going to be in person and those that aren't quite comfortable coming yet."

"The church will never go back to 'what once was' prior to the pandemic," Abbott said. "Most of us are aware that the worship experience has now been changed forever," he said, because so many congregations now know how to gather online.

"We need to be present to that change with a sense of mission and clarity," he said.

Forming a team

Getting that clarity from the start is key, because there are many ways to do hybrid worship, said Troy Vaupel. He owns a video production company and live-streams worship for Bethlehem UCC, Evansville, Ind., where he is a member.

As a first step, he recommended every congregation form a special team to focus on hybrid worship. Ideally it would include:

The church's senior minister

Its elected leaders, so they're in on conversations about goals and expense from the start

"Tech-savvy" members

An attorney familiar with copyright law, to be sure the church gets proper permission to stream and record music and images

It's essential to think of hybrid worship as something that's here to stay, Vaupel said. "It's not just a notion of, well, we're only doing this until the pandemic's over and then everyone can be back under the church roof. This is a ministry that's going to grow."

Setting hybrid goals

Vaupel said the team should ask basic questions: "What do you want people to take from viewing your [worship] video? And … what do you want them to do after?" The latter might include visiting the church's website, contacting a minister, signing up for a ministry, or, eventually, visiting in person. Answers to those questions will inform everything else, from worship planning to equipment purchases.

And then, he said, it's time to think about the structure of worship itself — knowing that a video feed is now part of it.

"Some of you may decide, out the gate, all we really want to do is just capture the essence of our service and maybe record our sermon or a message and just have that online," Vaupel said. "That's totally OK." Others, he said, may want to go hybrid more aggressively from the start. They may want to build in new ways of interacting with online worshipers — live, via social media, for example. "That's good too. But determine what that structure of worship's going to be like, not just for the people who are there, but for the people who are viewing at home."

'Not super-wealthy, not super-big'

The Rev. Janna Meyers, pastor of St. John UCC, Cumberland, Ind., encouraged webinar viewers not to be intimidated. "You guys may have a church similar to mine, which is not super-wealthy, not super-big and not super-full of, like, loads of tech people," she said. "But that does not mean that this cannot be your story."

That story, she said, started in March 2020, when St. John closed its building. It immediately went live on Facebook with worship, with nothing but Meyers' smartphone. "At first it was just me shouting at the phone from across the Sanctuary because I didn't know how to turn the sound board on, and the tech guy – we weren't going to ask him to come out of his house. We had just — literally, it was myself and the pianist. And it was a mess."

A year later, things look much different, she said. St. John has been worshiping in person for seven weeks now and — thanks to a year's learnings and equipment purchased with a grant — has kept streaming to FacebookLive. Connecting with remote viewers is a priority, because, as Meyers put it, "They're my real church. They're my real members. They're just in a different place, and I want to welcome them in the same way I welcome everybody else."

St. John has a team of "tech stewards" who take turns as digital ushers. "We have somebody at every single worship service whose job it is to say hello to everyone who logs on," Meyers said. "So if you log on, we'll ask you to say 'hi' in the chat, and then someone will write back to you by name." Meyers herself is also on her phone during the service — and said her in-person congregation understands why. "I make a point of posting to the Facebook screen from the pulpit," she said.

"They were just surfing the Internet"

Being online and in-person at the same time can pay dividends — including newcomers. "Maybe because we're an older church, smaller, you know, sort of half-rural, half-suburban, we don't normally get a lot of visitors," Meyers said. "You may not either. But we have had six different people join church since we've come back, in seven weeks, because they all started coming online during the pandemic.

"They were just surfing the Internet and one of their friends was watching, so they clicked in to watch. They've all come to church and said, 'Hey, it's our first Sunday here. … But we've been online for three months, we've been online for six months, we've been online with you since March.'

"That has been a really good reminder of why we're doing this. We're not doing this to get through the pandemic. We're doing this to have a new form of evangelism, a new form of reaching out, a new form of connecting with our community and reminding them that we're here whether it's a pandemic or not."

"Take baby steps"

Vaupel went into detail on camera and equipment options. He offered specific advice, such as streaming through an ethernet cable instead of relying on wifi. And he stressed that — what with hardware available in a range of prices and software available free — "there is technology to do it on a low budget."

"I encourage everyone, take baby steps," Vaupel said. "Have the big plan, but allow yourself to do it in increments, so that way it's successful as you build confidence."

And he again urged churches to embrace hybrid worship as a new, permanent ministry emerging from a tragic, temporary pandemic. "This is the beginning of something that's going to last forever," he said. "It's the new way to hold church. And we have to remember that that's a good thing."

Consider Donating to the Conference

There are several ways to give, and your generosity will be greatly appreciated. Please click below to go to our website and make your selection:

- ❍ Donate as a Friend to support the current operating expenses of the Florida Conference
- ❍ Make an enduring gift to the Church Redevelopment Fund to revitalize and renew programs and innovative projects in our local churches
- ❍ Make a Legacy Gift of cash, securities, or property to provide perpetual support of a Florida Conference Mission you embrace.

(__) I wish to discuss this gift in more detail with Florida Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan

Retirement of Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove

May 10, 2021

Dear Partners in Ministry,

The Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove began his Florida Conference ministry on August 1, 2001. In the 20 years since, he has served as the Regional Minister for the Eastern part of our state and has had primary care responsibilities for churches and pastors from Yulee to Key West and reaching into the interior of the Conference geography. He has provided staff support for Committees on Ministry, been an active voice in Board of Directors meetings, and served as a caring and compassionate listener to countless ministers in the local church and in chaplaincy. He has assisted churches in the search process and mediated conflict across a range of issues while also celebrating the high points in church life. Raymond has been a consistent presence in the life of the national setting including service on committees of the denomination and participation in many General Synod meetings. In all of this, Raymond has been a colleague, a confidant, a mentor, a faithful servant, and a friend.

Raymond Hargrove has announced his retirement from active ministry to be effective July 31, 2021. While we lament the loss of his presence and personality in our common witness we also celebrate this new chapter in his life as he and **Cora** make plans for a retirement surrounded by family and friends in North Carolina.

Please join us in wishing all the best to this servant of God who has ministered so well with us these last two decades. Contributions toward a gift of recognition and thanksgiving may be sent to the Conference office with "Hargrove" in the memo line of your check. Cards and notes may also be forwarded and will be shared with Raymond at the close of his ministry. We do hope for another opportunity to express thanks in a more gathered and public way when conditions allow.

Blessings,

Sumner Hutcheson III, For the Board of Directors

Rev. John Vertigan, Conference Minister

Conference Grants and Awards Committee Names Recipients

The People Empowerment Fund of the Florida Conference was established to fund programs or events that support justice advocacy for under-represented and historically-marginalized groups.

In celebration of the Easter season, the Conference offered a $1,000 grant to 10 churches in good standing with the Conference that remitted 2020 per capita dues. Thanks to these congregations for their witness in the cause of justice. Very brief descriptions of their extensive proposals follow, and you are encouraged to reach out to them directly when their project meets your passion.

Faith UCC/Dunedin — Rev. Mike MacMillan, Pastor

Among the nine action items selected by the church for work in 2021 are:

- Support for minority-owned businesses
- A recommitment to working with disadvantaged children in Haiti
- Church support of voter rights and restoration efforts

Faith UCC/Bradenton — Revs. Judy and Brian Bagley-Bonner, Pastors

- To fund lay leader training in the DART model of justice advocacy for the newly forming organization in Manatee County that will seek to address the root causes of poverty and injustice in that county

Fort. Myers Congregational UCC — Rev. David Bucey, Pastor

- A grant to support Fort Myers Congregational UCC's membership in Lee Interfaith for Empowerment (LIFE) as LIFE establishes a Fair Housing Trust Fund.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC — Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner, Senior Pastor

- To hire a consultant who specializes in historical racial reconciliation as well as purchase of curriculum and supplies for congregational work in reckoning with historic racism in church and community.

Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda — Rev. Mike Ford, Pastor

To engage the CUCC Congregation and Community Members at large in the reading and discussion of *A Time for Change: How White Supremacy Ideology Harms All Americans* by Dr. Martha Bireda, Phd. This will be a six week series on the book led by Dr. Bireda on the premises of CUCC and via Zoom conferencing.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota — Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby, Pastor

To have Dr. Luther Smith (Professor Emeritus, Candler School of Theology) and Dr. Shively T.J. Smith (Professor, Boston College), who are both Thurman scholars, come speak about Howard Thurman and his search for common ground. This gathering will help us find renewed strength for the work of anti-racism and network people of faith to this work.

Emmanuel UCC/Sebring — Rev. George Miller, Pastor

To create a handicap-accessible Community Garden on church property. Our target populations are the food insecure elderly, wheelchair bound, and those living with physical disabilities (as well as their family and grandchildren) in which vegetable and flower beds need to be raised off the ground. To empower people to play a part in growing their own food, and for children to develop an understanding of where food comes from.

First United Church of Tampa — Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson, Pastor

In 2020, First UCC Tampa joined with other UCC churches to declare itself an anti-racist church. As part of this commitment, First United is convening racial equity training sessions (approximately 6-12 hours of training) which will benefit the multi-racial and multi-cultural members of the UCC congregation and any others who wish to join. The sessions are facilitated by Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo and Thomas Spaulding (Holy Cow! Advisors). Mr. Spaulding is a trainer with the Racial Equity Institute. The Spanish session will be held by Rev. Astudillo, a Presbyterian clergywoman who works on climate justice issues and has also been trained by REI.

Raymond Hargrove, Regl Conf Min, service concludes July 31

John Danner, P, Sanibel Congregational UCC, service concludes, April 24, 2022

Angela Wells-Bean, AP, Naples UCC, service begins September 20

Deborah Kaiser-Cross, AP, Naples UCC, service concluded May 9

Wesley Snedeker, CM, Fort Myers Congregational UCC, service concluded, May 30

Shelly Wilson, P, Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg and Church of the Isles, Indian Rocks Beach, service concluded May 9

Judy Bagley-Bonner, P, Faith UCC/Bradenton, service concludes September 26

Brian Bagley-Bonner, P, Faith UCC/Bradenton, service concludes September 26

Bruce Havens, P, Arlington Congregational UCC/ Jacksonville, service concludes June 30

Bruce Havens, DTP, Coral Isles Church/Tavernier, service begins July 1

Key P, Pastor; AP, Associate/Assistant Pastor; CM, Community Minister; DTP Designated-Term Pastor

CALENDAR

Please note that some staff travel has resumed.

June-July
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge on sabbatical

June 1
CM Rev. John Vertigan, UCC Development Committee

June 3
RM Rev. Raymond Hargrove, First Congregational UCC/Port St. Lucie

June 13
CM Rev. John Vertigan, First Congregational UCC/Winter Park (in-person)

June 25-July 6
CM Rev. John Vertigan, vacation

July 11-18
CM Rev. John Vertian, General Synod (virtual)

July 31
RM Rev. Raymond Hargrove, last day of service

August 1
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, United Church of Marco Island

August 3
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Western Region Church on Ministry

August 7
CM Rev. John Vertigan and RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Conference Board of Directors

August 8
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, United Church of Marco Island

Returning "Home"

Rev. Angela Wells-Bean is heading back to Florida after serving as Pastor of UCC Congregational/Burlington, MA, since 2011. She has been called to assume the positon as Minister for Congregational Care at **Naples UCC** beginning September 20. Rev. Angela is the daughter of **Kim** and **Jeff Wells** (Rev. Kim is Pastor of **Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg**). No surprise that grandparenting possibilities for grandsons **Soren** and **Emerson** have improved dramatically, to the relief of Angela and husband, **Andy**.

Saying Godspeed

Rev. Wesley Snedeker, the Community Minister at **Fort Myers Congregational UCC** since November 2018, will be leaving May 30 to pursue PhD studies in Denver.

Getting Started

The Church Council at **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** has voted to support **John Ristow** as he begins studies at Chicago Theological Seminary in the fall. John began attending the church right as the pandemic began in March 2020. He has been accepted to the Seminary's online divinity program, which focuses on social justice ministries.

Search and Call in the Capital

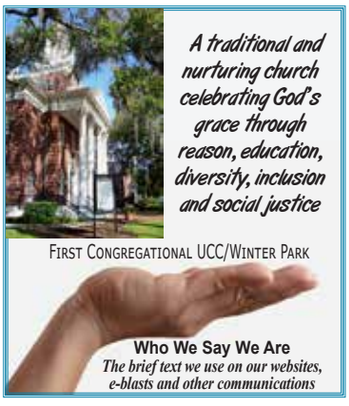
The Search Committee at the **United Church in Tallahassee** is keeping its members updated on progress in the process of calling a Pastor through its frequent e-blasts.

Odds & Ends from the Conference Church House

Who Do We Say We Are?

We are churches of the United Church of Christ. We are members of a whole, yet each of our congregations is different – with different histories, identities and missions. We proclaim in our UCC motto, "That they may all be one" (pictured is the UCC's recent logo, a tweak of John 17:21), but there is autonomy in our unity, a legacy of our congregational beginnings.

What words pop out when "church shoppers" go to one of our congregation's websites? What few words of texts are featured prominently in the e-blasts and other communications sent from our churches to their members and friends? Who do we say we are? In this edition and in future issues, you'll find several images like this one telling you who these congregations say that they are.



In our diversity, may we all be one.

Conference Sponsored New Boundary Training Opportunity in May

The Florida Conference sponsored "Healthy Ministry Relationships: Gender, Race and Sexual Orientation" (An Intentional Conversation on Boundaries) on Tuesday, May 18. Rev. Dr. Tracy Dawson and Rev. Wendy Kidd of the Rocky Mountain Conference Healthy Ministry Relationships Wider Ministry led the interactive workshop for authorized ministers (active and retired), lay leaders, seminarians and members in discernment. Florida Conference clergy who attended earned one unit of professional ethics (boundary) training credit. There was no cost to participate.

Adapted from e-Celebrate*, March 31*

We Need You!

Together, we can BE the church in the world that continues to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors near and far. Uniting as the Body of Christ, we can BE the church in the world that continues to live as "good disciples" of Christ's love in action. Working alongside one another, we can continue to offer our appreciation for all who have volunteered to share talents and gifts to help promote the ministry and mission of the Florida Conference. We, the Nominating Committee, recognize all of the good work that you continue to do and ask that you consider offering your talents and gifts by serving on a committee of the Florida Conference. Currently there are openings on several committees that can be filled by a talented person just like you! Please review the list below.

The Personnel Committee needs two people. If you are someone who cares about our staff and resources, this may be the place for you to serve.

The Board of Directors has one vacancy that needs for a youth or young adult 25 years of age or younger.

The Budget and Finance Committee has one open position. If you are someone who knows their way around a spreadsheet and thrives on working with numbers and money, this is the place for you to share your gifts!

There is also a need for a youth delegate for General Synod. Since Synod is virtual this year, it would be the perfect opportunity for a youth to experience and impact the UCC on a national level without traveling!

There are also three openings on the Nominating Committee. Some people might say that the Nominating Committee is the most important and powerful of all the committees because the right leadership has the potential to steer the future of the UCC.

We, the Nominating Committee, encourage you to get involved, make a difference and BE the church in the world by serving the Florida Conference! For questions or conversation, feel free to contact the Nominating Committee or the Conference office.

Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley, chair **(Hope UCC/Rockledge)**, revkcw@att.net

Rev. Dr. Sheila Harvey Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach), Sheila@unionucc.net

Bunny Gruntler (Sunset Congregational Church/Miami)

Bert Perry (New Hope UCC/DeLand)

From e-Celebrate*, March 31*

Disaster Update:

FEMA May Be Able to Help With COVID-19 Funeral Costs

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought overwhelming grief to many families. FEMA's mission is to help people before, during and after disasters. Under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, FEMA is providing financial assistance for COVID-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020.

For more information and to apply for assistance Click here!

From e-Celebrate, April 14

It's Almost Time for Synod

Rev. John Vertigan
Conference Minister

The 33rd General Synod of the United Church of Christ, held virtually this year rather than in-person and on-site, will take place over eight days from July 11-18. Registration will open soon. The General Synod website can be found at https://www.generalsynod.org/ and will preview the agenda, the business to be undertaken, the worship to be shared and so much more in this first ever virtual event for the whole church.

The Florida Conference will "send" 13 voting delegates to the meeting, and those delegates are preparing to meet and strategize how we will participate on behalf of the Conference when we won't be physically together. Our typical morning meetings won't happen; our time at table in the plenary hall won't happen. How will we be a delegation rather than just a baker's dozen of delegates? This remains to be seen.

Looking at the agenda, one quickly sees that most of the big events will take place in the later afternoon and evening in order to accommodate attendees from Maine to Hawaii and the time zones in between. This provides us on the East Coast with a wonderful opportunity to register as a visitor and share in time together with UCC folk from all over the country. Good preaching and worship, good keynote addresses, a good spirit in the life of the church; these will all be gifts to those who attend from home and gain a deeper feel for what it means to be UCC.

Registration for delegates and visitors opens May 1 at the Synod website. You will also find links there for the resolutions that will come before the body.

One such action will be consideration of a proposed Resolution for the Rights of Nature, affirmed by the New Hampshire UCC Conference in annual meeting by a 99% affirmation and sent to the Synod. It was written by **Rev. Dr. Bob Shore-Goss** (a newcomer to the Florida Conference whose name you will likely see more of in the future) and the Green Team of the Federated Church of Marlborough, NH. It will proceed to General Synod for an Implementation Conversation and consideration on July 17. Here is the link to the article that appeared in the UCC Environmental Justice newsletter, *Pollinator*, on February 23 https://www.ucc.org/a-resolution-on-the-rights-of-nature-progresses/.

This link is for the Resolution, a webinar on the Rights of Nature and the Biotic Rights of Lake Erie, a study guide and Biblical/theological justification for congregational use. Rev. Shore-Goss has relocated with husband **Rev. Dr. Joe Shore-Goss** to Orlando. Rev. Bob will offer a creation justice webinar for the Florida Conference on a date yet to be determined.

Please accept this invitation to become active in the life of the General Synod by exploring the General Synod website and considering registration as a visitor to this biennial event, which, by its nature as a virtual gathering, should prove to be quite special.

Be at peace, and be in touch, won't you.

From "Conference Call," e-Celebrate*, April 28*

Florida Conference Delegates to the 33rd General Synod of the United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume — Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach

Rev. Brad Lutz — Miami Shores Community Church

Rev. Michael Ford — Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda

Rev. Michelle Carter — Jensen Beach Community Church

Rev. Vonshelle Beneby — Hope UCC/Rockledge

Mr. Marcelino Rivera — Windermere Union Church

Mr. Chance Colon — Spring Hill UCC

Mr. Daniel Best — Christ Congregational Church/ Miami

Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley — Hope UCC/Rockledge

Ms. Dyanne Edds — Hope UCC/Rockledge

Ms. Lynn Jones — First Congregational UCC/Sarasota

Ms. Kate Howe — Union Congregational Church/ Tavares

Mr. John Havens — Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville

Mr. Sumner Hutcheson III — Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami

Valarie Kaur, Social Activist & Film Maker

Valarie Kaur is a social justice activist who leads campaigns for civil and human rights. When a Sikh family friend was the first person murdered in a hate crime after 9/11, she made her first film on hate violence in America.

Since then, her story-based advocacy has helped win policy change on hate crimes, racial profiling, immigration detention, solitary confinement, marriage equality, and Internet freedom.

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, Author & Minister

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners and author of *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post Civil Rights Generation* and forthcoming book, *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community.*

Taylor also serves on the Global Advisory Board of Tearfund UK and is a member of the inaugural class of the Aspen Institute Civil Society Fellowship.

The Joys of Being in Covenant

Judy Friend at **Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park** reports that the week following Ash Wednesday, **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach** delivered their monthly supply of food stuffs to the Food Pantry. It was a Monday and over 15 very full bags were received and immediately sorted to be to be distributed to the Pantry clients. At the bottom of one bag was a beautiful olive wood cross about three inches long. The volunteers stopped and stroked the smooth cross and marveled the beauty of the wood grain. And then the questions began:

…Why did they send the cross?

...Was the giver wanting us to know the reason for the gift of food?

...What should we do with it?

She said they didn't have answers. But they did feel they were being sent a message: "We are partnering with PAG to serve as Jesus' hands and feet here at the pantry. We need donations to keep open and serving clients."

That cross is on the counter in the packing room overseeing each bag packed by loving volunteers.

Then, on March 30, a woman knocked on the "donations" door at the Pantry. She was carrying a large white envelope and said she had a monetary donation for the Pantry. Judy asked **Kate Hall** (Pantry coordinator) to come and accept the envelope. Inside was a letter from the Chairman of the Legacy Committee of **Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole**, a Certificate of Appreciation and a check for $2,000!

Barb Brown, the woman delivering the donation told them that she had come to the pantry many years ago when her now adult daughter was very young and she needed assistance. She had been a part of the Legacy Committee that had distributed the proceeds from the sale of their church building on Park Boulevard in Seminole to several deserving charitable organizations in the community.

Adapted from The Messenger*, the newsletter of Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park, May 2020*

United Church of Gainesville
— April —
Emerge
"What is emerging among us?"

— May—
Dreaming
Members trace hands on colored paper, write dreams on it and they will be hung in the worship space throughout the month

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
— Summer —
Letters of Faith
Focusing on Romans 5

Coral Gables Congregational UCC

— June —

Elephant in the Pews
Asking the Pastor tough questions on faith and life]

United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine
— April —
Hope and Other Superpowers

— Late Spring —
Faithful Connections:
A Series of Interfaith Explorations
A worship series exploring the shared history and commonalities of different faith traditions in meeting the innate spiritual needs of humans -- an abundance of opportunities for engaging with and learning from prayers, chants, poetry, music and rituals of Native Americans, Buddhists, Sufis, and Christians. The series was inspired by *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* by Karen Armstrong and will include readings from *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths* by Matthew Fox.

Music and the Arts

Sewists at the **United Church in Tallahassee** have been summoned to participate in the Grateful Threads' annual quilt fundraising project. Anyone who can sew can learn how to put quilt squares together.

It was Bluegrass Sunday once again at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** when the Myakka River Bluegrass Band was welcomed back for the annual event on Sunday, April 18, at both services. As always, the boys from Charlotte County provided a bit of twang to the worship experience! Later that day the Unitarian Universalists of the Islands invited SCUCC Pastor **Rev. Dr. John Danner** to lead a Zoom worship experience with his presentation "Songs of Freedom, Songs of Hope," a recounting of the history of African American spirituals and their use in the Underground Railroad. Also, church members interested in art can join **Carol Good**'s gatherings on Tuesday afternoons outdoors under the offices.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach organized a free outdoor concert in the church parking lot featuring the St. Petersburg Community Band on Saturday afternoon, April 24.

Worship at 11am on Sunday, April 11, at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** was "The Gospel According to Dolly Parton." The music was performed by local professional musicians, featuring Ashley Levin, a former contestant on "The Voice." Dolly's songs are considered by many to be beacons of hope and inspiration in fearful and difficult times. The Alhambra Orchestra, which performs a free concert in the Sanctuary every year (usually in the spring), substituted a virtual performance this year because of COVID-19. The premiere of "Songs of the Ages," with voices, strings and winds, was Sunday evening, April 25, and was viewable on YouTube.

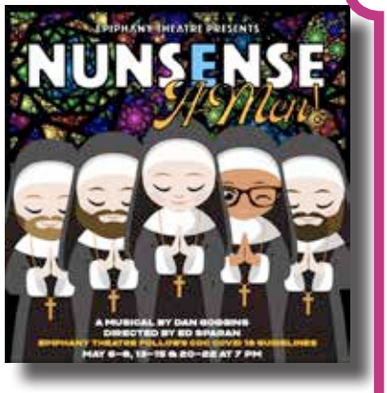
As April was National Poetry Month, **First United Church of Tampa** held a poetry conversation via Zoom on Wednesday evening, April 28. Participants were asked to bring to the gathering a poem that excites you and then share what poetry means to you and how it's influenced your life.

Members of the Volusia Music Club have donated $2,178 to **First Congregational UCC/Orange City**.

Ed Turner provided the special worship music at **UCC/Fort Lauderdale** on May 9, performing "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."

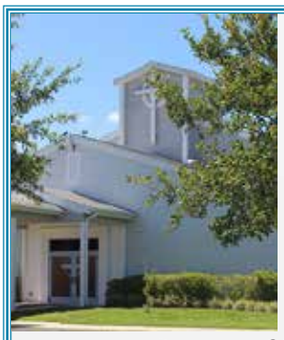
When **Debbie** and **John Dunbar** at **Faith UCC/Dunedin** moved to Florida, they got hooked on drum circles. They shared their joy with members at the church on Saturday evening, May 22, with an hour's worth of immersion into the meditative and invigorating rhythms of the drum. Guests were invited to bring something to shake, rattle, roll or bang on – flutes, buckets, pans and Didgeridoos were suggested. Masks and social distancing were observed along with happy smiles and dancing feet. Those interested in drum circles might like to know that the **United Church of Gainesville** has a drum circle that meets for an hour on the first and third Thursdays of the month.

Slightly *Off* Broadway



Elliot Hall at **UCC/Fort Lauderdale** was the location for the Epiphany Theatre production of the musical "Nunsense *A-Men*," May 6-8, 13-15 and 20-22.

The Anam Cara Women's Circle at **Faith UCC/Dunedin** staged an adaption of the 1985 Broadway hit, "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe." Seven of the personalities played by Lily Tomlin were performed by Faith's ACWC Players on Saturday afternoon, May 14, via Zoom after months of rehearsals!



To Help People KNOW Christ Personally and GROW in Their Faith

Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte

Who We Say We Are

The brief text we use on our websites, e-blasts and other communications

A Richness of Opportunities

Your Invitation to be Informed — Inspired — Transformed

June 2-3 Faith & Fair Food Summit 19
July 11-18 General Synod (virtual) 10
Vacancies to Fill on Conference Committees 9
Anti-Racism Ministry 15-16
Book Proposal Workshop 21
UCC Women "Reading for Renewal" Book Club 25
Tips for Weathering Storms 32
Emergency Clean-up Bucket Matching Grants 32

Clergy in a growing number of our Florida congregations have created blogs, which are discussion or information sites on the web offering posts on various topics.

Here are a few of them you may wish to check out. If you know of others, contact *Celebrate Florida* (celebrateflorida@uccfla.org) and we'll include them in future issues.

Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC): www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com/

Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach): www.pagchurch.org/news/pastors-blog/index.html

Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): www.gracetraces.blogspot.com/

Rev. Shawn Garvey (First Congregational Church/Winter Park): www.fccwp.org/blog/

Rev. Mike MacMillan (Faith UCC/Dunedin): www.faithuccdunedin.blogspot.com/2015/12/faith-uccs-new-blog-site.html

United Church of Gainesville: (www.ucgainesville.org/sample-page-2/)

Rev. Jim Coyl (Pensacola Beach Community UCC): (www.Jamescoyl.com)

New Sacred – A United Church of Christ blog www.newsacred.org/

Rev. Dr. Anna Verlee Copeland (Community Church of Vero Beach) https://ccovb.org/rev-dr-anna-verlee-copelands-blog/

Rev. George Miller (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring) https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/

Our Sincere thanks...

... to unsplash www.unsplash.com and its talented artists and photographers for many of the generic photos and images used in this issue. We appreciate the generosity of this free service.

Build It...
and they will come

Outside plantings have been added recently at **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton**, with ongoing watering and fertilizer applied, all thanks to dedicated volunteers.

The St. Johns County Planning & Zoning Board unanimously approved a Special Use Permit for constructing a cell tower in the back of the **United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine** property. The tower, to be constructed by LCS Wireless under contract by AT&T, will result in some brush being removed, but will not disturb the large trees. Once the construction is completed, the church will begin receiving approximately $1,000 per month for rental of the property.

In early April, four air scrubbers were installed in the air conditioning units in the Sanctuary of **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota**. These eight UV lights will help to eliminate viruses, creating a safe space as people return to in-person worship with masks.

The sky-high water bills at **Christ Congregational UCC/Miami** are a thing of the past thanks to some fixes to the leaky plumbing on the church campus.

The children's room at the **UCC/New Smyrna Beach** has moved into the Sanctuary building and has been painted and rehabbed with new and repaired lighting, thanks to church members led by **Carolyn Cote**. Most of the cost of new area rugs was borne by **Karen Watson**. **Bobby Lambert** and **George Smith** took it upon themselves to have an air filtration system added to the Sanctuary's HVAC system with **Bill Peterson** and **Dave Leblanc** underwriting the cost. Faith in action! In addition there is now A/C in the pantry and an awning over the back door of the Thrift Store.

The launch of a capital campaign at **First UCC/Orlando** took place on Sunday, April 11. The goal of $75,000 over a three year period is to replace the A/C unit in Crimson Hall and some roofs in out buildings and have reserves for future roof and A/C needs. Guidance for this effort is being provided by **Jennifer Brewer**, a member of **Windermere Union Church** who has a passion for church stewardship efforts such as this.

In late April workers began repairing the Sanctuary roof at **St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota**, taking care of the newly-discovered leak in the Chancel area as well as the leak in the ladies' room ceiling.

The **United Church in Tallahassee** put out a call in early May for volunteers for a Saturday Work Day by mid-June as it carefully plans for a limited opening of the church.

The Memorial Garden at **Hope UCC/Rockledge** received a facelift in March thanks to a dozen volunteers who spread 80 bags of mulch that brought the space to life and pressure-washed the walkways. Other areas of the campus have been pressure-washed, the front circle has been painted and new covers on the gutters have been installed.

With the 2017 capital campaign at **Faith UCC/Dunedin** resulting in the creation of a Gathering Space and other improvements, one area has been neglected – the Sanctuary. In March the Leadership Team asked the congregation for approval to spend up to $10,000 to refresh its sacred space to make it more welcoming. In addition to the initial $10,000, two substantial gifts were made to the church, which have allowed it to do even more than originally planned. This includes the purchase of several cameras, software packages and an iPad to help coordinate the streaming services that for broadcasting worship services to those not physically present. Also due for updating is the Pastor's office. Contributions are being requested for an additional $6,000 to cover the cost of these remaining projects.

***There were two church grounds "clean-up tree debris haul-away days" recently at* Faith Family UCC/Brandon**

Zoom in Zoom out

My Story of Moving Beyond the Binary

by Rev. Donna Cooney (United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine) SC2ER Facilitator

I was raised to believe that racism consisted of individual acts of meanness, and that racist acts were committed by a few bad people. Since neither I, nor the people who raised me, were bad people, racism had nothing to do with me.

This was and is the dominant teaching. It is based in the Good/Bad binary. Either I am good or I am bad. Either I am racist or I am not. I was socialized to allow this "either/or" dynamic to play a central role in my thinking. I was taught, by well-intentioned people, to think of racism on an individual level. I was taught to look at myself and others on the scale of "either/or." Either I am racist or I am not. Either they are racist or they are not. If they (or I or we) are racist, we are bad people. We are not bad people. We are not racist. My belief in the binary made it impossible to see, and easy to ignore my own racist tendencies.

Engaging in Sacred Conversations To End Racism (SC2ER) transformed my thinking. Space was created so I could decenter myself, move beyond the binary and understand racism differently. In many ways it set me free. No longer was I bound to a narrow path of self-interest; neither was I wasting precious energy trying to protect my "good" reputation. What opened before me was a broad and fascinating, sometimes frustrating, exploration of racism from a cultural, historical, structural perspective. I am grateful for these new eyes that see and ears which hear differently.

Many of you have already joined in this transformational journey, and for that the Anti-Racism Ministry (ARM) of the Florida Conference is grateful and eager to be in conversation with you. We'd love to hear about what you are learning and how you feel about what you are learning.

For those of you who are beginning or interested in beginning the journey, ARM is eager to be in conversation with you as well. We are open to speaking with individuals, small groups and committees, laity and clergy. We look forward to learning from and with you.

In addition, everyone is welcome to join in the Sacred Conversation To End Racism which takes place every Thursday at 1pm. (Join Meeting https://zoom.us/j/96911220983?pwd=d1hhUlUzcHMwalo1YkJwUVBCZkdndz09)

We look forward to linking ARMs with you!

Here is how to reach us:
Neal Watkins: 772/559-0875, NWatkins@uccfla.org
Donna Cooney: 386/244-4336, DCooney236@gmail.com

An Invitation Into the Sacred Conversations to End Racism

by Neal Watkins
Conference Minister of Faith Formation

No Matter Who You Are or Where You Are on Your (Church's) Journey

Many throughout our Conference have reached out to ask about the Sacred Conversations to End Racism, and one of the most common questions that I am asked is some form of "Is this the new curriculum that churches are using for Anti-Racism faith formation?" While it is a simple question, the answer is more complicated: yes...and no.

In the sense that the Sacred Conversations to End Racism (SC2ER) provide a framework/model that is intended to be portable and duplicatable — a model for the journey through intentional and transformational conversations. Additionally, it certainly facilitates conversations through several books, articles, videos and resources that have been quite helpful for several of us in the process.

And yet "curriculum" in the traditional sense has often been understood as uni-directional (given from one source to an intended audience) with a pre-determined and specific outcome in a specific period of time. This understanding of curriculum is not reflective of the SC2ER experience or intention. Just as

Faith Formation is most honest and impactful when it is driven by authentic relationships, the sacred conversations are the same. It takes into account that each of us enters the journey from a different place and honors that our primary responsibility to one another along the journey is to "do no harm." Also, it honors that there is wisdom, passion and transformation already occurring in the anti-racism ministry of the Florida Conference.

This might be problematic in the sense that it does not allow for a quick answer when we are asked, "How can you help our church," but what it ensures is that each church's journey within the SC2ER honors and takes into consideration the relationships, goals and abilities within each of our local church.

All that to say: YES! We want — and feel prepared — to help resource your church's anti-racism conversations. However, we are equally excited to begin the process with a conversation about your church in the hopes that understanding your hopes and expectations might be more specifically met — honoring the diversity and unique capabilities of each our churches.

Within our Florida Conference are two trained facilitators of the SC2ER; seven more members of the Florida Conference are being trained in this process.

12 members of the Florida Conference Anti-Racism Ministry Team have been meeting three times per month to be trained and are developing unique presentations and conversations in the hopes of being a resource to both the Conference and the local churches.

Throughout the Conference, our local churches have been dynamically being leaders and models in their communities in the ongoing work of anti-racism justice. In many cases, these are churches who have been leading in such ways for several years. There truly is great wisdom and passion in our midst to be shared amongst the regions of our Conference.

For laity and clergy alike, **Rev. Donna Cooney** hosts a weekly conversation that is open to members and guests of the Florida Conference every Thursday afternoon at 1pm (no pre-reservation is required). This conversation can be found at ZOOM ID: 969 1122 0983, password: ARM.

In short, it is our hope that the opportunity to share in conversation with you and your church is an opportunity to explore God's spirit moving in the unique ways that only you and your faith community can materialize. The resources, in the traditional sense, are plenty, but the SC2ER reminds us that our willingness to bring our full selves to the conversation is a resource in and of itself.

We would love to explore the intersections of these resources, your church and community. We hope to hear from you soon!

Parishioners at **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach** were invited to be part of an important dialogue on race and racism by watching the short video *"Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*" and then joining a follow-up Zoom discussion on April 28. On May 23 after the 10am service there was a "More Uncomfortable Conversations..." in-person, socially-distant continuation of the dialogue.

The April GROW guest speaker on April 2 at **Fort Myers Congregational UCC** was Dr. Ted Thornhill, the Director of the Center for Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and Associate Professor at Florida Gulf Coast University. His sociological research focuses on racism and antiracism, power, identity, marginalization and culture. His Zoom presentation was an introduction to the field of critical race theory and a discussion on the implications of that critical discourse for the work of justice in the community.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota offered the Black Church Symposium *The Black Church: This is Our Story. This is Our Song,* which was a six week Zoom event in April/May in partnership with the African-American Cultural Resource Center and Manasota branch of ASALH (Association for the Study of African American Life and History). Three viewing opportunities of the 40-minute segments were provided each week that included dialogue around what was being shared.

A special edition of Sacred Conversations on Race at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** featured Rev. Traci Blackmon, (Associate General Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries of the national UCC). The Zoom event took place Tuesday evening, April 20, and was a conversation that focused on Rev. Traci's sermon as guest preacher on April 18.

Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC) created a Zoom presentation on March 24 titled "Ain't I a Woman: Sojourner Truth." The talk covered the life story of this important and vibrant woman who worked for the abolition of slavery and the advancement of women's

rights. Originally named Isabella, Sojourner later took her provocative name as a symbol of her new freedom. She was a frequent speaker at gatherings across the country in the mid-nineteenth century, at one point having a meeting with Abraham Lincoln.

On Saturday mornings from May 15-June 19, **First United Church of Tampa** held an anti-racism workshop on Zoom. It was facilitated by Tom Spaulding, an anti-racism trainer, as participants sought to understand the underpinnings of societal racism.

The Racial Justice/Anti-racism/White Privilege group at **St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota** continues to meet weekly to study together to determine what might be the best way to help the rest of us come to grips with our own racism, face our white privilege and work for racial justice. The committee is considering a monthly series of programs and discussions that would be open to the community, but details have not yet been announced. In the meantime a series of brief messages, titled "Thought for the Week," are appearing in the church's weekly e-newsletter to raise awareness.

The Peace and Justice Initiative at the **United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine** is developing promotional material inviting other social justice groups to join them in bringing an exhibit on slavery to St. Augustine in connection with the 200th Anniversary (2021) of the acquisition of Florida by the United States.

Making Witness

BY REV. MARY ALICE MULLIGAN
ST. ANDREW UCC/SARASOTA

Occasionally we receive e-mails from someone in the community thanking us for one or another of the messages we put on our electronic sign. They mention how they appreciate reading something positive and faith-based as they wait at the red light on Beneva. They like being reminded that God thinks they are precious.

Also, occasionally we receive an e-mail or a phone call asking us to explain a message, or even asking us to remove something. After one person complained about the "All Lives Matter, so Black Lives Matter" messages, I invited him to come in and exchange ideas. We sat down in my office. The conversation started off politely, but it soon became clear to me that nothing would make this person agreeable except our removing the messages. Part of my explanation about the sign involved explaining that our society often treats people of color, especially African-Americans, as if their lives matter less than White people. He interrupted me to say that wasn't true. Later in the conversation, he stated that more Black people are in prison because more Black people break the law. I was shocked. Suddenly it became obvious that we were not speaking the same language. In fact, we were not describing the same reality. As I tried to draw the conversation to a close, he said something like: he would make sure people knew about us or knew who we really are.

I believe he was trying to intimidate me, perhaps even frighten me into changing the sign. He was not successful. To the contrary, his harangue reinforced my belief that our sign is very important. Because there are people around us who spread ideas about Christianity that make God seem unloving, it is more important than ever for St. Andrew to make a witness to the unconditional love of God poured out on everyone. Our sign is one way that happens. Every day, our sign is testifying that the radical welcome of Jesus Christ can be found at St. Andrew United Church of Christ.

From "Minister's Moment" in News from St. Andrew UCC, *May 12*

BE THE CHURCH

Protect the environment. Care for the poor.
Forgive often. Reject racism.
Fight for the powerless.
Share earthly and spiritual resources.
Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.

*In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was **Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality.** We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.*

As you read through these brief descriptions, do you note any which sound like programs or opportunities you would like to consider for your own congregation? If so, please feel free to contact our Conference Minister, Regional Ministers or the Pastors and staff of those churches to learn about people, curricula, materials and other resources that could be available to you. We will continue to share as we learn more from you. Here are a few more happenings. Please continue to participate in this conversation by contacting us at RickCarson1@gmail.com

Time for Conversations...

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park participated in the annual Nehemiah Action on Monday, March 22, represented by 114 people among the 2,000+ participants. An outdoor stage was set up at a centrally-located Catholic Church to provide for drive-up attendance in addition to Zoom viewing. Issues covered included mental health and addiction treatment, affordable housing and adult pre-arrest diversion.

Naples UCC offered a dialogue on "Learning from History: What the Holocaust Can Teach Us" with the CEO of the Naples Holocaust Museum, whose mission is to "Teach the lessons of the Holocaust to inspire action against bigotry, hatred, and violence."

Senior Pastor **Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner** of **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** was one of a number of guest speakers at a live webinar on Thursday evening, April 15, that reflected on interfaith relationships in these difficult times. Scheduled during the Muslim period of Ramadan (April 12-May 12), there was an iftar meal (the traditional Muslim fast during Ramadan). The speakers focused on the concept of friendship and how their communities came together during the difficulties of the pandemic, protests for social justice and economic difficulties incurred by so many.

On three Sunday nights at **Fort Myers Congregational UCC** in April, **Rev. Wesley Snedeker** facilitated a Zoom conversation on "Talking about Christian Worship." Working from the premise that when Christians get together every week to worship, the question can be asked, "What are we doing?" Are we leaving the old world behind, getting a glimpse of some heavenly life outside of time? Are we rehearsing just living in preparation to do it outside the church walls? Are we raising the trials of the community as a gathering fully in the world, seeking reconciliation and redemption? Are we talking with symbols? Accessing something ineffable? Where did it all come from, and what does it mean for us now? But sometimes even more often than that, Christians don't often ask deep or serious questions about how we worship or why. Intentional engagement with the concepts and questions of worship is a powerful way to get more out of the worship experience, whether as a congregant, facilitator or worship leader. The sessions dived into what we're doing on Sunday mornings by paying particular attention to 1) the historical and theoretical underpinnings of our liturgical practices, 2) the order of word and sacrament typically used in the UCC and 3) emerging worship communities that are pushing the boundaries of what weekly worship looks like.

April 5-11 marked the Alliance for Fair Food's "Demand Dignity for Farmworkers" Week of Action. During that week, allies from all over the country protested, delivered letters and took other means to get Wendy's attention and invite them into the Presidential Medal-winning Fair Food Program. Southwest Florida allies, including members from FMCUCC, gathered at a Naples Wendy's on Sunday, April 11, for a spirited action in support of the CIW's efforts.

The Lee Interfaith for Empowerment tenth annual Nehemiah Action took place on Monday, April 26, and was attended via Zoom or watched livestream on Facebook or YouTube by 1,200 community members (church members gathered virtually ahead of this on Monday, April 12, in preparation for the April 26 confab). The county sheriff said he would provide Crisis Intervention Team training for every deputy, dispatcher and call-taker in Lee County and agreed to increase the number of civil citations in lieu of arrests for juveniles in situations where the criteria are met. The Fort Myers mayor stated that he and the City Council would create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund with $3 million per year to be used for those earning less than 80% of Area Median Income.

Faith & Fair Food Summit

Clergy, lay leaders and faith allies from across the Fair Food Nation will "gather" on June 2-3 for the first-ever Faith & Fair Food Summit sponsored by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Alliance for Fair Food. The faith community has always played a central role in the struggle for farmworker justice, and this has included the Florida Conference of the UCC and member congregations.

Sessions will run from 11am-4pm each day, with various breakout opportunities for reflection, strategy and relationship building. Programming will include interactive sessions on the history of faith organizing in Immokalee, the operation and expansion of the Fair Food Program and the ongoing farmworker-called boycott of Wendy's.

In a year marked by distance, this crucial time together (albeit virtual!) will help forge the meaningful connections and political consciousness that power this work. Allies of all backgrounds and experiences are invited, whether this is your first CIW event or you've been a part of the struggle for decades — join them by **registering here**.

There was a peaceful protest on May 8 by members of the **United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine** in support of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Demonstrators were invited to come at 9am to make signs and then hold signs in front of the church along Route 1.

Members of the church were joined by activists from other St. Augustine organizations for an hour of deeply meaningful and community building activity.

Congregants at **Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg** were urged to send letters to Florida U.S. Senators to demand they vote "yes" on the Dream Act (providing a path to citizenship for "Dreamers"), the SECURE (Safe Environment from Countries Under Repression) Act and the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. Contact info and pre-filled letters were provided and personalization was encouraged.

BE THE CHURCH
Protect the environment. Care for the poor.
Forgive often. Reject racism.
Fight for the powerless.
Share earthly and spiritual resources.
Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.

A couple years ago, **Rev. Mike MacMillan** launched a new **Faith UCC/Dunedin** outreach program of public "witnessing" called "Witness Wednesday." Every Wednesday morning, from 10-11am (weather permitting), Pastor Mike along with members and friends stand together on the sidewalk in front of the church, with signs proclaiming the church's commitment to social justice, environmental awareness, weapons reform, kindness and love for each other, voting rights and racial justice among other important topics.

Participants can bring their own signs or use one of the church's. People walking, bike riding or driving by often wave, yell "Hello" and often give the "thumbs up" for being out there. Everyone gets a wave back.

The turnout from **First United Church of Tampa** for the March 22 HOPE Nehemiah Action was 162, surpassing its 115 goal. The total participation goal of 1,500 was exceeded as about 1,800 were present on 1,272 devices. This was the largest such meeting of its kind, working to bring about systemic change in Hillsborough County. HOPE stands for Hillsborough Organization for Progress & Equality and is composed of some two dozen+ churches – which advocates for social reforms. First United's **Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson** is co-chair of HOPE's Criminal Justice Committee.

BE THE CHURCH

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The final Theological Studies for the 2020-21 season at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** focused on the ongoing concerns surrounding immigration. The three-part Zoom course on Wednesday mornings in April examined Biblical/theological understanding of mass movements of people as well as the history of mass migrations.

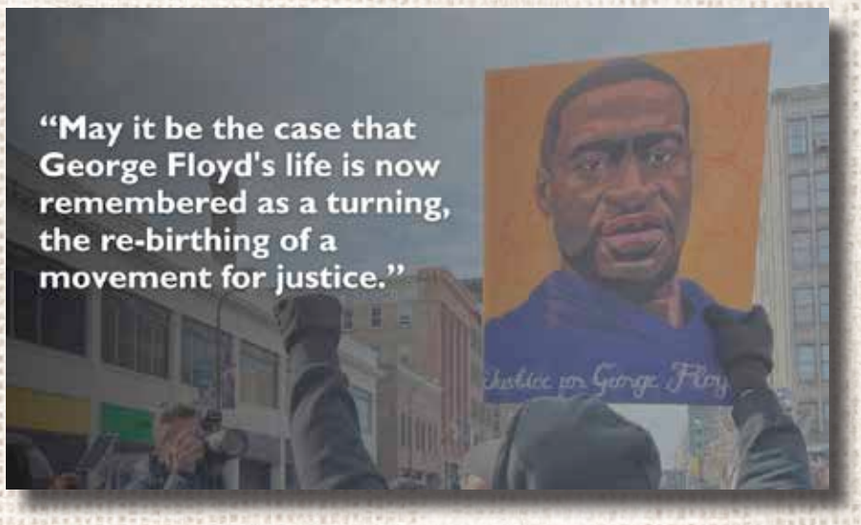
During the month of May, members of the **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton** participated in the Bread for the World: Yearly Offering of Letters to Congress to End Child Hunger. Members were encouraged during the month to take a few minutes to go online and sign a letter to Congress (the easy instructions were provided at OL.BREAD.ORG). This year's Offering of Letters continues to urge Congress to expand anti-hunger programs in response to the pandemic and increase funding for nutrition programs. **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** also joined in the campaign, writing their online letters on Mother's Day.

breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

UCC Leadership Expresses Relief, Resolve after Jury Returns Guilty Verdict in George Floyd's Murder

BY UCC LEADERSHIP
UCC NEWS, APRIL 20

United Church of Christ leaders offer this statement and prayer after 12 jurors convict former police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd.



All three counts – guilty

We share a collective breath of relief in the moments following the announced guilty verdict on all three counts against the now convicted murderer who recklessly ended the life of George Floyd.

There is no joy in this, instead a deep and profound sense of relief in knowing that a white police officer who killed a Black citizen with neither regard for the law nor his responsibility to uphold it will be held accountable.

This trial and verdict were necessary steps forward in a long journey towards justice, steps we have taken over and over again and which we have way too often failed to complete.

We remember George Floyd is dead and his family still grieves him. May it be the case that his life is now remembered as a turning, the re-birthing of a movement for justice. May he be remembered as one whose death caused white Americans to turn their faces towards the pain and suffering of Black communities that have been the object of white derision and scorn, a pain and suffering from which whites have too often and too easily hid their faces.

We continue to lift in prayer the family and friends of George Floyd who deserve this moment of justice and an assurance that his life was meaningful and worthy to all of us.

We pray for every Black mother and father who still have to sit with their children and warn them of the dangers of being pulled over by an officer of the law.

We call the church to engage in the hard and necessary work of reforming a police force still marred with the vestiges of white power, white privilege, and white supremacy and whose membership ranks reveal a growing number of actual white supremacists among them. Theirs is a noble profession, but we must all do the work of ensuring that those who wear the uniform do so without bias and prejudice, free from the evils of a racial bias that has ruined or taken the lives of too many Black and brown people.

There are others to be held accountable for their actions. We cannot, we will not rest until justice is an expectation; and until the system that recruits, trains, and deploys our law enforcement officers does so free from racial bias and hatred.

Let us all breathe deeply. There is a grief to feel, a pain and suffering to acknowledge, and a life to commemorate.

Let us continue to engage in the struggle for justice and peace. Let us commit to our individual and collective acts of love for all. And let us rejoice in the power of a God who offers resurrection hope in the midst of all of our struggles with death, with evil, and with injustice.

Faithfully,

The National Officers of the United Church of Christ:

- The Rev. John C. Dorhauer — General Minister and President
- The Rev. Traci A. Blackmon — Associate General Minister
- The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson — Associate General Minister

Time for Conversations...

Reflections from the Diary of My Soul

BY REV. JUSTO GONZALEZ II
PASTOR, SPRING HILL UCC

A few months ago, a colleague sent an e-mail asking if I would willing to write a poem for *Pitching Our Tents*, a new anthology focused on the work of justice and peace for all humanity. Peace Cathedral in the Republic of Georgia. Peace Cathedral is the intentional coming together of Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities constructing a mosque and a synagogue attached to their church building, a spiritual home for Abrahamic faiths, including Sunni, Shia and Sufi Muslims. The Muslim house of prayer will be called Masjid As-salam - مسجد السلام (Peace Mosque), and the Jewish home will be called Beit Kneset ha-shalom בולשל תסנכ תיב (Peace Synagogue). In addition, there is a Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, an interfaith adult library and a children's library with programming and summer camps.

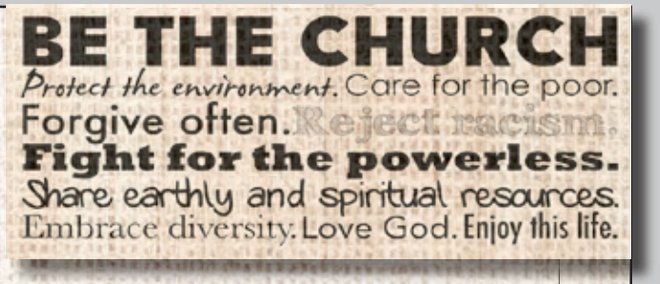
The pilgrimage program brings people to visit the Republic of Georgia to learn about the hopes and struggles of people of all of these faiths.

Peace Cathedral was established as First Baptist Church of Tbilisi in 1867. Its history is full of bold stands in support of oppressed minorities, and it frequently is endangered by religious extremists. It embraces full gender equality, lay and ordained. A current ministry is compassionate care for Transwomen, whose lives and livelihood are jeopardized by even more violence during COVID-19. Involved in interfaith work for more than 20 years, it has the confidence of Muslim, Jewish, Yezidi and other religious traditions in a context where the more dominant Christian culture often responds with violence against many minorities.

I share the poem because in many ways we too cannot (The Church in America) "see" each other, embrace our common journey or acknowledge that we have far more in common than anything that has the potential to divide us. Some like to focus on our slight differences rather than acknowledge that we all seek to love God, our neighbor, children and the world.

Remember, that regardless of how we feel in a particular moment, we, **Spring Hill United Church of Christ**, are better together. One church. One Team. One people of God. Hope is Ever Present. This poem will be part of the anthology.

From "What's Happening" at Spring Hill UCC, April 28



Hope is Ever Present

by Justo González II

We often cannot see
We are on same journey.
All aspiring to love
care for our families
and live in peace.

For thousands of years
there has been suspicion
and fear. The flames
of hatred stoked,
the anger clouds our eyes.

Hope is ever present.
Do not despair.

We are on the same journey.
We bring the best of who we are,
and share who we are with each other.

Peace Cathedral connects us.
We are siblings of the Sacred.
Our call is to stand together.

God rejoices when Peace begins to reign.

We have journeyed this far,
and we have much farther to go.
Yet, when we are United as One,
we are unstoppable.

Peace. Be. With. You.

OPPORTUNITY

Get Your Proposal Noticed!

Book Proposal 101 Workshop/June 2021

Whether you are writing the next great novel, a stirring spiritual memoir or a pivotal theological work, register for this online workshop to strengthen your book proposal's ability to catch an editor's eye or an agent's attention.

The 90-minute Book Proposal 101 workshop will be offered twice via Zoom:

- 1pm eastern on Monday, June 21
- 4pm eastern on Monday, June 23

Registration fee for the workshop is $25. Zoom links will be e-mailed to workshop participants in early June after registration is closed. Book Proposal 101 will be led by The Pilgrim Press staff.

Wanting More?

Watch our events page on www.thepilgrimpress.com for information about fall 2021 workshops on book marketing, publishing contracts, writer's block and more!

Ready to Submit a Book Proposal?

The Pilgrim Press outlines its expectations for book proposals on our acquisitions page, where you can also find contact information for submitting your proposal.

Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume,
Eastern Region Ambassador
Sheila@unionucc.net

Lynn Jones,
Western Region Ambassador
HonickyL@gmail.com

3 Great Loves is a denomination-wide story telling initiative, collecting and lifting up the stories of our local churches and affiliates about how we are living out God's love and expressing love of neighbor, children and creation — the 3 Great Loves.

From knitting clubs making hats for newborns, collecting food for food pantries, starting a recycling program at your church, standing together against social injustice — these are the stories of 3 Great Loves and no story is too insignificant to share!

Earth Day

In honor of the 51st anniversary of Earth Day and the theme Restore Our Earth, **Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg** created a music video to post on its website and share on social media. The video featured nature pictures taken by congregants and music from Music Director **Hilton Jones** to celebrate the wondrous diversity of the land, water, flora and fauna. The LUCC Creation Justice Task Force sponsored a Restore Our Earth Campfire gathering on Friday evening, April 30, at the church. Poems and readings that expressed love and appreciation for the Earth were shared, followed by writing love letters to the Earth, reading them to each other and tossing them into the fire, sending out love to the Earth, like prayers sent up with incense.

Members of **Faith UCC/Dunedin** were invited to join a Zoom meeting of Interfaith Tampa Bay on the morning of April 15 to celebrate Earth Day. It was recognized during worship on April 25 with special music and videos.

An Earth Day Trivia "pop-up" Zoom event was held at **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park** on Wednesday evening, April 21. Categories included history, solar energy, water resources and pollution.

Music during worship on April 18 at the **United Church of Gainesville** included music appropriate for Earth Day such as "Morning Glow" from the musical "Pippin" and singing "For the Beauty of the Earth" accompanied by piano and trumpets.

Members of **Naples UCC** were notified of the Earth Day Roundup for Collier County residents on April 22 at the Goodwill parking lot. There was a free locked box for shredding, a pharmaceutical take-back, free tire recycling and the acceptance of oil and oil filters, gasoline, antifreeze, propane tanks, paints, batteries, ink cartridges, fluorescent bulbs electronics, cellphones and more. Earth Day was recognized in worship on April 18, the theme being "Making Peace with Our Scars."

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota recognized Earth Day during worship on April 18. In light of the Piney Point crisis and in honor of the 51st Earth Day on April 22, the church's **Green Team** offered informative links about phosphate mining. Phosphate is mined to create fertilizers because conventional farming over-tills the earth, destroying the natural microorganisms in the soil. Congregants were able to learn about the consequences of tilling fields and the benefit of cover crops by watching the documentary "*Kiss the Ground"* (available on Netflix).

In its April newsletter, **UCC/New Smyrna Beach** provided readers with helpful tips and links to Earth Day resources.

The April 21 e-blast to members from **Spring Hill UCC** contained a link to "One Earth," an environmental short film that was created to help raise awareness about us and how our activities strongly impact our environment.

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour e-blasted a resource to members on April 23 with a brief history of how Earth Day came about and how it could be celebrated with songs. Links were provided to the following pieces: "For the Beauty of This Earth," "All Things Right and Beautiful," "All Creatures of Our God and King," "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," "All Good Gifts" and "What a Wonderful World."

On May 15 the Justice and Witness Committee of **Hope UCC/Rockledge** hosted a spring fling picnic celebration and dedication of its newly planted oak tree in honor of the love of creation, one of the 3 Great Loves. The chefs grilled hotdogs, hamburgers and veggie burgers. Guests assembled outside as **Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley** offered a prayer of dedication for the new tree.

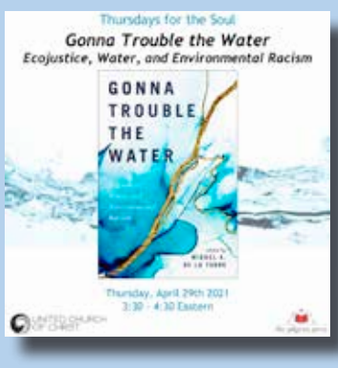
UCC a Leader in Environmental Issues

UCC Just Peace Webinar: Building Peace with the Earth

A presentation and discussion on issues of environmental justice and disaster recovery was offered via Zoom on April 27. The presentation was led by Amariee Collins, who has worked with Texas Impact and her congregation, St. Peter's UCC/ Houston, TX. There was time for small groups to network and share with one another resources and upcoming events related to our common work.

Adapted from e-Celebrate*, April 14*

Gonna Trouble the Water Webinar



The national UCC offered a webinar, "*Gonna Trouble the Water*: A Live Reading and Book Discussion" on April 29 as part of its Thursdays for the Soul series. To deny water is to deny life. Author Miguel A. De La Torre and contributors to *Gonna Trouble the Water* discussed the sacred nature of water and the ways it is weaponized against non-white communities. The book, *Gonna Trouble the Water: Ecojustice, Water, and Environmental Racism*, is available at www.com and wherever e-books are sold.

UCC Webinar: The U.S. and the Climate Crisis; What's Fair?

Historically, the United States has released more global warming pollution than any other country, and it remains the world's second highest emitter. With its immense wealth and power, what are the moral obligations of the U.S. in confronting the climate crisis? In short, what's fair? Three leaders in the effort to address this question were presented in this webinar: Sivan Kartha from the Stockholm Environment Institute, Jean Su from the Center for Biological Diversity and Susannah Tuttle from North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light. A recording of the event is available webinar

Adapted from e-Celebrate*, March 31*

National Gathering & Lobby Day

Ecumenical Advocacy Days is an annual gathering of Christian advocates and activists. We worship, delve deeply into the pressing issues of the day, and lift our voices by speaking truth to power on Capitol Hill. It was held as a virtual gathering on April 18-21.

The 2021 theme was ""Imagine! God's Earth and People Restored." EAD 2021 was an opportunity to support this global movement centered on and led by the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts due to historic racial and colonial inequities. Together, we will passionately advocate and reimagine a world that lives out the values of justice, equity and the beloved community.

In late March members of **First Congregational UCC/Orange City** received a baby bottle and a brochure from the Deland Pregnancy Center. They were encouraged to collect loose change (or dollars or a check) in the bottle. Then, on Sunday, April 18, a baby shower was held at the church, at which time congregants could donate gifts like diapers, blankets, socks, toys etc. Representatives from the Pregnancy Center were there to receive the bottles and gifts.

At **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton**, **Lynne H**. is knitting children's sweaters to give to Food for the Poor and Christian Appalachian Project and is welcoming church members to join her. She has simple patterns, needles and yarn to share. Another opportunity that presented itself was participation in the virtual 5k Run/ Walk for SOS Children's Village of South Florida that took place on Saturday morning, May 15. Those who signed up (free!) could walk wherever or meet at the church and walk around the parking lot island for however long. Those not up for walking could donate toward the church's team goal.

Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte provides wait staff twice a month for dinner meals at the Homeless Coalition. It's service with a smile – and eye contact! And 7th grader **TJ Graves** is preparing at least 20 duffel bags/backpacks for his spring Eagle Scout project that will benefit homeless veterans in Charlotte County. He's welcoming donations of clothes, shoes, toiletries and basic camping gear (flashlights, water bottles, etc) from church members eager to help.

The **United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine** has been asked to provide fieldworkers with long-sleeved shirts to protect them for the sun and insects. It also s encouraging members to participate in a summer literacy program for migrants in Putnam County, connecting adults with high school students who have asked for help with their writing and reading skills and teens with elementary students who need reading assistance. **Sanibel Congregational UCC** is working to enlist members who are willing to devote 20 minutes once or twice a week (on Zoom) to assist students in Lee County who need help with their reading skills.

3 Great Loves

As an extension of radical hospitality at **St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota**, its Mission and Outreach Board has moved to start a service project with Family Promise of Sarasota by collecting items/products needed by the families enrolled in the program who are in danger of becoming homeless. The Home for Good program works to keep them in housing. As many parents are feeding their families with limited funds, they are in need of donations of non-food items. Suggestions include cleaning supplies, feminine hygiene products and, in particular, baby or child personal care products (like tearless shampoo, baby lotion, diapers, wipes and baby powder).

The Board of Justice and Witness at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** collected new pairs of athletic shoes and socks for the homelessness ministry of First United Methodist Church where it distributed the shoes as a part of its annual Foot Washing Outreach event in April. First UMC serves over 60 unhoused people every day in downtown Miami with food, showers, hygiene kits and clothing.

The Green Team at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** held two events (in-person and on Zoom) in April addressing the question, "How Can We Save the Earth?" — saving whole ecosystems, which at the same time providing for human needs. One showed how and why to conserve butterflies and the other was on "Rights of Nature: A New Approach to Environmental Protection."

Navy Point Elementary School in Pensacola had a graduation party for 75 5th graders at the end of May and the **Community UCC/Pensacola Beach** gathered dessert, drinks and paper products from its members for the occasion. The church has an on-going relationship with the school.

The Board of Business at the **United Church of Gainesville** has made a second call for contributions to the Corona Contingency Fund, which was established last spring where folks could contribute monies from their initial Federal stimulus check to help those in need. Since then $5,000 has been collected and used to help individuals and families maintain access to safe housing, repair cars needed to get to work, cover unexpected medical and dental expenses and purchase devices to help remain connected to the church community over the Internet.

The national UCC has accepted the application of **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** to be a Creation Justice Church. The hard work of members **Rev. Dr. Sarah Melcher** and **Barbara Smith-Bacon** was commended as a model for how other churches could engage faithfully in this process. In the church's April newsletter "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" was featured, explaining where consumer items come from, how they are made and the implications of everything we use.

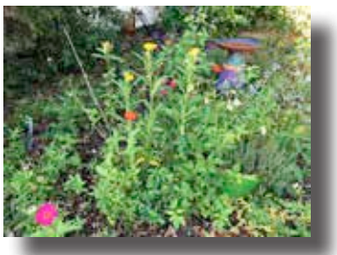
Please send your 3 Great Loves story to Lynn and Sheila.

The Green Team at the church invited parishioners to join in cultivating a relationship with natural Sarasota. Once those interested signed up, they were sent directions and some helpful information to explore one of the local preserves, exploring the site on their own or with a fellow quarantinee. On Thursday afternoon, May 6, they had a Zoom meeting to discuss what they noticed, what they learned about God and themselves and what response they were invited into.

The Seeds of Peace Community Garden at **First United Church of Tampa** has relocated to a nearby Lutheran church where they are joining forces. Saturday, June 5, is a Garden Work Day where helping hands (and compost scraps!) are welcomed. Also the church holds a Kinship Market for those needing food and First United members are invited to bring canned items to donate.

The necessary renovations of the Fellowship Hall at **Lakewood UCC/.St. Petersburg** have been completed and the city's Adult Day Care program began operating out of the church space on May 5**.**

The **Conference Church House** in Orlando now hosts a honeybee hive in partnership with Orange Blossom Beekeepers Association that was put in place on April 1. Conference staffer **Dana Ney** is a beekeeper and member of the group. The Conference butterfly garden has been upgraded to a pollinator garden with many Florida plants, making it more attractive to bees, butterflies, birds and pollinating insects. The drip irrigation system now maximizes efficiency and reduces water usage as the garden is full of life once again.



To honor its covenants of loving our neighbors and children, in March **Hope UCC/Rockledge** continued its monthly food drive through/drop off collection for the Central Brevard Sharing Center and the peanut butter collection for the Cocoa High School Fresh Market. Over 550 items were collected along with more than $300 in cash donations. In April, the congregation collected 285 non-perishable food items for the CBSC in addition to over $250 in cash donations. During the drive, some 20 jars of peanut butter were collected for theCocoa High School Fresh Market plus $60 in cash for the peanut butter fund. No wonder Hope is known as "the peanut butter church!"

***The Imperial Court of All Florida joins in outreach with the Ruth Ministry at* UCC/Fort Lauderdale**

Eager and Ready to Reenergize

Terri Crawford, President Florida UCC Women
Member, Fort Myers Congregational UCC

Greetings to all women! The purpose of the Florida UCC Women's organization is to help women cultivate the spirit of Christ and to promote sisterhood among women of the Florida Conference of the UCC.

After over a year of inactivity due to the pandemic, the officers and board members are eager and ready to reenergize and rebuild the organization. We are aware of the various ways in which individual groups of women in your churches have continued to reach out and remain connected to each other, and we would like to expand that outreach and programming throughout the state.

This month we released a new list of titles in our Reading for Renewal program. We are also pleased to tell you that we have gone virtual with the program using Bookclubz.com. You can join the *Reading for Renewal – Florida UCC Women* book club by visiting the website using the following link: https://bookclubz.com/clubs/32786/join/793c8f/ Once you visit the site and join, you will see the books for this year listed under "Books We Want to Read." Please do not add other books to this list but feel welcome to add comments/messages as you are reading. If you are hosting a meeting to discuss any of the books on the list, you can post the meeting on the site. Please note that this a closed club so the link should only be shared with other Florida UCC women and friends.

Other activities being planned include:

- Virtual UCC Southern Regional event on October 2, 2021
- UCC Southern Regional Women's Retreat in October 2022 at Camp Weed and Cerveny Conference Center (Live Oak, Fla)
- Florida UCC Women's Conference Weekend in September 2023
- UCC Southern Regional Women's Retreat on October 14-16, 2023

More details about these events will be available soon.

Did you know that the Florida UCC Women have been meeting as an organization since 1927? As we are working to continue the organization into the future, we would like to receive input from other interested women as to what we can do to fulfill our purpose and encourage participation by women from across the state. Any suggestions for programs, events and activities -- either in-person or virtual -- are welcome. Share your successful programs and ideas for activities in which you would like to see UCC women engaged. We also welcome any women who would like to be involved in the planning process. Please feel welcome to contact any officer or board member with your input. You can find our contact information at http://www.uccfla.org/contactus .

In Sisterhood, on behalf of the officers and board members.

UCC Women Around the State

TheGALS (God's Angels, Loving Social – a Women's Flock) at the **UCC/Fort Lauderdale** met for dinner on Tuesday evening, April 13.

Women Engage! at **Naples UCC** met on April 15 for a discussion of "Israel and Palestine" led by NUCC member **Mary Lee Turk**, retired attorney and current Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) student.

The Women's Fellowship at **Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte** met in-person on Thursday morning, April 1, to discuss Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky and his life as a man of faith. The review was a continuation of a year-long study of inspired world figures who had God at the center of their lives. The group's most recent mission project has been finding ways in which it can support the staff at the church's Joyful Noise Learning Center and contribute to a scholarship program for enrolled families in need.

During April the Sisters on Sojourn at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** discussed a recent article from Furman University, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned During a Pandemic." In May, for their last gathering of the season, they focused on their annual "What to do this summer" review in which attendees shared their suggestions. Their sessions were on Zoom.

The women's group at **North Port Community UCC** met in-person (protocols followed) Wednesday morning, May 12, to conduct business and hear from a guest speaker about the Sarasota County School lunch meal programs.

The Anam Cara Women's Circle at **Faith UCC/Dunedin** staged an adaptation of the 1985 Broadway hit, "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe." Seven of the personalities played by Lily Tomlin were performed by Faith's ACWC Players on Saturday afternoon, May 14, via Zoom after months of rehearsals.

Across Florida

In "Across Florida" our intent is to share with you what is happening at our 90+ churches throughout the state. It is obvious from these entries that there is an exciting vibrancy evident within our congregations.

This energy is making a decisive difference in the lives of congregation members and the communities in which they are located while also touching the lives of strangers in far away places.

Through this sharing, you can learn about innovative ideas, creative outreach and stimulating ministry, some of which might be adapatable within your own congregation.

See something that catches your eye or brings a smile to your face? If an idea sounds good and you'd like more information about what they're doing, contact that church.

In March the Imperial Court of South Florida and Lee's Lunches presented a check for $2,000 to Ruth Ministry at **UCC/Fort Lauderdale**. This donation helps the outreach ministry to continue feeding those in the community who are hungry and providing them with clothing, shoes, toiletries and other necessities — all served with love and compassion.

The Miracle Walkers at the **United Church in Tallahassee** have participated in the fight against cancer for 19 years. This year there will be a single American Cancer Society Relay for Life event for all of Leon County and Havana (Gadsden County) on Saturday, May 15, virtual or in-person, and the congregation put together a team to participate.

The April 5 *Tampa Bay Times* ran on its front page a lengthy article ("Group: Reduce Arrests of Kids") about HOPE – Hillsborough Organization for Progress & Equality, composed of two dozen+ churches – which advocates for social reforms. The story focused on the group's fight to provide a secondary review process for children accused of first-time misdemeanors. Prominent in the article was an interview with **Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson** (**First United Church of Tampa**) who is co-chair of HOPE's Criminal Justice Committee. "We can do better for our children because restorative justice is God's justice," states Dr. Bernice.

North Port Community UCC held a memorial celebration service on Monday evening, March 29, to pay tribute to those lost nationwide to COVID as well as family losses within the church family. **Mike Bourque** created the display.

The **United Church of Gainesville** raised $1,100 at this year's Bed Race on May 1 to support Family Promise, a local organization assisting families experiencing homelessness. Church members **Diego** and **Carlos Frenock** created the UCG-themed Pinewood Derby Car.

First UCC/Orlando applied for a loan from the Paycheck Protection Program earlier this year. It was approved and in April received a bank loan. With the funds the church was able to pay salaries and utilities through the end of April, which will not have to be repaid. **Fort Myers Congregational UCC** was approved for a second loan under PPP in the amount of $42,800. As with the first loan, this loan can be forgiven if used for payroll and operating expenses, which will also help to offset the church's current deficit.

On Thursday evening, May 13 – Ascension Day – **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** organized a contemplative walk which was organized at the Nature Center at the Celery Fields. The only "mountain" in Sarasota was ascended in silence for a brief service of scripture and prayers with time afterward for informal fellowship.

The **Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda** Scholarship Fund, created last year, has awarded $8,000 to seven Charlotte High School graduating seniors. They were chosen on a needs basis through applications and interviews.

Another of our churches is offering yoga classes. **The Beach Church/Pensacola Beach** provided a four week Intro to Yoga workshop on Monday mornings from May 10-31

Coral Gables Congregational UCC participated in an AIDS lecture series, "A Personal Response: Families Share Their Experiences & Memories" as Pastor **Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner** helped lead an interfaith candlelight service on Thursday, May 6. The event was held at the Coral Gables Museum, the site of the "A Matter of Time" exhibit "examining 40 years of AIDS while living through a pandemic." Behind members of the church is a small section of the nationally known AIDS Quilt.

Habitat for Humanity recently opened a home for a family in Hernando County and **Rev. Justo Gonzalez II** (**Spring**

Hill UCC) gave the blessing at the home's dedication and presented them with $50 worth of gift cards, thanks to the church's Loaves and Fishes Ministry.

Marion Spengler, who turned 100 on Tuesday, April 13, was an active member of **Faith UCC/Dunedin** before moving to Colorado a few years ago. She continues to make Faith UCC an active part of her life and, in her own words, "continues to cause some 'trouble' in her local Bible study groups because of all that she learned at Faith!" Faith UCC considers that a high compliment!

The Strengthen the Church offering that supports the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations is part of the mission at the **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton**. The church is grateful for the $1,500 COVID-relief grant it has received from Strengthen the Church, which paid for upgrades in its cameras and microphones, Chancel lighting and more. The congregation also raised $655 for One Great Hour of Sharing.

Hope UCC/Rockledge had a very successful yard sale and blood drive on Saturday, May 1. Over $2,500 was raised and 10 people donated to the blood drive.

World Labyrinth Day

On Saturday, May 1, in recognition of World Labyrinth Day, the SEEKERS of **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** invited church members and friends to walk the church's labyrinth in celebration, healing or spiritual contemplation and prayer. Orientation was provided for anyone needing guidance.

Naples UCC celebrated the day as well at 1pm, on the theme of "connections 2021" to emphasize interconnectedness during the long period of isolation caused by the pandemic. Participants were encouraged to sign up for "The Big Connection" link, the first-ever global humanity research using the labyrinth and gauging its impact.

Hope UCC/Rockledge celebrated Mother's Day with a tribute to mothers and to those whom we consider mother figures. During a musical interlude, the names of mothers submitted by the congregation scrolled on the screen. **Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakly** shared a message of laying aside selfish concerns for the common good, weaving historical examples into scriptural context including Anna Jarvis (the founder of Mother's Day in 1908), Woodrow Wilson's declaration of Mother's Day as a national holiday in 1917 and the carnation as the official flower—a resilient bloom symbolic of a mother's strength and devotion. Historical examples of those who exhibited strength and devotion to the divine human relationship included suffragists who were imprisoned and tortured on The Night of Terror November 14, 1917, for their courageous stand on equal justice for women.

Congregants at **North Port Community UCC** were invited to share "momisms" that they remembered from their mothers – those bits of wisdom and advice that were intended to help survive childhood.

Bread for the World is a grassroots Christian organization that encourages people of faith to reach out to Congress on issues of hunger and poverty. This year's Bread for the World Offering of Letters is being done online, and **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** is encouraging that members write letters on Mother's Day. Info and instructions were provided.

breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

In celebration of Mother's Day at **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Be**ach, mothers and grandmothers were asked to e-mail the church office a favorite motherhood memory (funny, cute or not) to share during worship on May 9. Sunday's sermon title was "Lessons Learned on Mama's Lap."

BABY BASICS
of Collier County
Because every baby deserves the basics

For many years, **Naples UCC** has supported one of its mission partners, Baby Basics, through a special offering received on Mother's Day. This year, congregants were invited to give during Mother's Day week. Starting on Mother's Day Sunday (May 9) through Saturday, May 15, donations could be made online, by mail or by phone.

DISCUSSIONS /SEMINARS/PRESENTATIONS WE'RE HAVING...

via Zoom, or other livestreaming

""I Once Met a Famous Person," "Where Would I Have Been in the 'Jesus Crowd'?" "Hypocrisy," "Is There a Time to Walk Away?" "What Does it Mean to be 'Held Accountable'?" and "Turning Gossip into Teamwork" (UCC/Fort Lauderdale)

"The Secret of Successful Aging," "Meditation for a Spiritual Connection" and "Safe Affordable Housing for Gainesville" (United Church of Gainesville)

"Fundamentalism in the 21st Century" and "From Far Off Shores: An Historical and Theological Exploration of Immigration" (Sanibel Congregational UCC)

"The History of Church Architecture" and "Changes Made to the Bible Over Time" (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

"Lost Christianities: Christian Scripture and the Battles over Authentication" [Great Courses series led by Dr. Bart Ehrman] (Faith UCC/Dunedin)

"Hope and Other Superpowers" (United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine)

"History of the UCC and UCT" (United Church in Tallahassee)

"Ascension and Other Events Leading Up to Pentecost" (First UCC/Orlando)

"Reflections on the Pandemic: Dark Clouds and Silver Linings" (Naples UCC)

LGBTQ

The Open & Affirming Committee at the **United Church of Gainesville** encouraged church members to contact state legislators to oppose proposed bills that would criminalize medical care for trans youth and ban trans youth from the critical life lessons that come from playing sports. There were also online events for LGBTQ+ Lobby Days in which to participate on March 29 and 31.

The Church Council at **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** at its March meeting unanimously adopted an LGBTQ+ Covenant Statement, joining other covenant statements relating to Creation Justice and Racial Justice.

Members and friends of **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** were invited to participate in the Florida premiere viewing of the documentary "AIDS Diva: The Legend of Connie Norman" and "In the Image of God" that were part of the OUTShine LGBTQ+ Film Festival (in which the church partnered). Those who were interested could watch the film between April 24-28 and then join in a Zoom "talk back" on April 30 with **Victor Gimenez**, a church member who is Executive Director of the Festival. Also, the church on Friday, May 21, hosted an LGBTQ happy hour in the Courtyard.

The Board of Outreach and Social Justice at **First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** is helping the Zebra Coalition with some current critical needs, encouraging church members to drop off donations of toilet paper and paper towels. Zebra Coalition is a network of organizations providing services to LGBTQ+ youth ages 13-24.

ZEBRA COALITION

BOOKS WE'RE READING AND DISCUSSING TOGETHER...

via Zoom, or other livestreaming

Three Hours Late by Nicole Trope, *The Book of Longings* by Sue Monk Kidd, *Lions of Fifth Avenue* by Fiona Davis (First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen)

About Grace by Anthony Doerrs, *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett, *Anxious People* by Fredrik Backman and *Unattended Sorrow* by Stephen Levine (Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton)

Always a Guest by Barbara Brown Taylor and *The Wonder Boy of Whistle Stop* by Fannie Flagg (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Splendid and the Vile* by Erik Larson (Sanibel Congregational UCC)

A Promised Land by Barack Obama, *The Last Kings of Shanghai* by Jonathan Kaufman (First Congregational UCC/ Sarasota)

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett, *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubled Times* by Rev. Michael Curry and *Deacon King Kong* by James McBride (Naples UCC)

The Problem of Pain by CS Lewis and *When the Disciple Comes of Age* by Diarmuid O'Murchu (First United Church of Tampa)

Oneness with All Life by Eckhart Tolle (Faith UCC/ Dunedin)

See No Stranger by Valerie Kaur (St. Andrew UCC/ Sarasota)

The Twenty-Something Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults by Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley and *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson (Hope UCC/Rockledge)

Caste by Isabel Wilkerson (United Church UCC-DoC/ St. Augustine)

The Sunday Morning Adult Education session at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** on April 18 via Zoom featured special guest Rev. Lillian Daniel (Senior Minister at First Congregational UCC/ Dubuque, IA). The conversation centered on her new book, *Tired Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong To* as she seeks to explain the better ways we can talk about our faith and faith journeys in a reasonable, rigorous and real way. Free books were made available to participants.

Food, Glorious Food

The truck pulls into position to unload much-needed food for clients

In February, the Food Pantry at **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park** was open 12 days and served over 1,300 adults and children, representing 473 households equaling that number of bags of groceries. In March it was open 14 days and served a total of 459 households representing 1,147 individuals. The church was given $1,400 in cash by a woman who received her stimulus check and wanted to donate it to the Food Pantry Fund. The Pantry continues to have many groups and individuals that bring donations, including fresh fruits and vegetables and frozen meat. The Pantry has become a Local Distributing Agency (LDA) for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Food Assistance program. A room in the church's Community Building has been set aside to store food received from the program. Participation in the LDA has required some additional "paper work" and record-keeping and training for the volunteers. On Monday, March1, the Pantry received its first shipment of USDA food. **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach** and **Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg** continue to collect food items and deliver them to Good Sam.

Members and friends of **Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte** enjoyed a Boy Scout Italian dinner fundraiser on Saturday evening, April 10.

Another of the regular monthly Cans for Communion food collection took place at **Naples UCC** on Friday, April 2, reminding snowbirds to clean out their pantries ahead of heading north and dropping off items at the drive through at the church Portico. The donations were shared with Grace Place. On Wednesday, May 5, volunteers spent several hours at the Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida, sorting and packing donations.

Snowbirds at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** were encouraged to clean out their cupboards before heading north to supply the drop-off food drives that took place on April 8 and May 6. Donations benefited F.I.S.H. of the Islands and the Gladiolus Food Pantries. Masked and gloved volunteers made it easy. In the church's May newsletter, Parish Nurse **Linda Convertine**'s "Healthy Happenings" column was about varieties of whole grains and their importance to one's health.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton collected non-perishable foods every week during the month of April to donate to Boca Helping Hands. Items could be dropped off at the church or picked up at members' homes. Boca Helping Hands serves six nutritious lunches per week and distributes over 6,000 pantry bags a month to those in need. Two church members volunteer weekly at the organization's warehouse.

Sarah H. and Leanne at Boca Helping Hands

North Port Community UCC had a monthly food drive to benefit the Salvation Army on April 19 and again on May 17.

Christ Congregational UCC/Miami is collecting non-perishable foods for the food pantry at the Ruth Owens Kruse Educational Center. The pantry was named in honor of a beloved church member, **Mark Krumich**, who was a teacher at the school with a real heart for special needs students.

Sunday, May 2, was the day to receive non-perishable food items at the **United Church of Gainesville** for Gainesville Community Ministries. The church has reported that between January 2020-March 2021 it had delivered to GCM more than 4,000 pounds of non-perishable food.

On Thursdays at Noon, members of **St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota** have been bringing their lunches and joining **Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan** in the Memorial Garden outside the church office building for a time of catching up with others – masked and safely distanced.

The Spirit Keepers men's group at **First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** gathered outside at the church on Thursday evening, May 13, for the annual Corn Boil. Grills and the corn pot were set up and sweet corn, plates, utensils, water, ice, tables and chairs were provided (masks were required). It was BYOB (beer and wine OK) and whatever guests wanted to throw on the grill. Favorite side dishes to share were welcomed.

The Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry at **Spring Hill UCC** reports that from March 20-April 17 it provided bags of food for 82 families, which equaled 300 individuals. On the Saturday before Easter, the Pantry gave out 26 $10 gift cards, which were left over from the Christmas drive, as an Easter gift for each family. The Pantry has received another donation of food from Hernando County Democratic Club as well as a private donation of $500 from a member of the club. Pastor **Rev. Justo Gonzalez II** has been attending the Food Pantry distribution days and making contact with the folks who stop by for food. This has really added to the human factor in this ministry as he reports that "there is a lot of pain in those cars." The Pastor's ability to speak Spanish has proven very beneficial in this outreach as well.

At First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, Meghan Jones, who led a class on healthy eating in March, offered another opportunity for church members, "Mindful Eating for Less Stress." It was made available through her website, and registrants received personalized information and assistance in creating a custom plan and follow-up aid.

Youth Ministries

On three Sunday afternoons in May, youth at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** watched via Zoom Ted Teen Talks — "The Power of Youth — Changing the World" — by creative and inspirational young adults on subjects ranging from sustainable technology to zero waste and conservation in coastal communities.

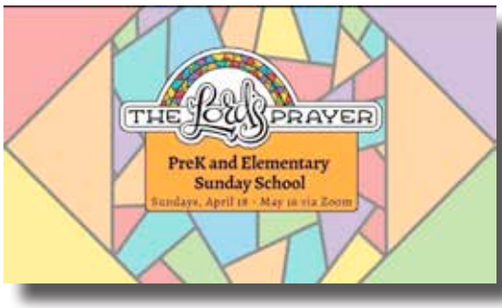
The W.I.N.G.S. (Worth, Insight, Nurture, Growth, Spirit) youth group at **First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** enjoyed an outdoor scavenger hunt on Sunday afternoon, April 11, and a hike (with parents welcomed) on Sunday afternoon, May 2.

Middle and high schoolers at **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton** held an Alex's Drive Thru Lemonade Stand benefit in memory of their dear friend Randall, who passed away from Wilm's Tumor two years ago. Donations of any size were welcomed on Sunday, April 25, or online. Contributions go toward childhood cancer research.

It has been a long and unusual year, including for church youth groups. At **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach**, Associate Minister for Youth and Young Adults, **Jeanne Haemmelmann**, decided to celebrate youth who have been participating weekly by having a food truck come and provide dinner in the church parking lot. They enjoyed a beautiful evening doing some outdoor activities and then finished with a wonderful meal. While masks and social distancing continue for its indoor meetings, Jeanne reports it was a joyous moment to be able to see their smiling faces, eat outside and be together while sharing a meal. She says, "It was a poignant reminder of how much we need to 'see' each other and remain in community. We are truly blessed to be in ministry together."

Kids Corner

Jen Manino at **Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour** sought to teach children to be good stewards of the planet with an Earth Day-inspired Creative Movement video viewable on the church website. Kids joining the Toddler Tuesday on May 11 learned that God created them each uniquely through the story, *The Peacock and The Crane*. Toddlers and preschoolers join **Rev. Barbara Asinger** and **Alexa Arteaga** [pictured] for a faith-filled time of song and story up on the church website.



From April 18-May 16 **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** led pre-K-5th graders through a series, "The Lord's Prayer for Kids." The Zoom event explored this foundational prayer and learned it by praying, singing, coloring and learning American Sign Language. There were weekly e-mails from **Rev. Megan Smith** that shared videos and developed family prayer time with at-home activities.

Children in grades three and above at **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach** who hadn't received Bibles from their church family did so during the 10am worship service on May 16 — a special day for these kids.

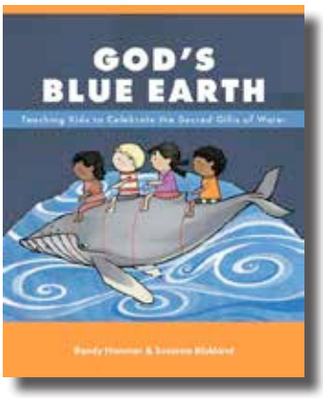
Kids Corner

Gathering of the Kid's Club at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/BocaRaton

There were Easter baskets for the young people at* Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, *with some delivered to children at their homes.

Hunting for Easter Eggs at Coral Gables Congregational UCC

God's Blue Earth: Teaching Kids to Celebrate the Sacred Gifts of Water is a ready-to-go resource for elementary school-aged children. Randy Hammer and Suzanne Blokland explain important ecological and faith concepts through fun activities, and each lesson is based on Biblical texts. *God's Blue Earth* includes six interactive lessons celebrating God's sacred gift of water. It is excellent for family time, Sunday School and Vacation Bible School programs. The paperback is available from the Pilgrim Press https://www.thepilgrimpress.com/products/god-s-blue-earth?mc_cid=d5f8aaf489&mc_eid=231303178e



Vacation Bible School

VBS this year at **First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** is "Super Heroes" and will be held live (with a virtual option) from June 28-July 2.

Pensacola Beach Community UCC will experience VBS mornings from July 19-23.

"Knight of North Castle" will be the Vacation Bible Camp at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** on mornings from June 14-18

Where Faith Happens and Love Abounds – Inclusive. Progressive. Community-Minded.

CHURCH OF THE PALMS – DELRAY BEACH

Who We Say We Are
The brief text we use on our websites, e-blasts and other communications

Rev. Alan Coe, Mayflower UCC/Naples
Coordinator,
Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry

It's That Time Again

It is here again, hurricane season. Thankfully, last year the state of Florida was not in the path of a major storm, but it was a banner year for the number of hurricanes in the U.S. If you have lived here for a while, you know every year is different. Even though this article is coming out too late for you to take advantage of the tax holiday weekend as hurricane season begins, you may not have thought about your own storm preparations yet. It is time to do that.

First, answer this question: Will I stay in place or evacuate? If a mandatory evacuation order is given, then it is best to leave. You may not be rescued if you refuse to heed the evacuation order — you will be on your own. If it is not a mandatory evacuation, then it is your choice and only you and your loved ones can decide what to do. One of the issues around Hurricane Irma in 2017 was that some three million people were under a mandatory evacuation order and over six million people evacuated, which caused the emergency operations systems to be overwhelmed. Please prepare and make decisions now.

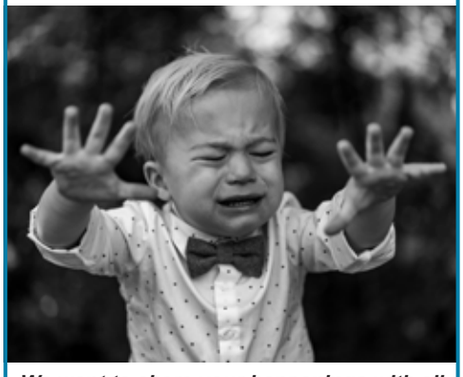
I want to recommend a book I recently read that came out in 2020, *A Furious Sky: The Five Hundred Year History of America's Hurricanes* by Eric Jay Dolin. It is what the title says as the author writes about major hurricanes that made landfall in the United States from Texas to New England. The author also talks about the development of hurricane forecasting over the centuries. It is an easy-to-read book, not a technical journal. I picked it up from our local library.

The United Church of Christ National Disaster Ministry office is still offering a $250 match for any church that wants to make up Church World Service emergency clean-up buckets. If your church is interested in doing that, please go to www.ucc.org/disaster. If you scroll down, there is a link to apply for the grant. On that site there is also a lot of information on preparing for disasters as a homeowner and as a congregation. Once you have a plan to collect the items and assemble the buckets, also have a plan of what you will do with them. I suggest you keep them in your church. They are stackable and do not take up too much space. If there is no room to store them at your church or a church member's extra space, contact a local Salvation Army office. They often have storage space or know of some. You may also contact me, and I can see if I can find a location near where you are located. If you keep them on-site, have a plan to distribute them as soon as possible after a disaster as people begin to clean-up. This is where agencies like Salvation Army can help because they are out there on the road right after a disaster.

As hurricane season begins, pay attention to weather forecasts, plan accordingly for what you will need if you lose power for an extended time, listen to local emergency managers and get one of the many hurricane preparation guides that are readily available online or at most grocery stores.

Be prepared, be safe!

PLeeeeaSe
SeNd US yOUr NeWS



We want to share your happenings with all our Florida churches

Emails, newsletters, e-blasts are always welcome

JUST ADD US!

Send to: RickCarson1@gmail.com

Insurance Board
Partners in Protection

Batten Down the Hatches!

Spring storms are here. The Insurance Board recommends you conduct checks to ensure your church is prepared to weather a storm. Click here for spring storm preparation tips **https://loom.ly/fZJmpsw**

How We Celebrated Holy Week

Despite COVID-19, Holy Week services and other activities came closer to what we knew during the "old normal" of 2019 (compared to 2020, which was really challenging as long-made plans had to change at the last minute).

So how were our congregations able to adjust and adapt in 2021 to something that better resembled the "good old days" even with many safety protocols still in place? Here is some of what we've learned about Holy Week at our Florida churches (post-Palm Sunday on March 28).

Bal Harbour — Church by the Sea

- Good Friday service was at 2pm via YouTube or the church website
- Easter sunrise service at 7am (taped as unable to secure permit) and online worship at 10:30am using sunrise service as a part.

Boca Raton — Church on the Hill Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday service was in-person /indoors and on Facebook-Live at 7pm
- Easter sunrise service outdoors at 7am and 10am in the Sanctuary (also on Facebook-Live)

Brandon — Faith Family UCC

- Easter drive-in service with FM broadcasting for cars in the parking lot

Coral Gables — Coral Gables Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday was in-person and online at 7pm
- Good Friday featured trilingual services by the three congregations that are part of their one church: English in-person at Noon and Spanish and German language online led by Pastors, musicians and representatives of each of these congregations
- Easter outdoor in-person service at 9am (available on FM radio), traditional online service at 11am, online services in Spanish language at 1pm and German language at 3pm

Dunedin — Faith UCC

- Maundy Thursday was on Zoom at 7pm
- Good Friday saw the church open from Noon-3pm for silent prayer
- Easter worship was on Zoom at 10:30am

Fort Lauderdale — UCC/Fort Lauderdale

- Easter services at 9 and 10:30am (on YouTubeLive and FM radio) in-person in the Sanctuary

Fort Myers — Fort Myers Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday service was on Zoom at 7:30pm with the Passion of St. Mark used as a dramatic reading and entre into Good Friday
- Easter Sunday service was at 10am on YouTube

Fort Walton Beach — Eternal Hope UCC

- Easter worship was celebrated at 10am in-person and long-distance virtually as Pastor **Rev. Booth Iburg** was "up the river" in Georgia

Gainesville — United Church of Gainesville

- **Maundy Thursday service was a walk-though on the church Courtyard, with** worship stations set-up around the Courtyard to visit in order, including a time to receive Communion
- Good Friday was observed at 7pm on Zoom
- Easter worship featured three identical services in the Courtyard at 8am, 9:30am (also livestreamed on YouTube channel) and 11am; advance registration, masks and negative responses to three screening questions required

Lake Helen — First Congregational UCC

- Good Friday "Service of Shadows" on Facebook and YouTube
- Easter service was virtual (with thanks to the Longs for sponsoring the cross)

Naples — Naples UCC

- Holy Wednesday had a meeting of the Men's spirituality group at 10:30am and a mid-week meditation at Noon
- Maundy Thursday worship included the Chamber Choir and was livestreamed at 7pm
- Good Friday worship was livestreamed at Noon

- Easter was in-person at Artis-Naples and also livestreamed at 9 and 11am

New Smyrna Beach — UCC/New Smyrna Beach

- Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter services all on Zoom

North Port — North Port Community UCC

- Maundy Thursday service at 7pm
- Good Friday at 7pm
- Easter worship at 10am

Orange City – First Congregational Church

- Easter service in-person (and Zoom) at 10:30am

Orlando — First UCC

- Maundy Thursday service at 6:30pm with Communion and Tennebrae
- Easter Sunday service was at 10am with congregants bringing live flowers to place on the cross

Pensacola Beach — The Beach Church

- Maundy Thursday service in the Sanctuary at 7pm
- Easter service in the Sanctuary (50% capacity)

Pinellas Park — Good Samaritan Church

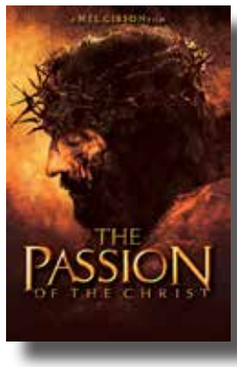
- Maundy Thursday "Love Feast" included "baking bread with Pastor Jen" on Zoom at 7pm and sharing a light supper together
- Good Friday and Holy Saturdays were celebrated with "virtual journeys" that could be watched at the viewer's convenience
- Easter worship was at 10:30am on Zoom, a split-screen composed of a prerecording of **Carolyn Woodard** painting-in-progress merged with **Rev. Jen Daysa** delivering the "Easter Story" message

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1S4LCpuG11U&list=PLNfjOmDBAG0cDJlZFahNdDfnFr60-7K_h&index=4

Port Charlotte — Pilgrim UCC

- Maundy Thursday was celebrated with worship in the Sanctuary at 6:30pm
- Good Friday service was in the Sanctuary at 6:30pm
- Easter worship was sunrise at 7am behind the Sanctuary followed by an 8am traditional service and a 10am contemporary service

Punta Gorda — Congregational UCC



- Maundy Thursday in-person service at 6pm
- Good Friday showing at 7pm in the Sanctuary of "The Passion of the Christ"
- Easter sunrise service at 7am on FacebookLive only; in-person service at 10am

Rockledge — Hope UCC

- Easter worship was on Zoom

Sanibel — Sanibel Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday service was in-person in the Sanctuary with livestreaming on the church website
- Good Friday service at Noon featured a dramatic monologue by Pastor **Rev. Deb Kunkel** and was livestreamed on the church website
- Easter featured a 7:45am Chapel service in the Sanctuary (attendance limited to 25% capacity), a 9am in-person outdoor service (attendance limited to 30) and an11am in-person service in the Sanctuary (attendance limited to 25% capacity)

Sarasota — First Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday was a 7pm service on Zoom
- Good Friday was a Noon outdoor service in the Garden of the Cross followed by a 7pm service on Zoom
- Easter Sunday was a 9am outdoor service by the Labyrinth followed by a10:55am in-person in the Sanctuary that was livestreamed on Facebook, YouTube and the church website

Sarasota — St. Andrew UCC

- Maundy Thursday worship was at 7pm on FacebookLive
- Good Friday saw the Sanctuary open for personal meditation from 1-3pm with printed devotional guides available
- Easter worship was at 10:30am

Spring Hill — Spring Hill UCC

- Maundy Thursday began at 6pm with a light dinner of soup and bread and the service began at 7pm
- Easter worship was at 10am, in-person

St. Augustine — United Church UCC-DoC

- Easter Sunday worship was outdoor at 10am

St. Pete Beach — Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC

- Maundy Thursday service was at 7pm in the Sanctuary
- Good Friday featured prayer and contemplation in the covered Pavilion from 11am-2pm
- Easter services began with a sunrise service at 7am on the covered Pavilion with extra seating on the street and park across the street and two services 8:30am and 10am (both livestreamed on the church website)

St. Petersburg — Lakewood UCC

- Maundy Thursday was on Zoom with communion at 7pm
- Good Friday worship was in-person at 7pm
- Easter worship was in-person at 9:30 and 11am (early service was also on FacebookLive)

Tallahassee — United Church in Tallahassee

- Holy Week reflections were shared via links to videos explaining Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter (for kids) and The Resurrection
- Good Friday contemplative service of readings and music at 7pm
- Easter service at 10am

Tampa — First United Church of Tampa

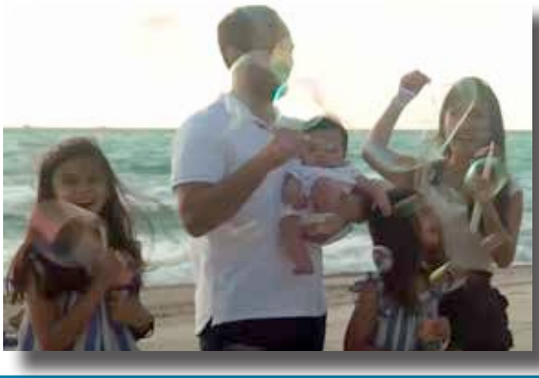
- Maundy Thursday service was at 7pm on Zoom
- Good Friday Spanish language service was at 6pm in-person in a local park
- Easter service was a 10:30am -- a hybrid event in-person meeting outdoor behind Faith Lutheran Church, which was livestreamed on Facebook using Zoom; a Spanish language service was Zoomed at Noon

Winter Park — First Congregational UCC

- Maundy Thursday service was at 7pm
- Easter services were at 7am (a sunrise service on the Rollins College campus) and 8 and 10am at the church

Adding Something Special to *Holy Week*

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour had several interesting happenings during Holy Week. After the service on Palm Sunday, an instructional video was viewable to learn how to decorate Pysanky eggs, a centuries old Lenten craft in the Ukraine with a method similar to batik where patterns are drawn on an egg with wax, which protects covered areas when dye is applied. For the sunrise service on Easter morning, the church's customary "bubble flurry" was featured at the baptism of **Samuel Alexander Scorza**, son of **Kristen** and **Vincent**.



After Easter Sunday worship at **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton**, there was a butterfly release from near the butterfly memorial garden on the south lawn (pictured is the **Peterson family**). A memorial contribution has made possible the church's largest butterfly release ever. In addition, there was an Easter Egg Hunt on the south lawn, with two hunts for various age groups.

On Palm Sunday at **Coral Gables Congregational UCC**, Dolly the Donkey was welcomed back, who parishioners have come to love over the years as she traditionally leads them from Salvadore Park into the Sanctuary for worship. Since the Sanctuary was still not open for public worship, Dolly came a day early so folks could give her a little pat, take photos and say "Hi." While toddlers through 5th graders participated in the Easter Egg Hunt after the 9am service, adults enjoyed Easter cookies, OJ and a mimosa bar. Family portraits could be taken at the beautiful flowering Easter cross.

The Easter Egg Hunt at **The Beach Church/Pensacola Beach** took place on Saturday, April 3, with bounce houses, face painting, balloon artists, tattoo stations and Easter bunny photos (notice the Bunny pictured far left below). The Beach Church had a ''Setting our Easter Table" for the families of the Navy Point Elementary School. Their goal was to feed 12-15 families, collecting food such as hams (canned/regular), yams, canned vegetables, mashed potatoes, jar gravies, etc.

On the evening of Maundy Thursday, congregants at **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park** gathered via zoom at 6pm to bake bread with **Rev. Jen Daysa** for the service at 7pm. Some of the attendees baked bread and some gathered with the group early to listen and enjoy watching the baking process. Pastor Jen set up in the conference room where she led a group through the baking of bread (instructions had been provided ahead of time). With each step of baking, she shared a spiritual insight to be pondered while she worked.

To generate even more interest in Holy Week at **Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach**, Pastors **Rev. Drs. Keith Haemmelmann** and **Guillermo Marquez-Sterling** created a tongue-in-cheek three minute/22 second "Weekend with Jesus" video to promote services and events for the week.

Pastor Barnes at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in Eatonville gave **First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** Pastor **Rev. Shawn Garvey** a special blessing and asked him to be the introductory speaker at their "7 Last Words of Christ" service on Good Friday, beginning at Noon and going until 3pm. This was a moving, inspirational way to explore Jesus' last words through the voices of some of the area's most powerful preachers. Since Macedonia was still doing worship virtually, the service was viewable on their YouTube channel.

MACEDONIA
Missionary Baptist Church Eatonville Florida Inc.
Where Love Makes the Difference

The annual Easter Love Offering at **First Congregational UCC/Sarasota** supports worldwide organizations caring for those Jesus loves — those who are hungry, without water, homeless, immigrants and refugees; people in poverty or suffering in any way from the lack of fullness in this life. Most of the 10 charitable organizations were associated with the national UCC and insures the church remains a "5 for 5" church participating in the five vital mission efforts of the denomination. The goal was **$16,500,** and $15,150 was raised.