Report of the Conference Minister

What a year 2012 was in the life of the United Church of Christ in Florida!

The Conference Board of Directors -- after several years of prayer, reflection and study -- made recommendations to the Conference regarding a change in structure and staffing. The continued decline of congregational support in OCWM/Per Capita giving, the recognition that the current structure could not be maintained financially and the changing realities of denominational life were factors in the recommended changes. Changes included:

Moving from three Regional Conference Ministers to two Regional Ministers

Shifting from three regions to two

Reducing administrative staff from two full-time positions to 1.5 positions

These changes were not made easily or lightly. We are grateful for the service to the Conference of those impacted by the changes: Rev. Dr. Jean Simpson, Gulf Coast Regional Conference Minister who, in November, was called to serve as the Transitional Pastor at United Community Church/Sun City Center; Rev. Bill Koch, Southeast Regional Conference Minister; and Loretta Perry, Conference/Placement Secretary. Farewell events were held for all three of these dedicated staff persons.

During 2012 the three Regional Conference Ministers took their three month sabbatical leave.

A nationwide search for two Regional Ministers was conducted. Close to 40 persons applied. The Search Committee comprised of Rev. Eileen Norrington (member, Hope UCC/Rockledge), James Crumel (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) and Rev. Dr. Steve Hudder (Pastor, Christ Congregational Church/Miami) interviewed candidates and recommended to the Board of Directors that the Rev. Drs. Raymond Hargrove and Sarah Lund serve as the new Regional Ministers. They were unanimously approved for these new positions. A search for a part-time Administrative Assistant was also

continued on page 2
conducted and Jeanne Roth was hired for the position. We welcomed these three persons to these newly created positions.

Our program staff continued their work in the areas of Youth Ministry, Disaster Ministries and Older Adult Ministries.

Michael Cain, Jeanne Haemmelmann and Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume continued their excellent ministries as our Regional Youth Ministers. They continue to increase the capacity of our congregations in reaching out to young people. They each provide primary staffing in their regions for events that are both regional and statewide. They also provided leadership at the National Youth Event held at Purdue University where 74 people from our Conference were in attendance.

Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand, our Disaster Ministries Coordinator in partnership with the National Disaster Ministries office of the national setting of the UCC, continues to offer outstanding leadership in education and coordination of our disaster response and recovery effort. A number of educational offerings were held this past year and coordinator groups were put into place.

Rev. Linn Possell, our Older Adult Ministries consultant, provides wonderful leadership in local congregations helping to equip ministries with and among the older adult populations of our congregations.

At the 2012 Annual Meeting at the Community Church of Vero Beach, the delegates were edified by the presence of Brian McLaren, a leader in the Emergent Church movement. Brian was an outstanding speaker and certainly was a highlight of our gathering. Another significant offering at the meeting was the “Facebook for Ministry” pre-gathering seminar that was offered by Neal Watkins (Director of Youth Ministry/Community Church of Vero Beach) and Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund (then-Pastor, UCC/New Smyrna Beach). This was one of the most popular seminars ever offered at an Annual Meeting, and it has now been repeated in other parts of the state. At the Annual Meeting our Conference was blessed to welcome a new congregation, Faith Family UCC/Tampa.

Among the changes made in 2012 was the development of a guiding vision to help the Conference move with excellence and vitality into the future that God has prepared. The delegates to the Annual Meeting approved this statement: “It is the primary goal of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ to encourage, help foster and equip local congregations to become more vital and faithful communities in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.”

We believe that the Conference exists to help equip the ministry and mission of our local congregations. This goal statement about vitality is guided by the vision that we are called to “love God and love neighbor.” We have entered into a two year relationship with the Center for Progressive Renewal, a ministry of the national setting which exists to help equip congregational vitality.

As 2012 came to a close, we were looking forward to a bright and exciting future for the United Church of Christ in Florida. May the Still Speaking God continue to move among us as we look to love God and love neighbor.
The Board of Directors of the Florida Conference had a busy and productive 2012. The Board of Directors is comprised of individuals who represent clergy and laypersons from throughout the Florida Conference plus the president of the Endowment Corporation, a representative from Florida UCC Women, a young adult representative, a youth representative and Wider Ministry representatives. The Conference Minister and Regional Ministers sit on the Board as ex-officio members.

The key responsibilities of the Board are: set policy; oversee the Conference’s physical and financial assets, create strategic plans to achieve goals and objectives; provide communication between the Board and the congregations of the Conference; provide communication between the Board and Ministry Teams; encourage and participate in the financial support of the Florida Conference and other “wider ministries” of the UCC; and act as “the Conference” between delegated Conference meetings.

The following items highlight the accomplishments of the Board of Directors for 2012:

• Provided guidance and supported efforts to streamline the Conference budget to meet all ministry needs. Discussed the issue of preparing a budget for the following year nearly seven months before the end of the current year. This is a difficult task, especially in light of the economic downturn and the reduction in OCWM and Per Capita support from Conference churches.

• Contracted with Mike LaBounty to assist in streamlining our financial reporting so that it is simpler to understand and completely transparent; Mr. LaBounty will consult the Conference on a quarterly basis.

• Received reports from the Endowment Corporation and provided advice, guidance and a vote when required; the Moderator, the Conference Budget and Finance Chair and Conference Treasurer sit on the Endowment Corporation with voting rights.

• Discussed the issue of dwindling OCWM support. Many strategies have been presented to promote support of the Conference through OCWM giving. This is major income stream to support the ministries of the Conference and in the national setting.

• Provided guidance and assistance for the Annual Gathering 2012 in Vero Beach.

• Supported initiatives and Constitutional changes from the National UCC.

• Reviewed the survey from the 2012 Annual Gathering; advice from the survey will help planning the 2013 Annual Gathering.

• Discussed in-depth the future of the Florida Conference in light of the reduction in OCWM giving and local church attendance and began to develop strategies to address this important issue.

• Developed and endorsed a Mission Statement.

• Developed strategic goals to support the Mission and Vision of the Florida Conference.

• Voted to transform the Conference staff and support staff positions to configure to the new vision of the Florida Conference.

• Provided support to the three Regional Conference Ministers for their sabbaticals in 2012.

• Redirected the job descriptions of the Regional Conference Ministers to that of Regional Ministers, thus dividing Florida into two regions (East and West) rather than into three regions.

• Redirected the job description the Conference Placement Secretary to that of Administrative Assistant.

• Invited Don Clark from the national setting to provide a comprehensive workshop on an effective, working Board.

• Voted to engage in a covenant with the Center for Progressive Renewal.

• Voted to provide a grant for one year to assist with administrative costs for Bridges of Hope.

• Renewed membership in VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters).

• Supported the Chili Cook-off – a fundraiser for OCWM.

• Voted to support a commission to continue to formulate ideas and action plans to accomplish cooperative efforts among the conferences of the Southern region of the UCC that can carry our mission forward into the future in dynamic ways. The Moderator, Vice-Moderator and Board member Ed Pritchett, along with the Conference Minister, represent the Florida Conference on this board.

• Provided the Conference Minister with a yearly performance evaluation.

• Attended farewell events for Regional Minister Rev. Dr. Jean Simpson, who has gone on to provide interim ministry at United Community Church/Sun City Center, and Rev. Bill Koch, who is retiring.

• Provided a presence in each edition of Celebrate Florida.

• Read The Fly in the Ointment in preparation for the February 2013 Board meeting. A lively discussion is expected as we continue to investigate how a Conference Board can best serve the churches of the Conference.
CONFERENCE OFFICERS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF 2012

Officers
Moderator ......................... Susan Cheney, Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda
Vice Moderator ..................... Rev. Eileen Norrington, Hope UCC/Rockledge
Treasurer ...................................... Richard Anderson (Naples UCC)
Assistant Treasurer ..................... Valerie Thomison
Registrar ...................................... Lynn Blevins (First UCC/Orlando)
Chair, Church & Ministry........... Rev. Clarice Mitchell (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Chair, Budget & Finance .......... Rev. James P. Kvetko (Miami Shores Community Church)
President, Endowment Board  David McFarland (First United Church of Tampa)

Board of Directors — Class 2014
Under 150 - Lay Man Ed Pritchett (First Congregational Church/Orange City); Lay Woman Ms. Jan Steinberg (Key Biscayne Community Church/Miami); Clergy Rev. Mark Goforth (Community UCC/Lake Park)
151-250 – Lay Man John Beisenherz (Christ Congregational/Miami); Lay Woman Ms. Sammie Hartwell (UCC/ New Smyrna Beach); Clergy Rev. Phil Garrison (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)
251-500 - Lay Man Mr. Terry Waldron (Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville); Lay Woman Margaret Mahoney (Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour); Clergy Rev. Dr. Guillermo Marquez-Sterling (Coral Gables Congregational Church)
501+ - Lay Man Robert Harris (United Community Church/Sun City Center); Lay Woman Peg Hulit (Sanibel Congregational UCC); Clergy Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

Geographically Isolated
Les Solymossy (Pensacola Beach Community UCC)

At Large  Rev. Dr. Bob Baggott (Community Church/Vero Beach); Robert Kolterman (Cocoa Beach Community Church)

Men’s Fellowship
Open

Florida UCC Women. Bunny Gruntler (Sunset Congregational Church/Miami)

Young Adult Representative Kimberly Watson (Longwood Hills Congregational Church)

Youth Representative Ms. Chandler Brun (First Congregational Church/Winter Park)

Ex-Officio  Rev. Dr. Ronald Patterson (Naples UCC), Executive Council; William Clarke III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami), Wider Church Ministries; Ms. Bert Perry (New Hope UCC/DeLand), Justice & Witness Ministries); Steven Mayers (Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour) Local Church Ministries

Conference Staff
Conference Minister — Rev. Kent Siladi; Regional Conference Ministers — Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove (Northeast), Rev. Dr. Jean M. Simpson [resigned as of 10/31] (Gulf Coast), Rev. William N. Koch (Southeast); Regional Youth Ministers — Michael Cain (Northeast), Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Southeast), Jeanne Haemmelmann (Gulf Coast); Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry Coordinator Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand; Older Adult Ministry Consultant Rev. Linn Possell; Webmaster Jeanne Haemmelmann; Celebrate Florida Editor Rick Carson; Associate Editor, Tom Mitchell; Executive Administrative Assistant to Conference Minister Candace Younglove; Conference/Placement Secretary Loretta Perry; Financial Assistant Beth Shedden

MEMORIES -- for all who ...

Gather in fellowship

All-church retreat at the United Church of Gainesville
Treasurer’s Report

Summarized below are the key financial metrics for the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ for the year 2012:

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<th>$ IN 000’S</th>
<th>2012 ACTUAL</th>
<th>2012 BUDGET</th>
<th>BETTER/ (WORSE)</th>
<th>2011 ACTUAL</th>
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*Excl. pass-through of OCWM to National

Commentary

Reviewing the Income/(Loss) Statement, we see that OCWM, Per Capita, as well as Total Income were all under budget by $95,000 in total. Income was basically flat year-over-year.

Expenses for Salary and Salary-Related spending (67% of total spending) was essentially on budget and exactly what was spent in the prior year. Other expenses (primarily rent and other administrative expense plus travel and meetings) was on-budget and slightly over 2011 levels ($44,000).

In the aggregate, our “real” operating loss for the full year 2012 was $210,000 which was $81,000 worse than budget and $44,000 worse than last year.

In 2013, as a result of staff and related spending reductions, we anticipate that this operating loss will be significantly reduced and largely offset by planned transfers from Balance Sheet Asset accounts. It should also be noted that our Balance Sheet Asset Accounts increased in 2012 as a result of stock market improvements and reinvested dividends.

Overall, the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ has over one million dollars in total assets (excluding the Endowment Corporation assets) and comparatively is one of the healthier conferences within the UCC.

Budget & Finance Committee

Financially speaking, the Florida Conference is one of the stronger conferences in our United Church of Christ family, with an Endowment Fund of $3.8 million and a Conference Reserve Fund of $1.9 million. [The Endowment Fund is a separate corporation and its annual report is found elsewhere.] The Budget & Finance Committee helps the Conference Board of Directors oversee the reserve funds.

The largest portion of our reserve funds is “donor designated” and used for the purposes for which they were given. The remainder is “unrestricted funds” and they are used by the Board to make up any shortfall of income needed for the successful operation of the Conference. Since the housing and financial collapse of 2008 -- a crisis that affected many local churches -- we have obviously had to use more of these unrestricted reserves than in previous years. Recent shortfalls tell the story: 2010 $78,950; 2011 $70,000; 2012 $78,750. One of the reasons for our decision to restructure the Conference was, quite frankly, the inability to sustain these shortfalls.

In 2012 our expenses were under budget by $13,994. Unfortunately, OCWM giving and Per Capita assessments were under budget by $63,113. So the continuing challenge is not on the expenditure side of the ledger but on the faithful giving of each and every local church, on a monthly basis if possible, to help keep our Florida family of churches strong.

I want to express my personal gratitude to Richard Anderson, our Conference Treasurer these past couple years, who had to resign for business reasons. He made a great contribution in streamlining our financial statements to make them more easily understood.

Treasurer

Richard Anderson
Member, Naples UCC

Budget & Finance Committee Members

Rev. James Kvetko, Chair (Miami Shores Community Church)
Rev. Donald Wilson (Venice UCC)
Rev. Gaye Bosley-Mitchell (member, Coral Gables Congregational Church)
Amy Luek (First UCC/Orlando)
Sherian Bullier (Port Orange UCC)
Rev. A. Bertram Miller (member, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour)
Endowment Board

David McFarland, President  
Member, First United Church of Tampa

I t has been a very productive year for the Board of Trustees of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ Endowment Fund, Inc (a Florida not-for profit corporation), referred to in this report as the Florida Endowment Fund. The following persons were elected to be the officers of the Corporation Board:

President – David McFarland (First United Church of Tampa)  
Vice President – Bonnie Blomberg (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)  
Treasurer – Dennis Rodrigues (Coral Gables Congregational Church)  
Secretary – Dianne Townsend (Mayflower Congregational Church/Naples)  

Additional Trustees on the Board are:  
John Allen – ex-officio (Conference Treasurer) – UCC at the Villages  
Susan Cheney – ex-officio (Conference Moderator) – Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda  
Rev. James Kvetko – ex-officio (Conference Budget Chair) – Miami Shores Community Church  
Valerie Thomison – unaffiliated with a congregation (formerly Hope Unites/Orlando)  
Don Treffinger – First Congregational UCC/Sarasota

The included chart shows the existing accounts within the Florida Endowment Fund as of as of the end of the 2012 calendar year. Over the past year, each of the listed funds has increased by approximately:

- 2020 Fund (Charles Burns): $170,000  
- Education Ministries Fund: 86,000  
- Outdoor Ministry Scholarship Fund: 27,000

In addition, the Board of Trustees has essentially completed a revision of the bylaws that had not been updated for decades. The revisions have been reviewed and approved or revised, as needed by the Conference legal counsel. The bylaws now only need to be reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees at its next meeting and then forwarded to the Conference Board of Directors for its review and approval.

The development of the first-ever strategic plan for the Florida Endowment Fund is being developed and is nearing completion. To date the statements for the driving forces, core values, mission and vision have been completed. First drafts of the strategic goals and related strategic initiatives also have been developed. It is anticipated the full strategic plan will be completed and at least initial implementation plans will be developed during 2013. Final movement on implementation of these plans will most likely wait on the arrival of the new ongoing Conference Minister.

Several months ago, the Florida Conference church Hope Unites/Orlando closed. It had been a new church start through the 20/20 fund. At that point in time, the building reverted to the care of the Florida Endowment Fund Board. Numerous steps were taken to assure the protection of the building. It also has become clear that the Davie property in South Florida, which was purchased with the intent to support a new church start, is no longer a viable property for a new church start. Both properties have now been listed for sale.

Finally, the six funds identified last year that had been invested but not used for many years have all been activated, and one scholarship has been awarded to a person to further her religious education. Additionally, the Conference Office has prepared and will distribute a brochure which identifies these funds and other Conference funds available to members of the Conference.

Ministry to Older Adults

Rev. Linn Possell  
Consultant

O ver the past year I have been working with the congregation from St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota. Together we met in a focus group meeting to discuss their interests and ideas regarding the 60+ Ministry. Due to the fact that a large number of their congregation lives alone, they decided to begin an Advocacy Ministry. I met with this congregation on five different occasions to help them develop this ministry.

I was the guest preacher at the UCC/St. Augustine and have been asked back to preach and discuss the possibilities of initiating a 60+ ministry with this congregation.

I regularly contribute to Celebrate Florida and am working on resources to keep our website current on information relevant to this ministry. I also have written a “Clergy Guide to Dementia,” which is in its final stages at the publisher.

I have contacted Waltrina Middleton with the national UCC office to see if there is a possibility to do an intergenerational program at General Synod 29 in Long Beach as we did in Tampa in 2011.

I gave a presentation on 60+ Ministry for our Conference Annual Gathering in May and at the Retired Clergy Retreat in October.

I have been in contact with the national office in hopes of having my book, Alzheimer’s: A Beautiful Spirit Celebrated, put on their resource list and have been making presentations throughout Florida on the book as well as on “Spirituality and Caregiving” and “Spirituality and Aging.”

I continue to host a caregiver support group on Facebook.

It is my hope that I will be able to increase my contact with our local churches and offer my ministry to more congregations.
Church & Ministry Committee

Rev. Clarice Mitchell, Chair
Pastor, Hope UCC/Rockledge

We continue to live into the new structure of three regions that meet approximately monthly and the full committee meeting only semiannually. The work of the committee is handled by the regional teams and their chairs — Andrea Burt (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami), Phyllis Rhinehart (Riviera UCC/Palm Bay) and Rev. Phil White (Fort Myers Congregational Church).

The full committee does handle all interviews with candidates for ordination or Privilege of Call. We do not ordain anyone; we do approve candidates for an Ecclesiastical Council and pending a call for ordination. This year we approved two candidates as of April 1 with two more candidates coming before us at our April 12-13 meeting.

One of our other duties is the administration of the Charles Wilson Fund. We granted several awards from that fund, including scholarships and money for the initial survey of clergy for the Shalom House at First Congregational Church/Lake Helen. We have another request pending.

We also are the body that handles the Oversight of Ministries Authorized by the United Church of Christ. We had a complaint that resulted in a Situational Support Consultation that proved to have no merit. We have an ongoing Standing Review which will not conclude until late April or early May. These events are very stressful and time consuming for all parties. We are blessed to have not only excellent members of the Committee but individuals willing to do the review who are not part of the Committee. The Florida Conference is blessed to have many qualified lay and clergy willing to do the work of the body.

Church & Ministry Committee

Class of 2016
Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC)
Joseph Ebbing (Faith Family UCC/Tampa)
Jo Pritchett (First Congregational Church/Orange City)
Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (New Hope UCC, DeLand)
Rev. Vonselle Beneby (member, UCC/New Smyrna Beach)
Rev. Jack Remaly (member, First Church of North Miami Congregational)
Martha Synnott (Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach)
Rev. Georgia Hillesland (Boynton Beach Congregational Church)
Suzanne Lewis (First Congregational Church/Ft. Lauderdale)
Rev. Dr. David Schnepf (Jensen Beach Community Church)

Class of 2014
Phyllis Rhinehart (Riviera UCC/Palm Bay)
David Heald (Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill)
Rev. Linda Giroux (Riverside UCC/Jacksonville)
Rev. Clarice Mitchell – Chair (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Hardric McMillon (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring)

Nominating Committee

Rev. Bonnie Lipton - Chair
Rev. Dr. Charles Mory (Church of the Palms/Delray Beach)
Rev. Charles "Bud" Schroeder (member, Naples UCC)
Dory Lingo (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami)
Rev. Dr. Garth Thompson (First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale)
Rev. Dr. James Boler (member, Fort Myers Congregational Church)
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Frantz (Miami Lakes Congregational Church)
Rev. Ronal Freyer-Nicholas (Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park)

Ex-Officio
Susan Cheney, Moderator (Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda)
Lynn Blevins, Registrar (First UCC/Orlando)

Staff
Rev. Kent Siladi, Conference Minister
Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove, Conference Minister – East Region
Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, Conference Minister – West Region

IN MEMORY

Ernest Klaudt
October 24, 2011
Charles Sheffield
March 13, 2012
George LaVoo
July 10, 2012
Donald Moyer Wilson
November 22, 2012
Thomas Golladay
January 30, 2013
Regional Conference Ministers

Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove (Northeast), Rev. Bill Koch (Southeast) and Rev. Dr. Jean Simpson (Gulf Coast) served the Conference as Regional Conference Ministers during 2012. They regularly visited congregations in their respective areas where they preached, counseled clergy and lay leaders, provided guidance for Members in Discernment and Privilege of Call and offered training and assistance for church members. They participated in their respective clergy group cluster monthly lunches, regional and Conference-wide Church & Ministry Committee meetings, Board of Director meetings and were involved in Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry programs, Youth Ministry events and programs offered for retired clergy and UCC Women. They each covered for one another during sabbatical absences.

During 2012, our Regional Conference Ministers did what they do best – drove thousands of miles, spent untold numbers of hours on the computer and telephone, put out fires, calmed the waters, held hands, threw their arms around shoulders, raised up celebrations and shed tears of happiness and joy. Each had the opportunity to grow and share their faith journeys with others during their sabbaticals, for which they have expressed their deepest appreciation to the Conference. We thank them for their commitment and service and all the gifts they have contributed to the Conference, its churches and their members.

Rev. Dr. Jean Simpson
Regional Conference Minister – Gulf Coast

Jean took her sabbatical from July 1-October 1. From July 23-August 31, she and husband, Paul, traveled to Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa where they met with various church and institutional leaders. When she returned home she shared stories of her journey via a slide-show presentation in various church and Conference settings. A detailed report of her sabbatical may be obtained by contacting Jean at jsimpsonucc@gmail.com. She completed her RCM tenure on October 31 and immediately began service as the Interim Senior Pastor at United Community Church/Sun City Center. A “thank you” celebration in her honor was held on November 11 at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota.

Rev. William Noel Koch
Regional Conference Minister – Southeast

Bill was on sabbatical from April 10-July 10. During this time he and wife, Kathleen, embarked on a road trip cross country through the Rocky Mountain states and California and Arizona where he conducted research at several churches along the way and connected with family and friends. He wrote a poem (“Coast to Coast and Back…and Border to Border as Well”) commemorating his travels. The report submitted to the Board of Directors is titled, “Seven on the Way: Inquiries, Responses and Reflections – The Report of a Sabbatical Journey,” and is available from Bill at bill@kochs.org. Bill’s service with the Conference concluded on December 31, and a congratulatory tribute for his tenure was held at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour on January 13, 2013.

Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove
Regional Conference Minister – Northeast

Raymond’s sabbatical occurred in two parts: June 1-June 30 and October 1-November 31. He and his wife, Cora, spent some personal “family” time in California, Virginia and North Carolina. He was involved in a study leave for ministry professionals at his alma mater, Duke University Divinity School, and devoted time with former ministry colleagues in the region around questions of their relationships with the UCC. He and Cora capped off the sabbatical with a cruise through the Panama Canal. The report of Raymond’s sabbatical was submitted to the Board and is available by contacting him at rhargrove@uccfla.org.

(Above) RCM Jean at the October 14 installation service of Rev. Mike MacMillan (Faith UCC/Dunedin)
(Center) RCM Bill at the July 22 ordination of Harvey Lockhart at Church of the Open Door Congregational Church/Miami.

(Right) RCM Raymond with other clergy greeting “Pastor” Winston Matafwali, a Zambian theological student, visiting the United Church of Sebastian in January 2012.
January 13-15
Walk on the Water youth event, Plymouth Congregational Church/ Miami (See photo 1)

February 2-3
Boundary Training workshops, St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota and Riviera UCC/Palm Bay

February 10-11
Board of Directors meeting, Orlando

February 18
Gator event, UCC at The Villages

March 2-4
Peace River Canoe youth event, Arcadia

March 7, 9, 12
Disaster Ministry orientation, Port Orange UCC, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota and First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale

March 9-11
UCC Women Annual Conference, Cocoa Beach (See photo 2)

March 24
Planned Giving workshop, First United Church of Tampa

April 14
Northeast youth event, Blue Springs State Park

April 20-21
Church & Ministry Committee meeting, Orlando

May 3-5
Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference, Community Church/Vero Beach (See photo 3)

August 24-25
Board of Directors meeting, Orlando

September 10-12
Disaster Ministry Coordinators meeting – First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale

September 14-15
Church & Ministry Committee meeting, First UCC/Orlando

October 5
Planned Giving workshop, United Community Church/Sun City Center

October 6
UCC Women’s Retreat, Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour

October 24-25
Retired Clergy Retreat, Punta Gorda (See photo 4)

November 9-10
Board of Directors meeting, Orlando
Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry

Disaster Ministry Coordinators have been recruited, trained and organized into three regional groups: Northeastern, Southeastern and Western (which will soon be divided into Southwestern and Northwestern region groups). Initially 25 people joined, and after initial training assigned themselves to establish a working relationship with the emergency management departments of specific counties, the long term recovery committees of specific counties and selected specific congregations to serve as a Disaster Ministry consultant. Since the initial gathering of participants, seven additional people have joined and received training. [A roster of these participants and the counties and congregations to which they self-assigned is available at the Disaster Ministry display table at the Annual Gathering.]

The primary recovery activity in which we have been engaged is the long term assistance to families whose homes were damaged by Tropical Storm Debbie and who are unable to rebuild their homes with insurance, FEMA and personal resources. We are in the early stages of recruiting many volunteers to help more than 400 families in Columbia and Suwannee counties. Tropical Storm Debbie recovery work is also underway in Volusia and Duval counties. Local congregations are encouraged to organize volunteer work groups to donate a weekend, a week or more of their time to help. The Florida Conference Disaster Ministry Coordinators are organizing several groups so people who are members of congregations unable to gather a group from their local church may become a part of one of the Conference groups. The next Conference work group is scheduled for May 25-June 1; a work group is also scheduled for June 22-29, and there will be additional groups scheduled. Contact me (bwealand@uccfla.org) or the Conference Office to register and for additional information.

During the year since the last Annual Gathering we have reestablished membership in Florida VOAD, developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Volunteer Florida, attended two Strategic Housing Initiative training events, hosted eight Make Mitigation Happen workshops -- which were attended by more than 100 people -- conducted three Human Caused Disasters workshops -- which were attended by 48 people -- had seven meetings with clergy groups and continued to arrange for places to store cleanup bucket kits, hygiene kits, baby kits and school kits.

Our Disaster Ministry Coordinators are available to consult with congregations as they develop a disaster plan for their congregation, as they organize the collection of funds or items for emergency kits and as they seek volunteers to assist in the Florida Conference Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry.
We unveiled a new website in 2012 and have received great feedback around the format. We are experiencing new and creative ways to use our website and continue to explore new options. For example, we have held live Q & A video conferences broadcast throughout the Conference and look forward to sharing more in 2013.

The Conference now has 13 Facebook pages.

Websites
Jeanne Haemmelmann
Member, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach

Communications
Rick Carson, Editor
Member, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach

During 2012 the Conference published six issues of our newspaper, Celebrate Florida. Over the years as the publication has expanded in size, it has taken on more the look of a “magazine” – or e-zine – than a more traditional newspaper. The editions, which ranged from 29-34 pages in length and were in full color, were posted on the Conference website. They were posted in two formats: one is a standard PDF and the other is an interactive version (with “live” links) for those using computers with a flash player on their server. E-blasts notified clergy and church leaders throughout the Conference of the postings and provided links to the issues.

We also published a 36-page Annual Report of the Conference for the 2011 calendar year. Hard copies of the report were provided to delegates and visitors to the Annual Gathering held at the Community Church/Vero Beach May 4-5, and it was posted on the website as well.

Thanks for assistance from Tom Mitchell (Hope UCC/Rockledge), our Assistant Editor (and former Editor) and Sharon Bond (Faith UCC/Dunedin) of Green Door Marketing and Graphics who provided professional layout services.

LGBT Activities and Open and Affirming

A number of our congregations continued having a visible presence in their local area Pride events. Miami Beach’s Gay Pride parade on April 15 featured an always creative Coral Gables Congregational Church float [see photo above] (extolling marriage equality). First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale had a booth at the Stonewall Summer Pride Street Festival on June 24, 14 Tampa Bay/Suncoast area churches with some 90 participants marched in the tenth annual St. Pete Pride Parade (see photo below) on June 30 and staffed an info booth and the UCC/New Smyrna Beach hosted Volusia Pride on its grounds on November 10.

As ONA consultants, Kathy Church and Lori Schenone (both of Jensen Beach Community Church) continue to meet with two-three congregations a year to discuss their process of discernment, and all have ultimately been successful so far. During 2012 two congregations officially become ONA: Faith Family UCC/Tampa and First Congregational Church/Lake Worth.

Kathy reports that for her a most exciting event was the recommitment to ONA service at UCC/New Smyrna Beach in October. Besides representing the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, she represented the Disciples of Christ, with their permission (the congregation is standing with both the UCC and DoC). The service was inspiring enough that she has convinced her pastor that they need to do this in Jensen Beach and so it will happen this October. Commitment after a successful ONA vote has long been a concern of the Coalition, so this is considered very important in the overall process.

Kathy has also corresponded with representatives of the Coalition and the Wisconsin Conference ONA team on their process to become an ONA Conference.
The primary youth ministry goal of the Northeast Region has been to be an advocate for youth and to partner in ministry with our local churches. I have continued to visit churches and their youth groups and to communicate with youth and leaders on the Northeast Region Youth Ministry and Fall Retreat Facebook pages. Through these media, I share ideas and best practices as I see them or hear about them and pictures from church visits and youth activities.

I believe it’s important to support activities in the other regions. In January, I visited Walk on the Water in the Southeast and during the first weekend of March I visited the annual Peace River Canoe Trip. These are the perfect places to visit with youth and their leaders from this region and beyond…and all in one place.

Youth and leaders from the Northeast Region gathered for our third regional event: A Day at Blue Spring in April for a great day of games, water activities, fun and worship. Thanks to the churches who came and the team who planned the day.

Shortly thereafter, I attended the Conference Annual Gathering at the Community Church/Vero Beach. At that event, Jeanne, Sheila and I presented a workshop on youth ministry.

In July, several youth groups and their leaders from the Florida Conference attended the National Youth Event held at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. It was an incredible opportunity to meet co-youth workers from all over the country and beyond. The most inspiring speaker of the week was Miah Yeager, a young lady from Colorado with Down’s Syndrome. We were blessed to hear Miah’s story, so blessed we asked her to come to Florida in the Fall.

From October 5-7, about 125 youth and leaders gathered again at the Vero Beach church for this year’s Fall Retreat: iSync. Tracks were separated for middle and senior high for the first time. The iSync theme focused on two basics: love God and love your neighbor. Miah Yeager (see above) and Kaley Loewendick, college age students, were the plenary speakers on Saturday morning; both were greatly appreciated. On Saturday night, a reflection walk was added with eight stations focusing on disconnecting and then re-connecting while reflecting on the iSync theme. The event ended with the entire group joining our host church in a special worship service on World Communion Sunday. Much thanks to CCOVB for hosting the event and the incredible team for all their hard work.

I look forward to working together with you for a great 2013.

Michael may be contacted at mcain@uccfla.org

Jeanne may be contacted at jeanneh@uccfla.org
In January, the annual Walk on Water event (WOW) held at Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami focused on the youth’s faith walk with God. To help them explore this topic, several ministers from our Southeast Region offered creative leadership sessions that engaged the youth in everyday topics that related to the youth. In addition, our national UCC representative for Interfaith and Ecumenical ministries, Rev. Karen Thompson, led us in an amazing project that explored the youth’s spiritual walk.

In May, the Annual Gathering of the Conference held a session for youth and youth leaders that focused on best practices for youth ministry. I focused on how best to begin and develop a youth group.

On October 20-21, the women of Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami held an event to which the community was welcome, which also featured youth from the surrounding area. I led the youth session with spiritual reflections and also shared of the UCC’s commitment to all youth.

Sheila may be contacted at sheilag@uccfla.org

Our 85th year started with our first Regional Meeting for the Gold Coast, held on Saturday, January 21, at Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach. The guest speaker, Viviane Fils-Aime, is on the staff of C.R.O.S. (Christians Reaching out to Society) and is in charge of the gleaning work done by local volunteers. She was born in Haiti and spoke about Haiti, which is one of our Mission Study Islands of the Caribbean.

On Thursday, January 26, St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota hosted the Southwest Regional Meeting. Saturday, January 28, was the Central West Coast Regional meeting held at Christ’s Promise/Auburndale; a creative workshop, “Becoming Your Great Yet to Be,” was led by Pastor Rev. Nancy Prout. The Miami Dade/Monroe Regional Meeting was held on February 4 at Church of the Open Door Congregational/ Miami; the program focused on “God’s Special Women: The Homeless and the Battered.” Saturday, February 11, was the date of the Central East Coast Regional at

Rev. Dr. Jeanette Sherrill at the Annual Meeting portraying Antionette Brown Blackwell, the first woman to be ordained as clergy

Riviera UCC/Palm Bay where the topic was “Hungry and Homeless Children in Central Florida” with guest speaker Robert Barnes from the Children’s Hunger Project. The St. John’s Region was hosted on Saturday, February 25, by Arlington Congregational Church/ Jacksonville with the theme “Eat, Pray, Love -- A Day of Friendship and Spiritual Renewal.”

Our 85th Annual Meeting and Conference was held March 9–11 at the International Palms Hotel & Conference Center in Cocoa Beach. (see photo above) The theme was “Re Generations.” Some of workshops offered were, “Bad Women of the Bible,” “Can You Text God?” “Community Gardening”, “The Power of the Purse” and “Picture Jesus: A Guided Meditation for Women.”

On October 6 we held our Fall Retreat, “In the Company of Women,” hosted by the Miami-Dade/Monroe Region and held at the Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour. The theme was “Generations” with Pastor Rev. Barbara Asinger leading us in a devotional entitled “Old and New Circles,” which ended with instruction for completing the labyrinth -- intricate and very spiritual with several prayer and informational stations along the pathway. When finished, each woman was provided a journal and given the opportunity to sit, reflect and record her thoughts and feelings provoked by the labyrinth experience.
The 2013 Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference, meeting in Orlando May 3-4, has as its theme: Ignite! Vitality for a New Day. Guest presenters will focus on ways in which our congregations can energize and set us ablaze. Instead of having breakout sessions of conventional workshops and seminars addressing this subject, facilitators will engage delegates and visitors in small group conversations. These discussions will be centered on a number of aspects of how congregations might ignite the passion and energy of their members and attract new people who can be drawn to our churches by how they see us worship and witness.

Every issue of Celebrate Florida – our Conference bi-monthly – contains numerous examples of what our Florida congregations are doing to “love God and love neighbor.” These are, in a sense, reflections of some of the “best practices” being offered by our churches. Some are fairly simple and basic while others may demand more time and effort. Some turn out working better than others. Some might work well in one church but not in another. However they have fared, something valuable can be learned from the experience. Intrigued by what you read and hear in Celebrate Florida and in these conversations at the Annual Gathering? Contact clergy, staff or lay leaders at these churches to obtain more information.

On the following pages are some of these ideas and “experiments” which had been noted in Celebrate Florida. As you read them, think about adopting or adapting them as the Spirit moves you. Sticking with something tried-and-true is ok, too, but consider if they might be a “fit” for your church -- even though they might require a bit of thinking outside your normal “box.” Maybe they would require some tinkering to more effectively reflect who you are -- or wish to become -- as “church.” Allow them to transport and transform you as the hands of feet of Jesus as the United Church of Christ in Florida. Then, as UCC Minister, consultant and author Anthony Robinson suggested in a recent Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, invite seekers to come to your church “to see what God is doing.”

Location, Location, Location

Take advantage of where you’re located. When members of Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach kept asking themselves, “Why did God put our church two blocks from the beach?” they finally decided they needed an answer. Thinking that maybe a worship service on the beach at sunset might be an appropriate answer, they formed a committee to “imagine” beach fellowship at twilight. The decision? To hold brief 20 minute seasonal “Sunday Sunsets” to proclaim “Go God” at dusk, closing with The Lord’s Prayer as the sun touches the horizon. [see photo 1]

Sanibel Congregational UCC has its Christmas Eve service on the beach. Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach has its Easter Sunrise service down the street overlooking the bay. Pensacola Beach Community UCC has its overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, Port Orange UCC’s is on the Atlantic, Christ Congregational/Miami’s is alongside Biscayne Bay and Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami makes use of one of the beautiful gardens on its campus.

Perhaps you have a Peace Garden, other outside garden area or labyrinth – perfect places for various kinds of worship services. Maybe you are located close to a body of water or wooded area that could be a creative setting for worship.

When the BP oil spill threatened Gulf waters in 2010, Suncoast area UCC congregations gathered at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, for a “Disaster Relief Recognition Sunday” worship service on the beach.

Create Resourceful Post-worship Time

University Congregational Church/Orlando has experimented with “Messy Church” – a time of celebration and fun and not dressing up. This has lots of singing and snacking, a hymn sing and a series of six “Meet ‘n Munch” sessions -- one hour gatherings which take place after worship where participants can enjoy soup and sandwiches.

First Congregational Church/Orange City has sponsored “Fifth Sunday of the Month Sermon Talk Back”s. After worship and fellowship hour, interested attendees gather in the Sanctuary annex for discussion and an opportunity to “talk back.”

Over a period of six months during 2011, Fort Myers Congregational Church offered an adult forum personal testimonials “Sunday School”-type session after the Sunday worship service. Interested church members were offered the opportunity to share something of their life stories and faith journeys. More
than two dozen church members took advantage of this opportunity, each speaking for between 15-45 minutes. One member told of her flight from Germany before the Nazis took control, ending up in Cuba before arriving in the U.S., speaking only German and Spanish – quite a story of survival.

**Be Imaginative with Your Substitute Clergy**

Tampa area evangelist Belinda Womack served as one of eight “supply pastors” at Faith UCC/Dunedin during the eight week period when the church awaited the arrival of its settled Pastor, Rev. Mike MacMillan. The jazz and gospel singer was responsible for preparing her worship service – from the choice of congregational hymns, the scripture selections (which were read by a lay person) and the sermon to the pastoral prayer and conducting Communion. As an extra, she gracefully accompanied the choir in their two anthems and closed with benediction, which was done in a large circle inside the Sanctuary. [see photo 2] The Community Church/Vero Beach had as its guest minister one Sunday Rev. Susan Sparks, an ex-lawyer turned stand-up comedian and minister.

**Involve Church Members**

At the end of each summer, the United Church of Gainesville holds its annual “Gathering of Waters” service where members bring waters they have collected either from their homes or their travels. Each member brings their offering forward as waters of peace, power, homecoming or healing -- whichever they determine it to be. That water is boiled and bleached to become the baptismal and blessing water for the year. [see photo 3]

Many churches, like the Congregational Church of Boca Raton, have a Youth Sunday service. [see photo 4]

**Be Creative**

The Sunday morning sermon series for this past January and February put together by Interim Senior Minister Rev. Dr. David Young at First Congregational Church/Winter Park was titled “Faith Notes.” In collaboration with Music Director Dr. John Sinclair, for six Sundays worshippers had an opportunity to sing some of the wonderful old hymns and explore their historic and relevant relationship to specific Scripture passages and our lives.

First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale has an annual tradition “Three Kings Celebration” during Epiphany. This year’s service took place in the Fellowship Hall where worshippers sang songs, received Holy Communion and were treated to a banquet of quiche, croissants and fresh fruit all served during the worship service. Each table in the hall was hosted by an “innkeeper,” who made room for guests until every seat was filled and then had to turn people away to go to other “inns.” Each innkeeper had provided a highly decorated cake that gave the essence of a crown. With great ceremony and festive singing, the cakes -- laden with lit candles -- were paraded around the room and delivered to each inn, where everyone feasted royally! [see photo 5]

Over the years several of our churches – including Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach, First UCC/Orlando, UCC/New Smyrna Beach, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, United Church of Gainesville, University Congregational Church/Orlando -- have offered different types of worship, which have been other-than-Sunday-morning, experiential, Taize-style.
The ideas that appear on these pages only scratch the surface of possibilities. Didn’t see a great idea that’s working at your church? If you’re attending the Annual Gathering, please share it and contribute your thoughts to the conversations around any of these nine areas of church life. Not going to be at the Gathering but have an idea or two you’d like to pass along?

Please send the suggestions to celebrateflorida@uccfla.org.

Be Visible to Potential “Friends”

Does your church have an attractive, welcoming, up-to-date-and-kept-current website? Can church seekers find you on Facebook? At the 2012 Annual Gathering, Neal Watkins (Director of Youth Ministry, Community Church/Vero Beach) and Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund (now West Region Conference Minister) led two workshops on utilizing social media for “educating, engaging and empowering.” You can still learn from them and others within the Conference who have experience to share. Check out the “Find a Local Church” link on the Conference website and see the amazing way some of our churches are communicating with visitors to their sites. How does your website compare and how can it be improved?

The UCC/St. Augustine was featured as a “Welcoming Church” on the “Believe Out Loud’ Facebook page, an online network that “empowers Christians to work for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) equality” and reaches over one million people weekly. [see photo 1]

Many of our churches — those in the greater Tampa Bay and Suncoast region, Hope UCC/Rockledge [see photo 2], First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale, Coral Gables Congregational Church and the UCC/New Smyrna Beach — regularly have booths at gay Pride events. Our church in New Smyrna Beach hosted an area Pride event on church grounds.

If you’re near a college, reach out to students — who may have been a part of UCC congregation back home or aren’t too busy to look for the Still Speaking God.

Pet lovers who are not church members may “check you out” because you offer a Blessing of the Animals ceremony.

First United Church of Tampa began a progressive Bible study in Spanish.

A “biker ministry?” Ask Christ Congregational Church/Miami about that outreach. [see photo 3]

Remind People Who You Are

Members of The UCC at The Villages have created banners to display around the church which include the themes, “God Is Still Speaking,” the traditional UCC logo, Open & Affirming and others about peace and justice. [see photo 4]

At Emmanuel UCC/Sebring “Burma Shave”-type signs have been placed in front of the church along the bike/walking path with messages like “If you feel the need — for a friend indeed — and God’s loving grace — then here’s the place.” Or “It’s time to stop — and make new friends — the fellowship here — never ends.” The last sign on each set reads: “Emmanuel United Church of Christ – Open Sundays.” [see photo 5]

Sunset Congregational Church/Miami holds an annual “Appreciation Sunday” to recognize and thank first responders who serve the community. [see photo 6]

Members of First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale demonstrate their appreciation of their neighborhood by adopting a street and keeping it clean. [see photo 7]

Don’t Forget the Local Newspaper

Rev. Dr. John Danner, Senior Pastor at Sanibel Congregational UCC, helped organize and coordinate an interfaith group of clergy to publish a religion column, “Faces on Faith,” in the local newspaper. Clergy contribute on a rotating basis. Each column features a 400-500 word essay on a topic of the writer’s choosing so long as it is sensitive to interfaith and ecumenical relations. The column not only gives public exposure to the religious congregations of Sanibel and Captiva but also allows for a real witness to interfaith cooperation.

Everybody Loves a Parade

Deltona UCC enters a float in the town’s annual nighttime Christmas parade. This past year the congregation took the parade theme of “A Storybook Christmas” and put together a float portraying the original story set up with a traditional Nativity scene.

Consider visibility opportunities presented by 4th of July, boat or gay Pride parades.

Share Your Gifts with the Community

It is “Never Too Late to Educate” at United Community Church/Sun City Center, where the church offers church members and the community an opportunity to enroll in the church’s Spring session of classes. This year 42 diversified classes and one-day outings are being offered. Classes are 90 minutes in length and tuition is $25 for six classes. Classes may also be taken online.

Church members with special talents and professional degrees can provide much of the instruction. Members who are in the health profession can provide the
resource core for health fairs held at the church to which the wider community is invited. Churches which have offered such outreach include Sanibel Congregational UCC, the UCC at The Villages, First Church of North Miami Congregational and Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park.

The Lake Helen Counseling Center is an outreach program of Lake Helen Congregational UCC.

Food pantries – like at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park, United Church in Tallahassee, First UCC/Orlando and University Congregational Church/Orlando – also provide a welcoming face to the community as do churches which prepare and serve meals on their premises to the homeless and those in need – like Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie – or send volunteers to shelters where they help in the kitchens. Thrift shops – and many of our churches have one – provide their own outreach and message to the community.

Altamonte Chapel/Altamonte Springs held its annual shrimp cook-off in May, inviting teams of culinary arts students from area high schools to prepare gourmet shrimp recipes for competition. The teams competed for prizes awarded by a celebrity judge, and church members and friends enjoyed the lunch which followed. [see photo 8]

Have some “extra” space in your Vacation Bible School? Extend the invitation to the community -- make sure the word gets out that there’s room!

Don’t forget
St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota also has begun organizing “Small Families,” groups of members and friends who seek to strengthen their connections with one another and build relationships—all to better serve each other and the church. Based partially on geography, the groups may contain as few as six members or as many as 20 or more. They meet in homes, a restaurant, at church or wherever those involved decide to go. Each group functions as its members choose based on interests, skills and what they want to do. Each group has a leader, and information about the groups is posted for all to see.

Small groups are popular at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, especially those in which the same groups of often diverse individuals gather over time—for two-three years—using the Companions in Christ series to grow spiritually individually and in relationship with one another. [see photo 2]

The Pastor’s Potluck Trivia Lunches have been held by Rev. Dr. Bob Sichta at Congregational UCC/Bradenton two days a month. Participants bring a small dish of some sort and besides enjoying a meal everyone talks, laughs and shares—and then play some Trivial Pursuit.

Coral Gables Congregational Church has offered its Circles of Dialogue. This justice-education program is designed to bring together 8-16 people at the home of a church member for some enjoyable socializing followed by a stimulating dialogue to encourage questioning and learning. In 2011 the program gathered a total of 72 people to discuss economic justice. In 2012 the topic for the dialogues was the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Cuppa Java
Riverside UCC/Jacksonville has started a coffee house. On the second Saturday of every month in its FaithWalk Center, those gathered start with Praise, Pray and Ponder at 6pm with 30 minutes of activity devoted to each segment; attendees can participate in one or more. One month the focus may be on how to use spiritual gifts to build up the church. Another month may feature line dancing. Following is time for open fellowship with games and relaxation until 10pm. You will also find a coffee house on Saturday evenings (and Friday Nights @ the Movies) at First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale.

A Church That Sews Together…
At many of our churches—including Cocoa Beach Community Church, Delray Beach Community Church [see photo 3], Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park, Jensen Beach Community Church, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach and Sanibel Congregational UCC—you will find groups of (mostly) women who gather together in fellowship to create beau-

On Communion Sundays during the Summer, it is “Spread the Table” time at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg. Everyone who would like to is invited to write his/her name, phone number and e-mail address on a piece of paper and place it in a basket. Then the basket is passed around the Sanctuary and whoever put a name in is to take a name out. Those matched folks are to get together to share a meal sometime over the course of the month. The goal is to build relationships and community and give new people another avenue for getting to know people in the congregation. They are “spreading the table”!

Pastor Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley has taken theology to the streets of DeLand—well, to a bar anyway. New Hope UCC/DeLand offered “Theology on Tap.” Buy you a drink? Members and locals were welcome to a Wednesday evening weekly “party” at the local pub for some stimulating conversation. Those interested enjoyed something cold from the tap or the soda fountain, and as they sipped they chewed on some hot topics such as ecology, sexism, homosexuality, anti-Semitism and child abuse. A recent basis for conversation was John Shelby Spong’s controversial book, The Sins of Scripture. [see photo 1]

The UCC/St. Augustine began a series of “bridge building” conversations with members of the Iglesia de Jesu Cristo Asamblea Apostolica. Small groups were formed and each person was invited to tell a story about a favorite childhood food. This storytelling format opened the way for open and honest dialogue to take place. Members of the St. Augustine community now have a new understanding of the Latino community, farmworkers and the plight of Latino youth brought to the US as infants, now high school graduates attending college, who are unable to obtain drivers licenses or “legal” employment. The conversations closed by singing “LaPaz Sea Contigo” from the UCC’s Sing! Prayer and Praise followed by refreshments of tamals and limonade provided by the Latino community.

In Sarasota County there is a large population of people which lives alone, and this is one of the reasons that members of St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota decided to develop a ministry around advocacy. They are creating communities within their larger community of faith that are located close to one another which will become advocates for one another, meet on a regular basis and look for ways to help the community around them. Some ideas presented are to connect people with specific skills to those who might need their help, provide transportation, travel to doctors’ appointments, be one another’s advocate during a hospital stay and gather to share a meal. Essentially this group of committed individuals has decided to become a family.
tiful quilts, pillows, shawls and dolls, which they share with those close by in the community or across the globe who need the love and comfort these gifts provide.

Forward – Retreat!

A special kind of all-church retreat continues for a second year at First Congregational Church/Winter Park, which did not involve travel or sleepovers. Instead, it’s a day-long offering (of five one-hour sessions) on the church campus. These L.E.A.R.N. workshops (or LEARNshops) draw on the gifts and talents of not only church staff but also church members in offering opportunities to learn. The workshops offered are: L (Life and Community), E (Environment and Technology), A (Arts and Culture), R (Religion and History) and N (Nutrition and Health).

Congregations which have held or continue to hold all-church retreats off-campus include Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami [see photo 4] and the United Church of Gainesville. First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, Naples UCC, Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park and Mayflower Congregational Church/Naples are among those which have held retreats specifically for church officers and lay leaders. There are also women-only and men-only retreats as well as those for specific groups within the Conference like youth, UCC Women, retired clergy and clergy women, for example.

Provide Information

Older Adult Ministry consultant Rev. Linn Possell [see photo 1, page 20] helped organize a seminar on long term care, which was hosted by First Congregational UCC/Sarasota. Participants came from our churches in Sun City Center, North Port, Venice, Bradenton, Sanibel, Fort Myers and Sarasota to hear speakers talk about issues involved with planning for long term care. Speakers included a certified Hospice and palliative care nurse, an ALF/Hospice chaplain, a rehab facility administrator and a specialist in long term and Medicare insurance. In recognition of National Heart Month in February, the church offered several presentations by authorities on cardiac disease, symptoms, exercise and nutrition and CPR with additional presentations on end of life planning and medications.

Windermere Union Church regularly observes Mental Illness Awareness Week in October with a series of events to generate greater understanding of these illnesses.
The Health and Wholeness Committee of First Congregational Church/Winter Park has launched a program called “Be Brave. Lose the Beige,” which promotes physical and spiritual wellness among women of the Baby Boomer generation. Through retreats and workshops they are encouraging women to discover their own spirits, creativity and a sense of playfulness.

**Organize a Health Fair**

Sanibel Congregational UCC has partnered with another church to present a health fair, coordinated in part by parish nurse Carol Gross. The event featured vision and hearing screening, memory screening and diabetic education with glucose screening. Also present were physical therapists conducting balance screening and education on fall prevention. A registered nurse was kept busy recording blood pressures while a local pharmacist answered questions regarding clients’ medications. Local vendors had a presence as well. [see photo 2]

First Church of North Miami Congregational has also offered similar health fairs open to the community and providing much-needed services. [see photo 3]

A Holistic Wellness Fair was offered free to the public by Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park called “Forks Over Knives,” offering samplings of various stress-reducing strategies such as aroma relaxation, massage, drumming and tai chi and info on health, medicine, food and diet.

**Food, Glorious (Healthy) Food!** Key Biscayne Community Church/Miami has tried “going green” by offering a fresh market to its neighbors. [see photo 4]

First Congregational Church/Winter Park has begun sponsoring four monthly “Wellness Wednesdays.” On a Wellness Wednesday, church chef Drew Weisner provides several dishes that are both healthy and easy to prepare as well as the recipes for those dishes in family-size proportions. Additionally, a class is offered on each of those Wednesdays on a topic which was highly ranked when the congregation completed a health and wholeness survey (e.g., a session, “Vegetarian Cooking Made Easy!”).

Are there school-age children in your community who are going without lunch? Investigate how you can be of help in providing simple meals during the week, on weekends and/or during vacation periods as has been done at CrossRoads Community UCC/Melbourne. [see photo 5].

**Ommmmmmmm**

If you have a conducive space and can coordinate scheduling with a certified instructor, offer exercise or yoga classes or meditation groups as is done or has been done at several of our churches including Sanibel Congregational UCC, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, Naples UCC, Coral Gables Congregational Church, United Church of Gainesville, Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville, Key Biscayne Community Church, United Church in Tallahassee and Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach.
Involve Your Children and Youth in Worship

First Congregational Church/Winter Park has its Youth Sunday. Last year the youth performed a very creative “Wizard of Oz” service, which included song, dance, drama and speech. And they offered to “take the show” on the road to other UCC churches. [see photo 1]

Last May youth of Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville led the entire Mother’s Day worship services based on the theme, “Making It Count” and using Ecclesiastes 3 as the Scripture lesson for the day as the basis of a skit they presented.

Holidays offer an opportunity for Sunday School children to put on a pageant, like this group of thespians at Longwood Hills Congregational Church. [see photo 2]

Only Have a Few Youth?

Not enough youth to build a “real” youth group within your church? Do what First United Church/Tampa did and find a simpatico congregation nearby in the same boat. In their case it is the local Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa. Or maybe you can buddy up with one or more nearby UCC congregations and offer a joint program. Youth are always welcome to participate in regional programs offered by the Conference Youth Ministry as well as the annual Peace River Canoe trip held in March.

Involve Youth in a Project

Last year 11 youth from First Congregational UCC/Sarasota slept out overnight in cardboard boxes to raise money for Family Promise and to highlight the concerns for people who are homeless. They took four awards: the largest cardboard home, the minimalist cardboard home, the most creative cardboard home and the award for having raised the largest amount -- nearly $1,000. [see photo 3]

Middle and high school youth at the Congregational Church of Boca Raton provided a day of service last September at Tomorrow’s Rainbow in Coconut Creek, a special and safe place for children who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Mission Trips Can be Life Changing

Several of our churches organize Summer mission trips composed only of middle and senior high youth or college students. Some stay close to home while others go across the country or abroad. Churches offering these opportunities include First Congregational Church/Winter Park, Community Church/Vero Beach, [see photo 4], UCC/New Smyrna Beach, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, Coral Gables Congregational Church. If there’s space available, maybe your youth can hitch a ride with another church’s trip.

Perhaps you can identify opportunities through the Conference Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry or mission trips sponsored by the Conference. [see photo 5]
Let’s Give a Play!

First Congregational Church/Winter Park hosted a benefit performance and world premiere of a musical revue written by church member Molly Conole.

Riviera UCC/Palm Bay is proud of its Summer Community Family Players, which is dedicated to connecting local youth and the community through the performing arts with a theater production every summer. Chances are you’ll find Pastor Rev. Scott Elliott directing the performances.

“Memories of World War II: When We Were Children” was a reader’s theater, written and directed by Nancy Bell of the UCC at The Villages, and performed earlier this year involving members of the church as readers of the stories. Pastor Rev. Drew Willard specializes in Biblical story telling and children’s liturgical drama.

Puppet shows often can be found taking place at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park and Congregational UCC/Bradenton.

Make a Joyful Noise

Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach holds its annual “Sing Along ‘Messiah’” in December. Members and friends join with professional soloists and keyboard artists to belt out selected choruses and arias plus the “hallelujah” chorus.

Rev. Dr. Hal McSwain, Pastor of First Congregational UCC/Ocala, not only composes his own music but conducts the Central Florida Master Choir and performs in various venues around the state.

Riverside UCC/Jacksonville has offered its acoustically superb facilities to be the home of the Jacksonville Men’s Chorus for its rehearsals and concerts. [see photo 1]

The Community Arts Program at Coral Gables Congregational Church is proud of its ALL-STAR Jazz Ensemble, which is competing in the jazz band completion and festival at Lincoln Center in New York City May 10-12, 2013.

Several of our churches have regular music series or special concerts featuring church members as well as guest performers.

Express Your Spirit

Rev. Donna Papenhausen (a member of St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota) has developed a program she calls “Spiritivity,” which incorporates the use of meditation, movement, writing, sound, poetry, visual arts and instrumenta- tion. She uses it to guide members of a congregation on a journey to discover and define new goals.

New Vision Congregational Church/Yulee offered a “mandala meditation” retreat last Summer. With pastels, colored pencils and markers, participants from the church and community drew their mandalas after hearing a sacred text read with accompanying music. The completed mandalas spoke to the one who created it in deep and meaningful ways as each person had his or her unconscious stirred in conversation with God. [see photo 2]

Let There be Paint!

Many churches showcase the paintings created by and the photographs taken by church members. These are often displayed for weeks at a time in Fellowship Hall, the narthex or other prominent spots in the church. Among these churches are Cocoa Beach Community Church, Sanibel Congregational UCC and Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda.

You also might find an art studio and/or art classes being taught at some of our churches, which is or has been the case at Naples UCC, First Congregational Church/Winter Park, Union Congregational Church/Tavares, First Congregational Church/Orange City and Christ Congregational Church/Miami.

Pageants, liturgical dances, dramatic readings, bell ringers, instrumental solos, school choirs….the list of possibilities is endless. [see photo 3, Miami Lakes Congregational Church]
Being “Political”

Union Congregational UCC/Holly Hill had a “Meet the Candidates” series during its morning worship services over a couple of Sundays last Summer. The three candidates in Holly Hill’s August mayoral election spoke to the congregation on the three successive Sundays prior, focusing their remarks on their vision for the future of the city with an opportunity for questions and from the congregation following.

Last year First Congregational UCC/Ocala partnered with the League of Women Voters to sponsor a forum on the future of a regional medical center as a non-profit hospital. The church also hosted the Interfaith Alliance of Marion County during “Racial Harmony Week.”

Pastor Rev. Linda Girouex and members of Riverside UCC/Jacksonville were active petitioning the City Council on a human rights ordinance last year.

Clergy and members from several of our churches can often be found in the forefront of issues facing a city or county as well as participating in protests such as those involving Publix in support of migrant worker rights. [see photo 1]

Faith UCC/Dunedin is actively involved in a county-wide group of religious organizations which trains and mobilizes it members to work for change in Pinellas County.

Back in 2010 Rev. Larry Reimer, then co-Pastor of the United Church of Gainesville, was the lead organizer of the interfaith clergy coalition opposing the local clergyman who had threatened to burn the Koran, thereby setting off a worldwide media firestorm. A lesson he learned was that a progressive interfaith community can find its way into the media, but it takes endless effort. [see photo 2]

Educate and Activate

A justice ministry has been created at Coral Gables Congregational UCC called, Community Justice Agents (CJA). It is designed to empower members of the church community to design, develop and implement their own projects of justice. Programs could address Islamaphobia, conservation and ecological issues and hunger concerns that affect people locally and globally.

Is bullying a problem in the community where you live? Take a stand, as members of Spring Hill UCC have. [see photo 3]Many congregations have been engaged in Sacred Conversations on Race.

Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park embarked upon on a multi-month program late last year to shed light on various justice and peace issues it feels should be of considerable concern to church members. On one Wednesday afternoon a month for several months a series of films were shown on subjects which included immigration, hydraulic fracturing, racism, health care, HIV/AIDS and drugs. The sessions included a break for pizza and discussion.

You’ll often find First Congregational UCC/Ocala, UCC at The Villages, Sanibel Congregational UCC and First United Church of Tampa (see photo) sponsoring interfaith events. [see photo 4, “Tapestry for Peace” Candlelight Vigil].

“The Least of These…”

The United Church of Gainesville and the United Church in Tallahassee have supported Kindred Spirits, a program benefiting death row inmates who have no family support, helping them purchase personal items like toiletries, clothing and snacks.
It is Sew Easy
The Church of the Palms/Delray Beach began its Comfort Doll Ministry in 2007, using simple patterns for dolls and basic clothes, which are blessed when they are finished and then delivered locally to local hospitals and police departments and also shipped abroad.

Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park also has a shawl as well as a crocheted “prayer bears” ministry.

Sanibel Congregational UCC has had an active prayer shawl ministry for many years, distributing the creations to the hospitalized, homebound and sometimes used for a celebration event.

Several other churches have similar programs creating or purchasing such items -- like First Congregational Church/Orange City’s annual “Teddy Bear Sunday” -- which find their way to first responders, hospitals, migrant worker settlements and missions and orphanages abroad.

Children in Africa affected by HIV/AIDS find comfort in the Duduza dolls created by women at North Port Community Church. [see photo 1]

Reach Out to Nearby Colleges
With Florida State University nearby, the United Church in Tallahassee is in combined ministry with the Episcopal University Center to provide worship and fellowship services to students from both denominations. If you are near a college, reach out to the students.

Hearts, Hands and Hugs Across the Waters
Thanks to missionary work performed by a church member, Naples UCC has become the sole sponsor of a church in Honduras which teaches handicapped children. The church provides tuition and helps with capital improvements and supplies. Church members visit annually.

The United Church in Tallahassee has partnered with the Alliance Education Fund to provide school fees for girls in Kenya who would otherwise never make it past 8th grade.

The ongoing mission project at Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park supports an orphanage in Los Guido, Costa Rica, dear to the heart of member Mae Louise Zeise. Slightly over $800 was raised in 2012.

First Congregational Church/Orange City and the Moonlighters Swing Band from Daytona Beach hosted its third annual benefit concert/dance in 2012 with proceeds shared with Grace House of Hope orphanage and school located in a community just east of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. [see photo 2]

Members at Key Biscayne Community Church/Miami were quick to respond to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti by filling -- and member Michelle Estevez -- personally delivering shipping containers full of supplies to the scene.

The Community Church of Vero Beach – thanks to member John Engle – has also become involved in mission work in Haiti by raising money, providing scholarships and sending volunteers.

Check with the Conference for mission trips which it may be sponsoring.

Helping Close to Home
Teams of members of Spring Hill UCC set off on Friday mornings and make long round trips to the two schools on the west side of town to the HeartFELT packing area and then back
to the schools to drop off backpacks filled with foods. The children involved pick up the backpacks as they leave for home in the afternoon and have food for the weekends.

Elementary schools serving a low income population near First Congregational Church/Lake Worth have been the recipients of school supplies – like erasers, binders, pocket dictionaries -- donated by church members of. Both these schools serve a population of children from families, many of whom have very little income.

The United Church of Marco Island has long been involved building homes for Habitat for Humanity. [see photo 3]

United Community Church/Sun City Center also fills backpacks with school supplies for Metropolitan Ministries, an agency seeking to provide 5,000 children with a great start to the school year.

The “shoebox ministry” at Pilgrim Congregational Church/St. Petersburg fills boxes full of kids’ items, which are made available to agencies dealing with abused children.

Faith Family Community UCC/Tampa has held a Bingo event at the church to raise funds for PAWS, an organization in the Tampa area which uses the donations to help feed and keep healthy the pets of folks with HIV/AIDS or place pets with HIV+ individuals.

Venice UCC partners in an interfaith backpack kids program for needy – many homeless – high school students as well as a similar program for elementary-aged children.

Cocoa Beach Community Church supports the needy with bags filled with ready-to-eat lunches it makes available at its thrift store and church office, enabling them to distribute food every day of the week.

“Undies Sunday” has become a tradition at Holiday UCC – gathering children’s underwear and socks as well as gently-used shoes to be given to local grade schools.

Naples UCC has partnered with an area food bank that serves five Southwest Florida counties, including the in-school pantries in Immokalee. The church also provided a grant to the pantries to purchase much-need refrigerators.

Riverside UCC/Jacksonville has held memorial services for people from the community who have died of AIDS complications. RUCC is the local home for the AIDS Quilt.

Bicycles are donated by members and friends of Fort Myers Congregational Church and then transported to the National Farm Workers Ministry in Immokalee. [see photo 4]

Ruth’s Ministry has been part of First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale’s social justice outreach in the local community for over a decade. The ministry feeds as many as 100-120 hungry people who count on the hot meals served each Thursday.

The Outreach Ministry Team at Jensen Beach Community Church has had a regular Thursday tradition of preparing spaghetti with meat sauce dinners, which are delivered to homeless who live under a nearby causeway bridge.

You’ll also find folks at Community UCC/Lake Park participating in a feeding program for the homeless.

Sharing Your Gifts With Others

There is a cold night shelter in Pasco County thanks to the
outreach from Community Congregational Church/New Port Richey.

A couple of years ago Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville decided to convert an under-utilized house it owned on its property into a temporary/transitional residence families graduating out of a local organization’s program for homeless families.

CrossRoads Community Church/Melbourne is growing...a garden! In an effort to continue to meet some of the needs of the growing food gap for its church family and neighbors, CrossRoads has prepared space behind the church for a garden that they hope will “produce” the “fruits” of their labors.

A vegetable garden is maintained by Riviera UCC/Palm Bay to help stock bins at a local community feeding ministry called the Daily Bread. [see photo 5, page 25]

First Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie has opened its doors as the newest of four serving sites for the community-based non-profit organization, Sarah’s Kitchen. Every Wednesday evening the congregation hosts and participates in the feeding of free hot meals to anyone in the community who comes to its doors. [see photo 6, page 25]

When LGBT leaders in Volusia County needed a place to hold their 2012 Pride festival, UCC/New Smyrna Beach offered church grounds as the location.

Spring Hill UCC was instrumental in starting a PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter in Hernando County and hosts meetings in its Fellowship Hall.

A survey a few years ago revealed that dozens of our congregations welcome other faith communities – including Jews, Catholics and Buddhists as well as Protestants – to use their church buildings. For instance, Holiday UCC, Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg and Sanibel Congregational UCC each makes its facilities available to other faith communities for worship. These three churches also are involved in some of the programs offered by their guests or they conduct joint offerings benefiting all who worship under their roofs.

Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill has turned a portion of space in its building into housing for volunteers who come from the state and beyond to assist in response to natural disasters.

When Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg received a generous donation to do “good works” in the community, it responded by establishing classes for refugees to assist them to prepare for citizenship [see photo 7, page 25]

Miami Beach Community Church has partnered with a local agency to provide a venue where on a bi-monthly basis upwards of 200 homeless have received food, clothing, medical attention, toiletries, Bibles, haircuts, entertainment and encouragement. [see photo 8, page 25]

If you are able, make the various spaces in your church available – free or at a very reasonable rate -- to organizations (various AA groups, hobby clubs, civic associations, health providers, scouts, Meals on Wheels, Weight Watchers) looking for a meeting space.

Creative FUNdraising

First Congregational Church/Winter Park provided an opportunity for members and friends to bring broken or unwanted jewelry -- 10K, 14K and sterling silver items – to the church to sell it based on current market pricing. While providing a safe and familiar place to sell such items, it also benefited the church, which received 15% of the purchase total.

North Port Community UCC has become a not-for-profit seller on eBay. Church member Carol Glanton volunteered to help others get rid of some of their “stuff” while contributing to the church whatever proceeds are derived. She posts photos and descriptions of the items on the site and then everyone can sit back and watch the hoped-for bidding take place.

Maybe everyone has a car wash, but it’s still a good way to raise funds – especially for youth and mission projects – as has been done at Port Orange UCC. [see photo 1]

Last Spring members of Cocoa Beach Community Church tried something not done before -- “A Hobo Hangout Dinner.” Those who attended were encouraged to wear hobo attire. As people came in they were greeted by a darkened room lit only by kerosene lamps or candles stuck in tuna fish cans. Tables were covered with newsprint for tablecloths. Bags of “Peddlers Peanuts” were available as an appetizer at each table setting. Other foods served were “Sidecar Stew,” “Scavenger Salads,” “Temperance Tea” and “Kerosene Coffee.” The dessert was “Railcar Cobbler.” They collected non-perishable food items throughout the night, and part of the dollars collected went to support community outreach that helps local neighbors in need. [see photo 2]

The third Sunday of each month is “noisy” at Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole. Church members are encouraged to save their change during the week and drop it in the offering plate to benefit the congregation’s youth and Christian Ed ministries.

Last year Arlington Congregational UCC/Jacksonville held its second annual “Friendraiser” dinner and auction, with an Oktoberfest theme for the food and decorations. The congregation was encouraged to invite guests to attend as well. Donations of items from members and friends of the congregation were auctioned off during dinner and included trips to Costa Rica, jewelry, gift cards for dinners, art work and gift baskets. The funds went to the church’s local mission partners, who were invited to send representatives to the dinner to speak briefly about their work during the event. More than $3,000 was raised between dinner tickets and auctioned items.
A dinner theater comedy production by the FunRaisers at the United Church of Sebastian, with church members as the cast, raised dollars for church-related projects. And it was fun!

Emmanuel UCC/Sebring holds its “Harvest Home Festival” in the Fall. In advance church members prepare homemade noodles and chicken for the soup sold at the event. Tables are set up in the Fellowship Hall to display craft items for sale. Come Saturday morning foods and craft items are sold while hot dogs and other items are cooked on grills set up in the parking lot. Several days of hard work by many dedicated folks yield substantial income for the church and further increases community awareness of Emmanuel. [see photo 3]

Thrift Shops = $$$

Port Orange UCC was proud to report last year that from the time their thrift store opened in July 1999 through July 2012 it had brought in a total of $345,637.50 in income—providing a service to its community as well as the congregation and its ministries and missions. Many other UCC churches in Florida also have thrift shops, which provide sizeable income flows. Churches which have (or have had) thrift shops include Union Congregational Church/Tavares, First Congregational Church/Orange City, Boynton Beach Congregational Church, Jensen Beach Community Church, Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole [see photo 4], Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach, First UCC/Orlando, Cocoa Beach Community Church, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami, Congregational UCC/Bradenton, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach and First UCC/Hollywood.

Stepping Up to the Plate

When a member of Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park became dismayed upon hearing that the church had a projected debt of $13,032, the member challenged the congregation to pay off the debt in the following way. The member promised to match all donations to the church, which are designed for debt service, up to $1,000 per household and up to half the outstanding debt. All donations must be in addition to a household’s regular pledge and the 2013-14 pledge must be at least as much as was pledged and given in 2012-13.

In 2012 the UCC at The Lighthouse/Naples conducted a special year-end Christmas offering – 7 for 70. Each of the church’s 70 family units was asked to raise $10 in addition to its regular offering – or $10 a week for seven weeks with the collection being received on December 16. Tips for raising the $10 included sacrificing a latte, skipping a meal out, brown-bagging at lunch, holding a garage sale. The funds raised went for three special projects: Grace Place Food Bank, Baby Basics (a group which supplies baby diapers for those who can’t afford to purchase them) and Sunday School and youth programs (toward projects and retreats).

Over the last Summer, the Stewardship Team at Coral Gables Congregational UCC held a series of gatherings called “Appreciative Inquiry” to find out what its members appreciate about the church. Knowing what is meaningful to the members and what they value about CGUCC helped guide the Stewardship Team in the creation of the church’s 2013 mission statement plan (budget). These “Appreciative Inquiry” gatherings were set up by age groups in the hope that the Stewardship Team would hear clearly what was important to each generation represented in the life of the church. Leading out of “Appreciative Inquiry” came “From Generation to Generation,” the theme for Spirit Sunday and the stewardship campaign.

In previous years, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring has conducted a “Meet the Budget Match” fundraiser at year’s end to keep the congregation financially successful and able to enrich its church family experience. Again in 2012 the campaign was a success, and Emmanuel entered the new year in a financially stable position.
# Clergy New To Florida

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Church/Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan Coe, P</td>
<td>Mayflower Congregational Church/Center, Naples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Bagley-Bonner, P</td>
<td>Faith UCC/Bradenton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael MacMillan, P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harold Hunter Thompson, P</td>
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# Clergy Changes

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<tr>
<td>Robert Melhorn, P</td>
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<td>Charles Mory, IN</td>
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<td>Louis Leone, SS</td>
<td>United Community Church/Sun City Center</td>
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<td>Harvey Lockhart, P/T AP</td>
<td>Church of the Open Door</td>
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<td>Michael MacMillan, P</td>
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<td>Pamela Oliveira, 4-Way</td>
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<td>Alan Coe, P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Della Fahnstock, 4-Way</td>
<td>Alliance of Faith &amp; Feminism and Education Fund</td>
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<td>Marilyn Lewis, 4-Way</td>
<td>Blake Medical Center</td>
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<td>Martin Montone, 4-Way</td>
<td>James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital</td>
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<td>Robert Sichta, P</td>
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<td>Ann Phillips, 4-Way</td>
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<td>Sarah Lund, WRM</td>
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<td>Raymond Hargrove, ERM</td>
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<td>Neal Hunt, IN</td>
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<td>Labert Altemose, IN</td>
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<td>Michael Caine, LM/IN</td>
<td>Hope UCC/Rockledge</td>
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# Ordinations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brenda Marin</td>
<td>Coral Gables Congregational UCC</td>
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<td>Angela Wells</td>
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<td>Harvey Lockhart</td>
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# Retired

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<td>Tim Woodard, P</td>
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<td>Lawrence Reimer, Co-P</td>
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<td>Sandra Reimer, Co-P</td>
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# Services Concluded

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# Clergy New To Florida

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<td>Michael Evans, P</td>
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<td>Sally Seith, IN</td>
<td>Mayflower Congregational Church/Center</td>
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<td>Frank Faine, 4-Way</td>
<td>Visiting Church Association/Orlando</td>
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<td>Robert Palin, IN</td>
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<td>Rebecca Stephenson, P</td>
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<td>Jeanette Sherrill, IN</td>
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<td>Bonnie Lipton, P/T P</td>
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<td>Catherine O’Connell, AP</td>
<td>Naples UCC</td>
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<td>Earl Keirstead, IN</td>
<td>Miami Beach Community Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean Simpson, RCM</td>
<td>Florida Conference Gulf Coast Regional Conference Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Koch, RCM</td>
<td>Florida Conference Southeast Regional Conference Minister</td>
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<td>Raymond Hargrove, RCM</td>
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<td>Elise Elrod, P</td>
<td>Christ’s Promise UCC/Auburndale</td>
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<td>Phyllis Parthemer, Co-P</td>
<td>Union Congregational Church/West Palm Beach</td>
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<td>Fred Rhines, IN P</td>
<td>Faith UCC/Bradenton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Watson, P</td>
<td>Longwood Hills Congregational Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Lund, P</td>
<td>UCC/New Smyrna Beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Van Valkenburg, AP</td>
<td>Pilgrims’ UCC/Fruitland Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Key**

- **P**: Pastor
- **IN**: Interim
- **AP**: Associate/Assistant Pastor
- **SS**: Stated Supply
- **LM**: Licensed Minister
- **P/T**: Part time

---

**Memories -- for all who ...**

*Love God, Love Neighbor*

---

*Pastor Rev. Nancy Dahlberg (United Church of Tallahassee) in Kenya*
4-Way/Specialized Ministers 2012

Rev. Sherry Angus .................................................... Chaplain, Venice UCC, TideWell Hospice & Palliative Care
Rev. Dr. Walter Barker .............................................. Pastoral Counselor, First Congregational Church/ Winter Park,
Pathfinders Counseling & Consultation/Orlando

Rev. Vonshelle Beneby .............................................. Chaplain, UCC/New Smyrna Beach, VITAS, Volusia/Flagler
Rev. Ellen Blaise ........................................................ Chaplain, Pensacola Beach Community UCC, Sacred Heart Hospital/Pensacola
Rev. Donna Carey ..................................................... Chaplain, Hope UCC/Rockledge, VITAS/Titusville
Rev. Mardie Chapman .............................................. Chaplain, Lakewood UCC/ St. Petersburg, St. Anthony’s Hospital/St. Petersburg
Rev. Dr. Virginia Doherty .......................................... Pastoral Care, Indian River City United Methodist Church/Titusville
Rev. Dr. Della Fahnstock ............................................ Pastoral Education, Alliance Education Fund/ Tallahassee
Rev. Carol Fields ...................................................... Chaplain, St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota, TideWell Hospice & Palliative Care/Sarasota
Rev. Graciela Flores .................................................. Chaplain, First United Church of Tampa, Moffitt Cancer Center/Tampa
Rev. Mark Goforth .................................................... Chaplain, First Church of North Miami Congregational, VITAS/North Miami
Rev. Dr. Fay Golding .................................................. Chaplain, Faith UCC/Tamarac, VITAS/Plantation
Rev. Dianne Hudder .................................................. Chaplain, Christ Congregational Church/Miami, VITAS/South Dade-Miami
Rev. Donna Ives ....................................................... Chaplain, Spring Hill UCC, Moffitt Cancer Center/Spring Hill
Rev. Misti Johnson-Arce ............................................. Chaplain, Miami Lakes Congregational Church, Sr. ACPE Supervisor/VITAS Innovative Hospice/Fort Lauderdale

Rev. Dr. Beth B. Kollas .............................................. Windermere Union Church, Orlando Regional Healthcare System
Rev. David Lane ...................................................... Chaplain, Christ Congregational Church/Miami, VITAS/South Dade-Cutler Bay
Rev. Jacqueline Lewis .............................................. Chaplain, Spring Hill UCC, Hernando-Pasco Hospice/Brooksville
Rev. Marilyn Lewis ................................................... Chaplain, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, Blake Medical Center/Bradenton
Rev. Brad S. Lutz ...................................................... Chaplain, Miami Shores Community Church, VITAS Innovative Hospice Care/Fort Lauderdale

Rev. Gregorio Marin ............................................... Chaplain, Coral Gables Congregational Church, Baptist Health South Florida/Miami
Rev. Martin Montonye ............................................. Chaplain, First United Church of Tampa, James A. Haley Veterans Hospital/Tampa
Rev. Ann Phillips .................................................... Chaplain, Venice UCC, Tidewell Hospice of Sarasota, Charlotte & DeSoto
Rev. Dr. David Pitt ................................................... Chaplain, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, All Children’s Hospital/St. Petersburg
Rev. Linn Possell ..................................................... Older Adult Ministry, Florida Conference UCC
Rev. Dr. Patrick Powers ............................................. Chaplain, First Congregational Church/Winter Park, Rollins College/Winter Park
Rev. Nancy Prout ..................................................... Chaplain, Christ’s Promise UCC/Auburndale, Good Shepherd Hospice/Auburndale
Rev. Mary Ramsay ................................................... Chaplain, First Congregational Church/Fort Lauderdale, VITAS/Fort Lauderdale
Rev. Dr. Jihey Esther Roach ...................................... Chaplain, Christ Congregational Church/Miami, VITAS/North Miami Beach
Rev. Beverly Ross .................................................... Chaplain, Coral Gables Congregational Church, VITAS/North Miami Beach

4-Way/Specialized Ministers 2012

Rev. Sherry Angus .................................................... Chaplain, Venice UCC, TideWell Hospice & Palliative Care
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Pathfinders Counseling & Consultation/Orlando

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Rev. Beverly Ross .................................................... Chaplain, Coral Gables Congregational Church, VITAS/North Miami Beach

5 Years
Mark Wade Goforth
Phyllis J. Parthemer
Leonard Charles West

10 Years
Andrew M. Bachmann
Sally D. Brown
Sheila Harvey Guillaume
Moira McGuinn
Linn Possell

Roger Paul Richardson
15 Years
Robert W. Asinger

20 Years
Richard W. Baker
Hiram Irizarry
Thomas C. Lacey
David R. Pitt
James E. Reilly

25 Years
Bryan G. Fulwider
Leigh G. McCaffrey
James D. Rapp
Jean Milan Simpson
James C. Wood

30 Years
Deborah P. Kaiser-Cross
Robert E. Melhorn
Frederick F. Rhines
Ruth M. Richardson

35 Years
Walter E. Barker
Carlan D. Helgeson
James T Mory
Eileen O. Norrington

40 Years
Michael F. Evans
Clifford M. Lawrence, Jr.
Thomas R. Niblock
James M. Willis

45 Years
James Edward Boler
Vincent W. Carroll
Johannes F. Fourie
Barry L. Johnson
Dale G. Kent
William G. Nix
Paul H. Scheele
Gordon J. Svoboda

50 Years
Thomas C. Brenner
Milan Kralik Brown
Charles E. Randle

55 Years
Dolphus J. Allen, Jr.
Arthur W. Stevens
Garth R. Thompson

60 Years
Ben E. J. New
Jack A. Smith, Jr.

65 Years
Linus L. Wierwill
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<td>Fruitland Park/Pilgrims’ UCC</td>
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<td>Hallandale/The Lord’s House UCC (2011)</td>
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<td>Tavares/Union Congregational Church</td>
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<td>The Villages/UCC at</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yulee (Fernandina Beach) / New Vision Congregational (2011)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**MEMORIES -- for all who...**

Extend their hearts, hands and hugs across the water

Naples UCC supports a school for handicapped children in Honduras
## MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Church/Location</th>
<th>Institution/Program</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria Anderson</td>
<td>Coral Gables Congregational UCC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Andrews</td>
<td>Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg</td>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison Baker</td>
<td>Windermere Union UCC</td>
<td>Chicago Theological Seminary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian Beason</td>
<td>Longwood Hills Congregational UCC</td>
<td>Asbury Theological Seminary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Bird</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynn Blevins</td>
<td>First Congregational Church/Orlando</td>
<td>Methodist Theological School</td>
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<td>Rosario Bottari</td>
<td>Miami Lakes Congregational Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra Cencebaugh</td>
<td>First UCC/Hollywood</td>
<td>Florida International University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donna Cooney</td>
<td>UCC/St. Augustine</td>
<td>Florida Center for Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenny Gragg</td>
<td>Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami</td>
<td>Princeton University (approved for Ordination pending a Call)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zach Graves</td>
<td>United Church of Gainesville</td>
<td>Graduated from Candler School of Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rick Harrell</td>
<td>First Congregational Church/Sarasota</td>
<td>Bethel Seminary</td>
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<td>Cynthia Lee</td>
<td>Miami Beach Community Church</td>
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<td>Lisa LeSeuer</td>
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<td>John D. Letson</td>
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<td>Florida Center for Theological Studies</td>
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<td>Sara Martz</td>
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<td>Amy Rovell-Rix</td>
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<td>Greg Smith</td>
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<td>Ronald A. Thompson</td>
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<td>Terri Vincent</td>
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<td>Paul Werner</td>
<td>First United Church of Tampa</td>
<td>Florida Center for Theological Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pierce Withers</td>
<td>United Church in Tallahassee</td>
<td>Andover Newton Theological School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## MEMORIES -- for all who ...

- **Remember their church’s past**
  - Looking over memorabilia at First Church of North Miami Congregational’s centennial celebration

- **Help others help themselves**
  - Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg helps SERRV provide opportunity and support for artisans and farmers worldwide
I am honored to represent the Florida Conference as a member of the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ. While my term of service on EC will be ending this Summer at General Synod, I have been nominated to serve as a member of the new United Church Board. This board will consist of 36 elected members along with 16 ex-officio members, including our Collegium officers, six Conference Ministers and others representing our partner agencies. This Unified Governance plan, which we affirmed in 2012 at our Conference Annual Meeting, will take effect fully at the conclusion of this Summer’s Synod in Long Beach. Unified governance will provide more effective and efficient leadership in the national setting of our church.

The Executive Council serves on behalf of the General Synod between meetings of that body. We review the work of the national church and our partner agencies and set policy guidelines for the work of our denomination.

I am pleased to report that the successful dinner our Conference sponsored at Synod in Tampa in 2011 will be repeated in Long Beach. This time the event will kick off a one million dollar campaign to support new and renewing congregations in the UCC. Because of a single $50,000 sponsorship, 100% of the proceeds will go toward the campaign. You will be hearing more about this in the near future, but it is hoped that those attending Synod will purchase tickets and that local churches will offer leadership gifts.

In his report to us, UCC General Minister and President Rev. Geoffrey Black celebrated the pardon of the Wilmington Ten -- UCC church workers wrongly convicted and imprisoned for their organizing work in the ‘70s. He announced an effort to lead an ecumenical campaign against gun violence, reported on his continuing work to establish a theological commission in the UCC and a Mission Planning Council, which would strategize on how best to serve other settings of the church. Reminding us that “stretched resources force creativity,” he invited our partnership. In visiting local churches, he has discovered that thriving congregations have discovered new and different ways to do church, embracing the bold values of the UCC.

Pension Board President Michael Downs reported on the health of our pension and health insurance plans. They are preparing the necessary information for congregations and conferences concerning the new national health insurance plan and its impact on local congregations. He pointed out that “adherence” -- or following recommended treatment plans by individuals -- would cover most of the cost of health care in this country and that greater adherence by members of the UCC health insurance plan has helped us keep our costs lower. This year marks the 100th anniversary of our Pension Plan, which was created by a group of congregations in Southern California. This anniversary soon will be celebrated at Synod 29.

The Collegium reported on the initial response to Mission 4/1 Earth, a 50-day shared resurrection witness of “‘greening up, powering down and mobilizing for the sake of the earth.” The goal is to involve local church members in one million hours of direct service for earth care, plant one million trees and write 100,000 letters to Members of Congress supporting the earth. Local churches have been encouraged to put their own spin on this effort between Easter and Pentecost 2013.

The Collegium of officers reviewed its work and offered specific examples related to their implementation of the four “biggies” -- or Bold, Inspirational Goals, Bold, Public Voice The UCC is a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God’s ever-unfolding mission. Welcoming, Reachable Congregations There is a welcoming UCC community of faith that is accessible to all — no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey. Engaged Discipleship Every UCC person is well-equipped to be growing in faith, be theologically conversant and be active in the global mission of the church. Excellent, Diverse Leaders The UCC has a wealth of prepared, excellent leaders that reflect the diversity of God’s beloved community.

It was reported that in advance of and in preparation for unified governance, the Cleveland office would be reorganized to better serve local congregations. Don Clark has now been employed as General Counsel for the UCC.

On the financial front there was a slight increase in OCWM giving: 2012 receipts were $95,000 higher than in 2011. This good news was offset by the reality that Conferences continue to retain a larger share of OCWM money. Serious work is in progress toward developing a new covenant of giving to further communication and cooperation between all settings of the church. This new covenant would help move our financial development programs from a transactional (institutionally and need focused) posture to a relational one (responsive and donor centered) to encourage greater involvement in philanthropy. Church-wide conversation on this topic will be initiated in the next two years.

Thank you for the privilege of serving. I welcome your comments or questions. You can reach me at rpatterson@naplesucc.org. To learn more about the work of the Executive Council and to read minutes, financial reports and other resources go to ucc.org/executive-council/.
The experiences gained and the development of relationships with others on this Board as we worked throughout the wider church have been not only invaluable but enlightening as well. Due to limited space in this Annual Report, I will only highlight a few salient points.

The Wider Church Ministries (WCM) Board convened in November 2012 at the Church House in Cleveland in pursuit of the business at hand. The first order of business dealt with the sale of properties owned by WCM. It is important to note that the Wider Church Ministries has accumulated many properties in a host of other countries. However, because of very stringent laws, the money from the sale of these properties cannot be returned to the United States; therefore, our attorneys as well as Area Executives from the respective countries are working out the very best solutions for where these monies are to be directed and appropriately used. Affected properties where attention is presently focused during this meeting are in Japan and Bulgaria. It was approved for our attorneys to follow through with the appropriate Area Executive and Ministers/Executives in the respective countries to negotiate in the best interest of WCM and once the sale is complete to direct the money where it will do the most good.

Please know that it has been my good fortune to serve as Chair of the Personnel Committee and to work with Human Resources in an effort to foster equity across the board for staff as well as the Collegium of Officers. Eligible staff was able to receive reasonable increases from a limited pool of dollars.

The Board also voted to adopt the Clergy Housing Allowance designated for all UCC employees who are ordained ministers and in good standing with the denomination. The medical insurance did not increase, but there was a slight increase to the dental insurance.

Other action included the approval of the establishment of the Haiti Limited Term Endowment Fund. This fund would be established with an initial transfer from the UCC Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund in the amount of $1,000,000.

The WCM Board voted at this meeting to approve the new Governance structure that will be presented at the General Synod in 2013. All of the Covenanted Ministries voted to affirm the new Governance (the United Church Board). While the size of the new Board has severely decreased, every effort was made to have representation of the various groups across the spectrums which comprise the United Church of Christ.

The joint Boards also had an opportunity to meet on March 8-11, 2013, in Cleveland. Much of the discussion at this meeting, especially with WCM, was to clarify and make an attempt to allay any fears or reservations regarding the new Governance board. Since many Board member terms will end after General Synod, this meeting provided a time for reflecting and gaining a sense of vision and direction in terms of where the UCC is heading under this new structure.

It has been my fond pleasure to represent you on the Wider Church Ministries Board.

Memories -- for all who...

Serve smiles while serving meals to the hungry

Help keep their church looking good

Venice UCC

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park celebrating creating a mosaic of the Good Samaritan out of 40,000 tiles
The Community Church of Vero Beach (CCOVB), the host church for the 113th Annual Meeting (or Gathering) of the Florida Conference, is a 2,100+-member congregation located on two+ blocks in a shaded residential neighborhood home to several other churches. With its new and renovated buildings, the comfortable campus and facilities are very much state-of-the-art, but the hugely gracious extravagant UCC welcome to delegates and visitors was as warm and old-fashioned as it could be.

Prior to the official start of the Gathering on Friday, two workshops on utilizing social media were offered on Thursday. Both were held in the CommMotion Youth Center facility, a new wing off the Education building. Facilitated by Neal Watkins (Director of Youth Ministry at CCOVB) and Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund (UCC/New Smyrna Beach), about 50 early birds to the Annual Gathering were learning about Facebook and using the social media in ministry through “educating, engaging and empowering.” The afternoon concluded with a reception in the Courtyard.

More attendees began arriving at registration Friday morning and to participate in two workshops – “There’s an APP for That!” – which covered ten different topics including ministering to seniors, mental health ministries, responding to natural disasters and best practices in youth ministries, children’s education, financial development, advocacy, social media and outreach. The different sessions were facilitated by clergy and laity alike. After a box lunch under the “big tent” sponsored by UCC Women – during which time the Florida Conference Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry truck was on-site for close-up observation – the scene shifted to the awe-inspiring Sanctuary where the Annual Gathering officially got underway.

Moderator Rev. Dr. Steve Hudder (Christ Congregation-al Church/Miami) called the meeting to order. After a brief worship led by clergy and staff from CCOVB, the afternoon program began – livestreamed, as Conference Minister Rev. Kent Siladi, announced -- “Let the tweeting begin!”

After an introduction by Rev. Kent, keynoter Brian McLaren -- author, speaker, activist and public theologian -- was quick to compliment us in the UCC: “I think you’re on the right track. Don’t stop. Please, please keep moving forward,” he encouraged, suggesting what important things can happen at gatherings such as this. In the UCC he sees that God is Still Speaking, where God is still working and seeking. He encouraged those present to find a different way of understanding the teachings of Jesus, a different framing story from the one taught to most members of the Christian church in the past as a story of humans who “fell” from the
state of grace intended by God and in need of being “saved” from an eternity in “hell.” Brian described the teachings of Jesus to be a very different message.

He closed quoting Ivan Illich, the Austrian philosopher and Roman Catholic priest (who was once asked, “What is the most revolutionary way to change society: Is it violent revolution or is it gradual reform?” He answered: “Neither. If you want to change society, then you must tell an alternative story.”). Our alternative story, said Brian, is one of healing and hope.

A quorum was met, with 162 delegates registered representing 74 congregations; additionally, 52 visitors had signed in. The first order of business in the afternoon session focused on a report from the Board of Directors delivered by Moderator Hudder. He provided an overview of the Board’s composition, actions taken by the Board since the last annual meeting, discussed the Conference’s budgetary situation and the staff restructuring.

Treasurer Richard Anderson (UCC/Naples) presented his report. The narrative of the 2012 budget was presented by Rev. Jim Kvetko (Miami Shores Community Church), who summarized anticipated income and expenses. A report of the Endowment Corporation was forthcoming from its President, David McFarland (First United Church of Tampa), and Treasurer, Dennis G. Rodrigues (Coral Gables Congregational Church).

When the meeting resumed after the banquet, churches were recognized for their OCWM giving; giving by the top five churches provided 44% of basic support with the next eight churches providing 23%. This was followed by special thanks and recognition given to outgoing Moderator Hudder, Rev. Dr. Bill Wealand for coordinating the annual meeting (his third) and the Annual Gathering Planning Committee for its efforts. Rev. Karen Thompson (Minister for Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations in the national UCC) presented Rev. Kent a special “thank you” gift from the national church for his leadership efforts on behalf of Synod 28. Dr. Bill Wealand (Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry Coordinator) acknowledged the Disaster Ministry Coordinators in the three regions of the state. Kathy Church (Jensen Beach Community Church) provided an update on Open & Affirming in Florida and cited the three churches which have become ONA since the 2011 annual meeting: Venice UCC, Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville and First Congregational Church/ Lake Worth; Faith Family UCC/Tampa, officially set to come into the Florida Conference the next day, had been certified by the national UCC as an ONA congregation, bringing the total in Florida to 44.

Keynoter Brian McLaren completed his address with a continuation of his message of rediscovering the Bible as missional and focusing on the four global emergencies facing us. [For more about Brian, go to his website, http://www.briannmclaren.net/]

The meeting adjourned for the day, allowing time for several affinity groups to meet, including those interested in the Conference finances, LGBT/ONA, youth ministry and Members in Discernment.

Before Rev. Kent gave his Conference Minister address to begin the Saturday morning session, he introduced Revs. Larry and Sandy Reimer, co-Pastors of the United Church of Gainesville, who will be retiring from parish ministry, Larry after having served 38 years at UCG.

Grieving, perceiving and believing were the touchstones of Rev. Kent’s address, and he reflected on where we find ourselves:

“We are grieving. We are grieving over the loss of the church we once knew, of the structures that we once created and loved, of the impact that the changes in our world have on us.”

Quoting UCC President and General Minister Geoffrey Black: “When I hear about the future of the church, I get nervous. We have all heard the stories of decline and diminishment. However, when I talk about the church of the future I get excited. I want us to focus not on the future of the church but rather the church of the future.”

Believing. “I believe we need a big idea…. What if together we agreed that our Conference, this community of churches, this expression of faith, this tribe would engage in believing that we are called to….Love God and love neighbor? That’s it? Yep, that’s it. Now while it is not an original idea, it is a foundational belief on which to hang our collective hats.

“Yes,” he said. “we are grieving, perceiving and believing. The United Church of Christ in Florida is blessed with wonderful churches and leaders attempting to live with the changing realities of our time. As we move into the future together, let
Celebrate Florida
2012 Year in Review

us do so with confidence that this is God’s future, God’s time and that as we rely on God’s presence and guidance – we will indeed find our way! Thanks be to God!"

Three resolutions were then considered and voted upon. “Embracing the Vision of the UCC in Florida,” developed by the Board of Directors, was presented, discussed, modified and adopted to read: “It is the primary goal of the Florida Conference United Church of Christ to encourage, help foster and equip local congregations to become more vital and faithful communities in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.” The resolution then goes on to outline assets of the Conference, challenges being faced, “A Way Forward” and goals for which to strive:

- Invest in technologies and social media to build connections among the churches
- Provide a variety of resources to local churches around specific areas of need e.g., worship, evangelism, leadership development, stewardship, financial development, youth and young adults, communication strategies, interfaith resources and promotion of core values
- Build an infrastructure of relationships between and among churches to foster sharing of best practices, learning from mistakes and failures and networking around congregational needs

Another resolution urged the Governor and state legislature to amend Florida’s concealed carry law and the third called upon the Conference to foster conversations about racial profiling. Each was adopted.

The 2012 budget was passed as was the slate of candidates put forth by Chair Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund (UCC/New Smyrna Beach) on behalf of the Nominating Committee.

Faith Family Community Church/Tampa, a congregation which had been in discernment, officially was voted into the Conference. This was followed by Annual Gathering Planning Committee Chair Bill Wealand recognizing several of the individuals who helped with key aspects of the Gathering

In his “Parting Reflections,” outgoing Moderator Dr. Steve Hudder invoked UCC General Minister Rev. Geoffrey Black’s comments about worrying about the “future of the church” versus the “church of the future” and how we decide to address change by shifting our focus. What brings him hope, he says, are technological changes that are enabling people to sit in front of their computers to watch the Annual Gathering proceedings streamed and the impact he has seen his e-devotionals have touching people’s lives. We are embracing the church of the future this weekend, he declared, seeing the “glimmers and signposts” of the “good and rightful” things accomplished at this gathering.

The closing worship sermon, “Oh, the Places You Will Go,” was delivered by host Pastor, Rev. Dr. Bob Baggott. Referring to the popular book by Dr. Seuss, Dr. Bob addressed the potential we can realize in the call when we listen for and hear God’s Word. The service was filled with uplifting music from the choirs, soloists, bell ringers and Music Ministry staff. A “Time of Memory and Thanksgiving” was shared to remember clergy who have passed since our last time together. The newly-elected officers, Board and committee members were installed. An offering was collected totaling $1,788, which was designated for OCWM.

Communion was shared, worship concluded and the Annual Gathering adjourned. The gathered departed, fed, nourished and ready to heed our keynoter and Conference Minister’s message from 1 John 3:18: “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”