As we begin to plan the 2020 Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference, I continue to reflect upon and be grateful for the keynote work of the 2019 gathering in Orlando in which Dr. Velda Love and Dr. Bernice Powell-Jackson (First United Church of Tampa) helped us begin a Conference-wide conversation about race.

The timing was good for me, personally, as I’d just finished reading Robin DeAngelo’s book titled White Fragility in which I encountered an invitation to explore what it means to be white in America these days. More so, the book served to invite me into a reflection on where I fit into the larger cultural systems that underride my place in society while systematically oppressing people of color in ways both overt and covert. My own exploration has continued; I experienced a profound visit to Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, last November and heard the testimony of colleagues lifting up the positive impacts of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s as well as offering a blunt sharing of deep pain at the struggles that continue into the second decade of the 21st century. This is a topic that has grabbed onto my spirit and which caused me to claim — in a way that frankly shocked some people — that I am, in fact, a racist.

John McWhorter wrote in The Atlantic: “Racist is a word of our times, indicative that social history does include intellectual progress. It has evolved into a word that asks of us a degree of psychological, anthropological, and sociohistorical sophistication.” (July 2019)

Evolved, indeed. Many toss the term around quite carelessly, especially against people we wish to demonize. It’s a word we use about others but not to describe ourselves; a word to indicate someone’s hatefulness, bigotry and intentional bias. If that’s the way people hear the word “racist” when I say it, or even attribute it to myself, that’s not the way I am using the word. I join McWhorter in asking for a higher level of thinking about what it means to me.

So, let me try to explain what I meant when I stood in front of delegates and visitors to the Annual Gathering and said, “By the definition I am offering here, I am a racist.” This might seem inadequate to one or all, but that’s why I am inviting conversation: so that we might grow together in exploring what it means to be...

(From Celebrate Florida, December 2019/January 2020)

Thanksgiving Gift to Fund Immokalee Land Buy
BY CONNIE LARKMAN
UCC NEWS, NOVEMBER 26

The Florida Conference United Church of Christ and its congregations, with support from UCC Justice and Local Church Ministries, is giving a longtime partner a special gift this Thanksgiving.

The faith groups, through a three-week fundraising campaign, will be providing more than $200,000 to the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance, Inc., money to complete a land purchase the IFHA for future construction and will be forwarded as a gift from the Florida Conference toward that effort.

...continued on page 2

Update on the Immokalee Land Purchase Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>56,597.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>100,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National setting</td>
<td>50,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (as of 1/16/2020)</td>
<td>$215,247.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$200,000 has been forward to the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) for their land purchase. Remaining gifts are being held in the Conference pending an expected capital campaign by the IFHA for future construction and will be forwarded as a gift from the Florida Conference toward that effort.
it means to be a diverse people living together under the veil of unity. For the sake of that conversation, let me try this out:

I am a middle class white male raised in a middle class white neighborhood 60 years ago. I am a direct beneficiary of institutional white privilege, and those benefits accrue to me daily even in the year 2020. In so far as those benefits accrue to me without my doing anything to have earned them — and in so far as I don’t recognize that privilege on a regular basis while also raising my voice in protest that those benefits don’t accrue to everyone based on their full humanity — I am a racist. (I don’t do an adequate job of recognizing my privilege; I do my utmost to raise the aforementioned protest).

Being a racist doesn’t mean I use the N-word or that I display obvious prejudice against people of color. Far from it, I hope. It means I am still learning about how to deal with what whiteness means while also delving into deeper understandings of what it means to be a person of color. It makes white privilege MY problem to work on instead of a problem to be overcome by the very people that privilege negatively impacts. It places the onus on me to fight for and make change and demand justice. It doesn’t mean I am a bad person. It means I’m still learning about what it means to be fully human even as I try to embrace others in the fullness of their own humanity.

I know that conversations like this are happening in some settings across the Conference, and I encourage all of us to dive deeply into what it means to recognize privilege and renounce racism. We’ll want to continue the conversation we began in 2019 well into the years to come. That’s why our 2020 Annual Gathering will include an emphasis on the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

The main objectives of the International Decade are as follows:

- Promote respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African descent, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies;
- Adopt and strengthen national, regional and international legal frameworks according to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

This is gospel work for a gospel people!

Our Gathering will take place October 8-10 at Coral Gables Congregational UCC, and I am glad to be in community with you as I try to figure out what all of this means to me in my own continuing evolution. I’m anxious to know what it means to you, too, whoever you are and wherever you are on your life’s journey. To that end,

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

---

**Immokalee...**

“We want to offer a gift of thanksgiving for the people who make it possible for us to feast,” said Conference Minister the Rev. John Vertigan.

The Florida Conference was spurred into action through a challenge to its Board of Directors. At the Conference’s annual gathering last month, more than 100 UCCers from 51 churches pressed participation in an ecumenical effort supporting Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance’s effort to buy a nine-plus-acre parcel of land in Collier County. The IFHA needed the last chunk of funding — $200,000 — to finalize the sale.

“We needed to raise $200,000 to enable the building of more than a 100 affordable housing units,” Vertigan said. “That’s a pretty good investment!”

On October 30, the Florida Conference Board approved an initial $100,000 gift, donated from the Conference’s unrestricted reserves, and challenged UCC bodies to match it. Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, immediately responded with $50,000. Vertigan then invited additional gifts and commitments from the churches, to be made by November 25.

**A “Thank You” from Immokalee**

Following are excerpts from a letter dated January 17 received by Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan from the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance:

“This has been an incredible year for the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance, Inc. thanks to the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ, its congregations, support from the UCC Justice and Local Church Ministries and our other supporters.

Less than a year after organizing, you have helped us raise the necessary funds to secure 9.52 acres on Lake Trafford Road in Immokalee upon which to build for secure, affordable, hurricane-resistant rental housing for farm worker families and other low-income residents of Immokalee.”
Allow me to add one more article to the many you’ve likely seen in the last weeks reflecting on last year with an eye toward faithfulness to the Gospel to which we are called. (Thanks, in advance, for indulging me.)

I realize, the longer I am in conference ministry, that Raymond and Leslie and Neal are a most vital component in relationships with local churches. They and the support staff here in Orlando interact with local leaders more frequently than I ever can to support specific ministry objectives that arise on a daily basis. I am thankful for Dave and Dana and Beth in the office, along with the professional staff, for the ministries of leadership they fulfill on your behalf.

I also came to realize anew, about mid-year 2019, that my ministry these days is steeped in administration. Look at the word. ADMINISTRATION. It has ministry right there in it. In the case of my ministry, though, it has lacked (recently, at least) the relational aspects of my vocation that I enjoyed earlier in my career.

Even so, 2019 was a good year administratively!

• We piloted a program of cooperative church mentoring that we will evaluate and hope to expand in 2020. Seven congregations helped with this launch.
• We put into place a Board-approved Safe Conference policy for use when we host events for people of all ages. (Does your church have a safe-place policy?)
• We trained a pool of volunteers for leadership on response teams should allegations of pastoral professional misconduct arise.
• We provided a day-long good governance workshop for our Board of Directors to help them understand their role and responsibilities as leaders in the Florida Conference.
• We performed an audit of our technology needs at 9300 Church House with an eye to significant updates in 2020 that will keep us more current with the evolving digital age.
• We managed a folio of legacy funds that made possible grants to churches and pastors across the state.

I was also privileged to serve on the Board of the United Church of Christ and as a Director with the United Church of Christ Insurance Board.

Maybe none of that sounds exciting from a local church perspective. I understand that. But projects like these are the types that get me out of bed each day with the fervent hope that by doing things like this we create deeper and richer possibilities for shared covenantal relationship that benefits every partner in the Conference.

Thank you for being a partner with us in the Florida Conference. I pray that in the coming year your own ministry – your own way of responding to your baptism – will be faithful and fruitful and as full of potential as even a ministry of administration can be when done for the sake of healthy and meaningful relationship.

To that end … healthy and meaningful relationship – I invite you to be at peace, and be in touch, won’t you.

From e-Celebrate, January 9
Pastors: Here’s your invitation to a place that is:

Safe  Nurturing
Sacred  Insightful
Confidential  Educational
Genuine  Beneficial
Covenantal  Friendly

Doesn’t that sound like a place you’d like to visit? Those are actual testimonials from the UCC’s Conference on Communities of Practice from pastors that are part of these groups. I’m writing to tell you about a covenantal ministry that pastors and chaplains across the country are finding extremely valuable in their ministries, both personally and professionally. With our challenging geography in Florida and many other conferences in the UCC, coupled with the busyness of ministry and the struggles associated with doing church in 2020, pastors need each other more than ever. We need to be able to have a safe space to air our fears, trials, disappointments and likewise to share successes and joys, as well to offer encouragement and ideas to each other.

Communities of Practice (COPs) have proven to be an effective arena in which to do this. COPs are allowing ministers to communicate, grow and learn together while bringing their members into a closer covenant with one another where heretofore they may have felt isolated. I can personally attest to the value of these groups as I have been part of a COP for four years. We are a very close-knit group of Associate Conference Ministers from all across the country. We have laughed, cried, struggled and prayed together. This group and their collective wisdom have been invaluable to me as I’ve learned and grown in my ministry in the Florida Conference. I owe them a great debt of gratitude.

More objectives of these communities are to strengthen and sustain pastors by:

• Preparing for a church whose future we cannot yet see or imagine.
• Offering care, support and accountability;
• Developing and honing good habits and practices of ministry;
• Strengthening practices of pastoral leadership;
• Preparing for a church whose future we cannot yet see or imagine.

Last year we introduced COPs in the Florida Conference, and we currently have three groups meeting, totally about 14 pastors/chaplains. Because I know of the great benefits of these groups to others, I plan to write a grant in hopes that the Florida Conference will help foster more of these groups, offering trained facilitators for each group. There are already facilitators volunteering for this opportunity.

We do it by:

• Sharing resources
• Nurturing holy friendships
• Seeking the experience and expertise of others
• Processing real conflicts in our ministry settings and more

All we need is pastoral participants currently active in ministry — any authorized ministry. This beneficial two-hour-a-month commitment may have you offering up tributes such as those above.

Often we think we don’t have time for something like this, just like we may not feel we have time for meditation, a pastoral visit or a deep conversation, but if we persevere and take the time, we find we have been so blessed by the experience.

Won’t you consider this invitation to do something for yourself that will benefit you, your church or your other place of ministry? I feel it is a vital component to my spiritual, physical and emotional health. I’d love to share this experience with more of you in the Florida Conference. Many churches are requiring participation in COPs, listing them as an essential element in their call agreements. COPs have proven beneficial to so many people. Won’t you accept the invitation?

Please reach out to me with your questions, concerns or commitments (letheredge@uccfla.org). HURRY! The party starts soon, and you don’t want to miss it!

From “Conference Call,” e-Celebrate, January 23

Can you please help? If you know of someone who could fill any of these vacancies, please call the conference office at (407) 835-7501 and ask for a nomination form for them to fill out. The first two positions will have to be vetted, of course.

We ask for your support at this time to keep things running smoothly please!

Beware of Scams

A number of our UCC Florida pastors recently reported hacks of addresses on their e-mail lists so that persons are receiving pleas that gift cards or money be sent to the “clergy” person. The sender’s e-mail address may look legitimate but you should be able to notice the difference from the real address your pastor uses. Be skeptical of any sort of e-mail you receive with such suspicious messages and do not respond. Notify your pastor if you are the recipient of such e-mails.
Data Hub Open for Church Yearbook Reports

Yep, it’s that time again … time for all United Church of Christ churches to gather up their numbers and information and submit their reports for the 2019 UCC Yearbook!

We’re asking all churches in the Florida Conference to please submit their reports by no later than the end of the day on Wednesday, February 28. The Data Hub will close, and churches will no longer be able to enter their reports after midnight on Wednesday, March 4.

As has been the case for the last several years, all church data must be submitted online, directly into the UCC Data Hub. But fear not, although the way the Data Hub looks has changed a little over the years, the process is almost exactly the same as last year. So if you entered your reports in the Data Hub last year, filing your reports this year should be a snap. And, of course, we’re here to help if needed.

We know you’re busy, especially at the start of a new year. But filing your reports really is important. “Why,” you ask. Well, you’ll find just a few good reasons here.

If you find the old paper forms useful for gathering up all your information before entering it into the Data Hub, you may download updated blank forms below:

- Local Church Report Form
- Ministerial Support Form

To log in to the UCC Data Hub, go to http://datahub.ucc.org/. For your “User Name”, use the Florida Conference number (12) followed by your church number, including leading zeroes, for a total of five to six digits. You can find the number you should use for your church in the Conference Directory. (By the way, please let Dave know at dcyril@uccfla.org if any of the information in your church listing in the directory needs to be updated.)

So, using The Church By the Sea/Bal Harbour (Church 30 in the Florida Conference) as an example, their User Name would be 120030. Using Holiday United Church of Christ (Church 155 in the Florida Conference) as another example, their User Name would be 120155.

The passwords for all churches have been reset to “password” (without the quotes).

Once you’ve logged in, you will be prompted to change your password immediately. Please make sure to write your new password down and put it somewhere where you’ll be able to find it later. Then click the blue “Continue” button.

At this point, you should see a page that says “Welcome to the UCC Data Hub for entering 2019 church data!” If you submitted your reports online last year, you can then click “My Church” in the black navigation bar at the top of the page. You should then see your church name and number, followed by several tabs below. By default, the first tab, “Main Info” should be selected. On this tab and the next (“Addresses”), just confirm that all the information is correct. If not, make whatever changes are appropriate and then click the blue “Update” button at the top of the page to save your changes. You must click “Update” or your changes will not be saved.

The actual reports that you’re all familiar with are under the next four tabs, “Membership”, “Attendance”, “Finance” and “Ministerial Support”. When you click on these tabs, you’ll see a black table header below, followed by all your church data from previous years. Just above that header and below the tabs, you’ll find a button to click to enter your data from 2019. It will say “Add New xyz Year Data”, where the xyz is the name of the tab, for example, “Add New Membership Year Data” under the “Membership” tab. When you click on that, you’ll get the form you need to complete as a pop-up. When you’ve entered all your data, simply click the blue “Add” button at the bottom of the form to submit and save the data. You must click “Add” or your data will not be saved.

If you start entering your data and then need to attend to something else, just save your data as described above, then come back later and pick up where you left off. To do so, log in, click “My Church” and then the tab for the report you want to edit, and finally, click the little pencil to the left of 2019 in the top row of data. Or, if you discover that one of the numbers you entered is incorrect, you can come back and change it later, as long as it’s before March 4. After that, only conference or national staff can make changes.

If this is your first time submitting your reports online, you might want to visit the online Data Hub tips and tutorials section before you get started. Under “Video Tutorials” on this page, you will find video walk-throughs for each of the reports you need to submit. Just above those are a few helpful links — “Definitions Tip Sheet for Local Churches”, “Other UCC Giving” and “Yearbook Guide to Total Church Participants and Community Engagement Categories”, and there’s a link to “Church Yearbook Instructions” from the national setting that covers what we’ve just covered above in much more detail.

Once again this year, there is a short, supplemental survey the national setting would like you to complete. If you submit your annual reports and complete the survey, your church will be entered into a drawing for one of 40 prizes.

Once again, if you need help getting your Yearbook reports submitted, we’re here for you. Please feel free to call or email Dave Cyril at 407/835-7501 or dcyril@uccfla.org with any questions or challenges you may encounter. And if, for any reason, you are unsure or uncomfortable entering the data online yourself, just call to set up a time with us to either walk you through the process or have us take your information over the phone and enter it for you.
Being Church

Wonder How YOU Could Make a Difference?

Have you ever been concerned about the church’s funding — wished you could help more — but thought to yourself, “I just don’t have enough money to make an impact”? When we were raising money because of a sudden demise of an expensive air conditioner, some of us probably did feel that way. Many of us dug extra deep and scraped together more funds than we usually do. We made personal sacrifices to help our church in a time of need. (Those of us who live in Florida understand how essential a functioning air conditioner is!) But even as we scrambled to contribute more, I know I heard folks say, “I wish I could do more!”

Two women found a creative way to DO MORE! Donna Lambert made up some sweet gift baskets designed to appeal to a number of people… baskets for kids… one basket for ages over 21 that included some adult beverages… there was a variety of baskets designed to interest different folks. Donna, with the help of her mother, Germaine, put together the attractive baskets and made her own poster to advertise the baskets. Week after week she would bring the baskets out of the storage closet to display in Community Hall and she sold her tickets. At the end of coffee hour, she would lug the baskets back to the storage closet until the next week. Over about a month, Donna sold raffle tickets and then drew winning tickets for the baskets at the end of her ticket selling time. Donna found a way to DO MORE!

Sabrina Conroy wanted to help more, too. She does inspirational artwork and she and her husband displayed her artwork in Community Hall for a number of weeks. Sabrina made sure to sell her work at prices people could afford (it is much more in her studio), and the work she did encouraged so many hearts and found loving spots in many of our homes. Her project touched many hearts AND the artwork she sold raised a significant amount of money for our new air conditioner.

Together, Donna and Sabrina raised about $1,300 for our air conditioner. Could either woman have done it from their own bank accounts? No, but with God’s nudge in their hearts, they knew that wasn’t a limit to their helping. Each one felt a call and used their own loving enthusiasm and gifts to make a difference! We are SO GRATEFUL!

From the January/February THE UNITED VOICE, the newsletter of UCC/New Smyrna Beach

Churches Tithe, Too

We’re all familiar with the Biblical concept of tithing, whereby congregants give a tenth portion of their resources to God. Well, in a sense, churches also tithe.

While it’s customary to think that the tithes to our church go for paying staff salaries, the electric bill and coffee for Fellowship hour, probably all of our congregations also contribute some of those tithing dollars to community organizations down the street as well as to far-flung groups on the other side of the globe.

Our Florida churches — both large and small, wealthy and not-so-much — direct a portion of their funds — maybe 10%, perhaps less or maybe more — to outside groups and organizations. And many share in communications with their congregants exactly where these dollars are going. By doing this, parishioners can better understand the identities of the recipients of their offerings and take pride in the difference they are making in the lives of those in need.

Celebrate Florida has received a couple of church communities that share with their members how their funds have been distributed. We think this is a helpful practice that can both educate church members about how their tithes are being used and perhaps motivate them to contribute even more.

Naples UCC shared with its members that it had distributed over $525,000 in 2019 — equal to 30% of its budget — to causes that included:

• $400,000 to Habitat for Humanity of Collier County (which built eight homes)
• $5,000 to Baby Basics of Collier County
• $16,000 to Church World Service for Hurricane Dorian relief and other support
• $13,000 to St. Matthew’s House (for homeless recovery programs)
• $7,000 toward nursing, teaching and seminary scholarships
• $38,000 for assistance to those in need in Guatemala.

At the United Church of Gainesville, in 2019 its outreach giving came to almost $85,000 above and beyond its regular pledge income. The congregation’s donations included:

• Over $30,000 to support Youth United’s trip to Puerto Rico
• Over $12,000 to support the Wilson Health Ministry fund in honor of former Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Shelly Wilson
• Over $20,000 to its Food 4 Kids Backpack program
• Over $3,000 to support the Mommy Reads Program

Also over 300 gifts to the Rawlings Christmas Gift Market, which raised over $1,100 that will go directly back to the school. Members gave over 3,700 lbs of food to the Gainesville Community Ministries food pantry. Almost $4,000 was given to support Growing Hope Globally, and through Mommy Reads there were 536 books and recordings sent to children of incarcerated women.
A Time for a Rebirth?

by Rev. David Westcott
First Congregational UCC/Orange City

I hope that those who attended my lecture on Michelangelo enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed doing it, and I hope that others will plan on joining us for my next presentation, “Madonna and Child: Duccio to Raphael”. For starters we will look at some beautiful works of art by Giotto, Duccio, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael. Looking at these works will show the stylistic and aesthetic evolution leading to, and including, the Renaissance.

Hopefully, it will also open doors to other avenues of thought. For one it will give us an opportunity to consider a Biblical figure far too often overlooked in our Reformed tradition, i.e., Mary, the mother of Jesus. Let us not forget that in counting our Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters, as well as many Anglicans and Lutherans, Mary remains an important part of spirituality and devotion for the vast majority of Christians in the world. If for nothing else, we should seek understanding of her place in church history for the sake of ecumenical understanding.

The period covered in the lecture (13th to 16th centuries) was a watershed for Western civilization, as well as for the history of the church. Ideas that began brewing in the late Middle Ages came to an explosive revolution in the 16th century in which Renaissance ideals ran side-by-side with the Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, and there was a lot of cross-pollination taking place between what was taking place in northern Europe and in Rome. We saw evidence of this reflected in Michelangelo’s later drawings.

Some historians in the past have described the Renaissance as “the Middle Ages minus religion.” Among other things I believe that this is contradicted by the art of the era, as well as the thought behind that art. The explosiveness of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation would not have occurred in a society devoid of religious passion.

The word “renaissance” comes from the French and means “rebirth.” For many behind the changes taking place they were driven by the hope of a rebirth of what they saw as a golden age – the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. It was also a “rebirth” in the sense that it was a response to the Black Death (bubonic plague) that had wiped out as much as half the population of Europe in the 14th century. And there was more taking place than just changes in art and architecture, and religion. There were changes taking place in literature, technology and science – as well as the breakdown of the feudal system, all beginning to set the stage for the modern era.

Could it be that we are living in a time much in need of a rebirth? Certainly, that is the case in the western church! And could the arts play a major role in bringing that about?

From the December newsletter of First Congregational UCC/Orange City

A Free Art Lecture Series
(with an emphasis on Christian Imagery)

All lectures, 12 noon at the Church
201 West University Avenue, Orange City (Jane Murray Hall behind the Sanctuary)

Thursday, January 16 — Madonna and Child: Duccio to Raphael
Thursday, March 19 — Spiritual Imagery: Gauguin and VanGogh
Thursday, June 18 — The Gospel According to Rembrandt

Lecturer: Rev. David Westcott (Pastor) graduated from Southern Connecticut State University majoring in Philosophy and Art History. He went on to receive a Master of Divinity Degree from the Yale University Divinity School, followed by doctoral studies at Andover Newton Theological School where he taught a course on Theological Aesthetics with Professor Robin Jenson.

Back Bay 2021 Mission Trip Calendar Now Open

It’s time to start scheduling your organization’s or church’s 2021 mission trip!

Mission trips to Back Bay Mission are great opportunities for learning, service, and fellowship. These week-long immersive mission experiences teach participants about poverty on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and prepare groups to serve in their own communities.

Our 2021 mission trip calendar is now open. Click here to view the 2021 Mission Trip Calendar.

Popular dates, especially during the summer and spring break season, fill up fast. Please be patient as we return all email requests and update our calendar.

Click here to learn more about mission trips at Back Bay Mission, including how to register!

Dates are still available for 2020. Click here to view the 2020 Mission Trip Calendar.

Opportunity
Celebrating Florida has received the following message from Rev. Jack Copas, Pastor of Boynton Beach Congregational UCC, and we are sharing it with our readers.

Much of what we read on these pages celebrates all the “good news” happening in our Florida congregations. But we are very mindful that many of our churches are doing the good that they can while they are seriously challenged simply to remain viable. From what Pastor Jack is telling us, Boynton Beach Congregational is discovering it still has life left in it. “Being Church” often can mean getting back to the basics and rising to the occasion to get beyond just hanging in there. We wish them all the best!

Our Journey of Discernment
BY REV. JACK COPAS
PASTOR, BOYNTON BEACH CONGREGATIONAL UCC

I am the pastor of the Boynton Beach Congregational United Church of Christ. We sold our building to the City of Boynton Beach, and our departure date from this building is February 29, 2020. We have called this building home for 44 years. Before we bought it in 1976 it was a bank, and it still shows remnants of being designed to be a bank.

We are working with due diligence to move into a temporary facility until we decide which direction our ministry is headed:

• merge with another UCC Church
• stay on our own as a congregation and enter into an aggressive evangelism program to meet some needs of our community
• partner with interdenominational congregations to do work together that up til now has only been the brain-child of some highly progressive people, etc.

We just don’t know yet where we will end up, but we are determined to temporarily land somewhere until the dust clears from one location we are leaving to the new location we are headed — wherever that may be.

The Rev. Dr. Raymond Har grove, our Regional Minister, has provided us with astounding consulting leadership as has some people in the Conference office to help us get through this critical time in the life of our church.

What we did in the run-up to this dramatic changing course of our congregation is to intentionally embrace aspects of ministry long forgotten throughout Advent and Christmas. We have begun a revived home communion visitation program and the laity is actively going with me as Pastor to keep contacts with our shut-ins and hospital-bound members.

We held a long-remembered Christmas party in the “parsonage” where our members recalled decades ago holding such an event.

During our worship time members are voicing their favorite hymns they like and remember singing — WITH the hymnals open and WITHOUT jumbo-trons or visual aids. Coffee hours are more attractive with some of our folks taking a Sunday as host. Over the years they stopped doing that for some reason.

I came here in April of 2019, and within the time from then until today we have gone from 15 people attending to 30 people attending. That may not sound like much to you but it means the world to us. These folks were actively considering the option of closing their doors forever and now they are inviting people to church. And last but not least Dennys Fradera is our musical accompaniment on a baby grand piano. During Advent Dennys played a medley of our combined hymns for that day after church worship and no one wants to leave.

My point is that by using the traditional things people remember and love, we used Advent as a time of “real” preparation. We are the church, and the only thing that changed is where we worship and how young we still are able to feel. The average age of our members is 75 to 80+, but we also have some young people (ok, 55 is young to me) who are joining the church. We are also ready to launch our new website.

Our Moderator is Candace Etzler. Her 91-year-old mother, Sally Dye, is a member here and Sally leads our liturgy with me now and then. Candace’s father served this church as a minister.

In less than a year we went from being a congregation on life-support to being a congregation with new life and new ideas. To me our story is exciting and what a way to celebrate God’s Christmas! It is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is, indeed however, the end of the beginning — and if that is not a gift from God, I do not know what is!

“Let people of faith be the love of God personified and let the church be the love of God organized...”

William Sloane Coffin
A January 6 P.S.: We just received one new member this week.

 Churches which are at that point of facing the challenge of deciding “Where do we go from here?” may want to consider New Beginnings. This is an outside assessment process that assists churches with internal discernment to answer one question: What is God calling our congregation to do and be in this time and this place? It is a three-phase process and usually takes six to eight months.

Congregations in our Conference that have been through/are currently going through include: Seabreeze UCC/Daytona Beach, Church of The Palms/Delray Beach, Longwood...
Progress on New Beginnings at Orange City

BY JO PRITCHETT
MODERATOR, FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC/ORANGE CITY

At a recent Council meeting it was mentioned that some people are wondering what has happened since we began the New Beginnings process more than a year ago. This comment made me think I should refresh everyone on what has and is happening.

After our groups met, their thoughts and ideas were compiled into the New Beginnings Report to the Congregation. Some of the ideas were:

• Reach out to the community and our church members by hosting a Health Fair. Wendy Wilson is working on this project and we hope to have an announcement soon about a Health Fair in Fellowship Hall in March.

• Begin the ONA process: Janet Anderson, Sharon Brown and David Putnam will serve as a Steering Committee as we begin this process after the first of the year.

• Invite Meals on Wheels diners to our Thanksgiving dinner. Because most of the diners arrive by VOTRAN, it was felt that it would not be possible for them to join us on a Sunday so this idea was not pursued.

• Provide Visitor Bags and follow up with visitors: This is an ongoing project of the Deacons.

• Establish a plan and financing for maintaining buildings and grounds: Because of Evelyn Waite’s generosity and love for the church, many projects have been completed and the Trustees continue to look at how our buildings and grounds can be improved. The Trustees continue to prioritize maintenance and renovations.

The Rev. Raymond Hargrove, NE Regional Minister of the Florida Conference of the UCC, met with us and encouraged us to try new things and look for new opportunities to serve. There is assistance and support available to us from the Conference.

So, the question remains—has anything come from the New Beginnings process? We have a long way to go to before we become all we can be as a church, but I hope you agree that we have made some progress. I hope that our list of accomplishments will grow in 2020.

From the December newsletter of First Congregational UCC/Orange City

• Consider changing the way our church is organized: Redo By-Laws; plan to address this in the new year.

• Repair carillon: Thanks to Don Kline and the Trustees, we again have music in our parking lot when we arrive for worship.

• Establish a plan and financing for maintaining buildings and grounds: Because of Evelyn Waite’s generosity and love for the church, many projects have been completed and the Trustees continue to look at how our buildings and grounds can be improved. The Trustees continue to prioritize maintenance and renovations.

The Rev. Raymond Hargrove, NE Regional Minister of the Florida Conference of the UCC, met with us and encouraged us to try new things and look for new opportunities to serve. There is assistance and support available to us from the Conference.

So, the question remains—has anything come from the New Beginnings process? We have a long way to go before we become all we can be as a church, but I hope you agree that we have made some progress. I hope that our list of accomplishments will grow in 2020.
Yes, meals are one of the fuels that keep our churches going. Whether they are potlucks, cook-offs, pancake breakfasts, teas, progressive dinners or Lenten suppers, we church people love our food and our fellowship!

And we also know the importance of sharing food with those who often go without. Here are some examples of members of our Florida churches “breaking bread” together as well as extending the gift of food to others.

As part of being a Blue Zones Project congregation, Mayflower UCC/Naples recently had three themed moais potlucks. December’s theme was Christmas and January’s was Italian with February being French/Valentine’s.

On Saturday evening November 9, in Community Hall, UCC/New Smyrna Beach’s John Buchanan and Donnie Coleman hit another home run with their now famous Fish Fry Dinner, supported by their very familiar cooking team of Judy Jodoin and Woody Stasak. Dinner included fried or broiled fish, baked potato with sour cream and butter, hot rolls, coleslaw, hush puppies, choice of pie (apple, pumpkin and chocolate chip) and beverages. Many of the oh-so delicious pies were home-baked by church members and donated to the event. Bill Peterson along with David Le Banc from the Hospitality Committee did an amazing job spearheading the event including promotion, flyers, making tickets and organizing all facets of the event. The fundraiser was a huge success. Not only did they sell 120 delicious dinners and have a fun-packed evening, but they managed to raise $900 for UCCNSB after expenses along with a 50-50 drawing, which provided an additional $75 for the church.

The Community Action Committee at the United Church in Tallahassee recently made a donation to the Farmworkers Association of Florida. The church received a note from the organization’s chairperson, thanking the church for its donation of $250. “You just provided 30 lbs. of food for 12-13 families who otherwise may have found themselves going hungry,” the note read. “With food donations that we get to supplement the special foods. The church is able to buy in bulk these things and provide the nourishment necessary for their health and well-being.

Due to your generosity and several other surprise donations, we believe we will have enough for a much needed event in Belle Glade. We have been praying and obviously our prayers have been heard and answered. Thanks again for making this possible.”

Saturday, January 18 was the annual MLK Hunger Vigil at Coral Gables Congregational UCC. Once again, Sr. Pastor Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner headed up into the church tower at 9am and stayed there until five tons or 10,000 pounds of food for the hungry of South Florida was raised. Actually 12,000 pounds was raised and she was able to come down from the tower in record time. This year the church will share the food with the Miami Rescue Mission that in 2019 provided 990,000 meals for hungry adults, children and families. Some of the donated food will stay right there at the church for its own food pantry. Each and every week they have folks at the church door desperately needing help. This has been especially true this past year as two significant food pantries in the community closed down, and Gables UCC remains the only one open in the area. The gift of money is also a big help as there are families who come in such as the aged, those with special needs children, diabetics, those on chemo, etc. who need special foods. The church is able to buy in bulk these things and provide the nourishment necessary for their health and well-being.

January 28, 2020, marked the first anniversary of First Congregational UCC/Sarasota’s participation in the Community Meal program initiated and held at St. Paul Lutheran Church. On the fourth Tuesday night of each month during 2019, church members prepared and served a hot, balanced, nutritious meal to about 60 people. The November 26 meal was served by church youth and parents, an innovation that was especially appreciated by the guests.

Naples UCC had scores of volunteers to help pack food for distribution at the Harry Chapin Food Bank on Saturday morning, December 7. By popular demand is the Baby Boomers Dinner, which was held on Friday evening, January 10, and the Senior Singles Dinner on Tuesday, January 14.

Members and friends of Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami sampled their way through the church’s 16th Annual Chili Cook-Off on Sunday, January 26, after worship. Cherished family recipes were tasted, savored and voted upon.

The Thanksgiving Box Brigade at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton had a goal of providing eight boxes of food for needy local families but received enough food for 14. In additional more than two dozen cans of assorted foods were donated and delivered to Boca Helping Hands.
Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour participates in the Saturday Morning Pantry Program at St. Joseph’s Church. Church members help package and distribute food to the homeless and food insecure every Saturday morning at St. Joseph’s Church. Members serve a meal on the first Wednesday of every month to anywhere between 300-500 people at the Chapman Center in downtown Miami.

“Love is the point...Lead with Love” was the theme of an evening of food, fellowship and song at Longwood Hills Congregational UCC on Saturday evening, November 9. Music was provided by local theater professionals and musicians, and free will donations were accepted.

January 5 was Food First Sunday at the United Church of Gainesville at which members filled the grocery cart with cans, jars, bottle and boxes of food for the Gainesville Community Ministry. In 2019 the UCG donated over 3,000 pounds of food to this effort – a record for the church.

The fourth annual “Men Who Cook!” took place at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park on Saturday evening, January 25, for the first 80 people to RSVP. The free event, sponsored by the Spirit Keepers men’s group, has become a great way to kick off each year, by enjoying fellowship with members and friends over a delicious meal prepared by many of the men of the church displaying their culinary talents with unexpected treats.

Rev. Booth Iburg at Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach reports that their feeding ministry continues in FWB and in Pensacola and that she was recently contacted by another small church that would like to participate with Eternal Hope in its FWB ministry.

Volunteers from Altamonte Chapel Community UCC/Altamonte Springs will serve lunch at the Orlando Rescue Mission on February 9 and March 8.

The Outreach Ministries at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach prepared a chili dinner — complete with corn bread and brownies — for the residents of CASA (a facility for victims of spousal abuse) on Thursday, January 16. The ever-popular annual all-you-can-eat Shrimp Boil is set for Friday, February 7, with proceeds going to mission activities.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota is throwing a Valentine’s Day potluck on Monday, February 10.

The annual bake sale at First Congregational UCC/Orange City will be held on Sunday, April 5, with proceeds benefiting Duvall Homes, which provides a group home setting for persons with developmental disabilities.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon is collecting soup during the Super Bowl festivities which will be donated to the food pantry at ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization) in Brandon. Last year the congregation collected 350 pounds of soup! On Sunday afternoon, February 2, it will be the Annual Souper Bowl of Caring at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton, with live entertainment and sharing of info about hunger in the area. A lunch of homemade soups and bread will be shared (a $5 donation) with proceeds going to CROS Ministries.

“From Pastor Bernice” by Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson First United Church of Tampa

O K, I admit it ..., I’m angry. Even in this holiday season, even when my heart should be full of hope and joy and peace and love, I’m angry. How in the name of all that is good can we be talking about even more food stamp cuts for the poorest, the hungriest, the most vulnerable at the same time that the stock market is soaring with profits for the wealthiest and tax cuts have kept even more money for the 1% and for corporations, most of which have not re-invested it in employees or plants. This is the third time this year that the administration has proposed cuts in food stamps.

Feeding America predicts that if these cuts are enacted, they will impact seniors, the disabled and working families the hardest. In Florida alone, the estimate is that 200,000 school children will lose access to school meals. That means that many of those 26 children for whom we pack week-end snacks may face losing the meals they get at school during the week. This is unconscionable.

Common sense and science tell us that children who are hungry cannot learn. They cannot make good decisions. They cannot pay attention. Their brains and their bodies cannot properly grow and be nourished.

In the richest nation in the world, why are we cutting food for the most vulnerable? How can we call ourselves people of faith or followers of Christ?

From Courage in the Struggle, the weekly newsletter of First United Church of Tampa, December 6
Riviera UCC Celebrates 130 Years

Since 1889 Riviera UCC/Palm Bay has been serving the community and offering fellowship. In November the congregation celebrated its 130th anniversary all month long with events that included a pancake breakfast, a recitation of the church’s history, a musical performed by the choir and band and a banquet catered by The Source (a non-profit organization that serves the needs of the poor and homeless) at which members spoke about their memories of church life. Pastor Rev. Tim Woodard raised up the name of the church’s Pastor Emeritus, Rev. Jim Allen, who died before Easter at age 103.

Member Margaret-Ann Eisenmenger was quoted in a local newspaper, “We’ve actually just gone through what we call our New Beginnings because our church has gone through some ups and downs,” she said. “We started this New Beginnings with the idea to grow, and there’s a few things we needed to do to change in our attitude and to be more mission-conscious.”

Pastor Tim shared that church members volunteer at Daily Bread on Mondays that the church has reached out to a Haitian community, offering to share Riviera’s space so it can meet there as it forms its new church.

On Saturday morning, November 2, the church invited the community to a free pancake breakfast with flapjacks, sausage, coffee and juice. Later, on Sunday, November 17, the church celebrated its first 130 years with an afternoon concert followed by refreshments.

30 Years at Mayflower

Members and friends of Mayflower UCC/Naples celebrated the congregation’s pearl anniversary on Sunday, January 5.

Not only did they acknowledge their first 30 years but it was also Epiphany Sunday, Communion Sunday and new member Sunday!

A brunch followed worship and members were encouraged birthday gifts to the church of $30 per person.

UCC Abolishes $12.9 Million in Medical Debt in St. Louis

BY CONNIE LARKMAN
UCC NEWS, JANUARY 19

More than 11,000 families in St. Louis will soon be learning that their outstanding medical debt has been forgiven through donations from the United Church of Christ.

Contributions from local churches, regional bodies, the national office and inspired individuals, matched in part by a generous investment from the Deaconess Foundation, have wiped out almost $13 million in debt for low-income households in the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County. UCC leaders shared the news January 18 at Christ the King United Church of Christ, in Florissant, MO. That congregation birthed the idea that triggered this effort, to honor their pastor’s 10th year of leadership, and raised $15,450 for the cause.

Their pastor, the Rev. Traci Blackmon, also Associate General Minister of UCC Justice and Local Church Ministries, shepherded the initiative that was quickly joined by Christ Church UCC in Maplewood, MO, and its pastor, the Rev. Rebecca Turner. “The initiative was a no-brainer for us. As Christian people who walk in the steps of Jesus, it is our joy and duty to care for our neighbor.”

Christ Church gave $17,000 from a designated “Health Fund” that “sat stagnant for years because we lacked a vision for what to do with the money,” Turner said. On top of that, the congregation contributed additional donations totaling more than $24,000.

At the Saturday-morning news conference, which kicked off the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend festivities at Christ the King, clergy and local leaders announced the December purchase of medical debt of 11,108 households, primarily concentrated in south and west St. Louis. UCC church groups raised almost $105,000 and partnered with the New York-based nonprofit RIP Medical Debt to buy the debt at pennies on the dollar. In addition to gifts from Christ the King and Christ Church and the $40,000 match by the Deaconess Foundation, generous contributions came from 12 other UCC congregations, the UCC Missouri Mid-South Conference Council, the St. Louis Association and Justice and Local Church Ministries.

Read the entire article here.
Be Nosey — In a Good Way

Did Joan go on the around the world cruise she’s been planning these past several months? Do you know whether Harold is recuperating at his daughter’s home in Wisconsin? And how about Marie – she’s usually back in Fort Myers for the season by now, have you heard from her?

Oftentimes, the Board of Deacons and the church staff know when a church member is homebound locally and keep tabs on him or her. However, we aren’t always informed by family members or caretakers when a member has prolonged health issues making it difficult for them to attend church functions.

Here’s where the members of the congregation can help out. If you are aware of a member that is homebound or have noticed a member’s prolonged absence but haven’t heard it announced at church, please bring it to the attention of one of the deacons or the church office. Most times we are aware of the members who are homebound locally, but we don’t want to overlook anyone.

Trinity UCC Explores World Religions

BY MARK DEVORE
TRINITY UCC/ST. PETERSBURG

At Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg we have a group that meets every Sunday at 9:30am before service as an “adult” Sunday school. We call ourselves the Spiritual Seekers Group. Participation is open to anyone and we have averaged between six and 12 out of a church membership of 35. This article will describe something that is not common but not necessarily unique.

It started out as a discussion group. For example, one two-week period included each of us individually describing our own spiritual growth and journeys. We learned that many of us have had a variety of experiences that in some cases took decades to lead eventually to the United Church of Christ.

Eventually, about three years ago, we evolved to a quest to learn more about world religions and world philosophical beliefs. We believe that to truly know our neighbors we need to understand them. Understanding results from seeking knowledge, asking questions and keeping an open mind. One might wonder how this affects our Christian belief foundation. It absolutely does not weaken our beliefs — in fact, it strengthens our foundation. We have learned that there are many common threads and common beliefs shared by all of the world religions. In many cases, though the parables and language may be different, there is more in common than not. We also have realized through our study that what we often read in the media, pronounced by individuals or groups, does not always clearly reflect the true religion itself.

In the past three years we have explored Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, native Americans, Jainism, the Axial Age, books and letters that were not included in the Bible, and Christianity. Our most recent exploration was a lecture series comparing Buddha, Confucius, Mohammad and Jesus. It was fascinating, prompting deep conversation. The individual videos are 30 minutes followed by 30 minutes of discussion. We found one particular set of lectures by Professor of Religious Studies Mark Muesse that we felt most engaging (his lectures may be found at https://www.thegreatcoursesplus.com/professors/mark-w-muesse). We also individually supplement our learning with related books.

Our quest for more knowledge about other religions and other cultures may well have been prompted by our multicultural campus. For several years we have found richness through sharing our campus with a Hispanic Christian church and an African-American church. Six years ago we sold our campus to the national conference of the Lao Christian Church. This may well be the spark that led to our Seekers group.

To quote the fourteenth Dalai Lama:

“Always embrace the common humanity that lies at the heart of us all. Always affirm the oneness of human family. Let your heart be softened by the balm of compassion, reflecting deeply upon the needs and aspirations of yourself and others. Let not your differences from the views of others come in the way of the wish for their peace, happiness, and well-being.”

Our most recent exploration began October 20 with a study of the Greek gods set before the Axial Age, Islam and Christianity. Who knows where God’s spirit will lead us after that. What are you curious about?
The Mission and Community Outreach Team at the **Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton** shared a letter recently received from Mari, one of the children sponsored by the church. She lives in Guatemala and is sponsored through Food for the Poor. Basher is another church-sponsored child from Syria, living in Lebanon.

Interested members of **Coral Gables Congregational UCC** were able to receive on Sunday, January 19, an update on recent developments in Haiti from member **Leonie Harmantin**, Deputy Director for the Lambi Fund of Haiti. This non-profit organization supports those in the country’s rural community, who are still recovering from an earthquake a decade ago.

The People for Guatemala mission dinner will be held at **Naples UCC** on Sunday evening, March 22. Two staff members from the organization will present an update on the group’s activities.

---

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

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

- **Rev. Dr. John Danner** (Sanibel Congregational UCC): [www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com/](http://www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com/)
- **Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby** (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): [www.gracetraces.blogspot.com/](http://www.gracetraces.blogspot.com/)
- **New Sacred** – A United Church of Christ blog [www.newsacred.org](http://www.newsacred.org)
Violence in Houses of Worship

The Department of Homeland Security provided some excellent resources in an earlier webinar.

For more information regarding violence in houses of worship and other church safety concerns, go to https://loom.ly/kXVOZdI

Click on image below to watch "Confronting Violence in Houses of Worship" on YouTube.
The comedy play “Gay Amnesia: Relationships Can Be Such a Headache” was presented by Epiphany Theatre in Elliot Hall at UCC/Fort Lauderdale over several weekends in November and into early December. On Saturday, January 11, Unity Church/Fort Lauderdale presented “The Tones of Enchantment” at UCC/FtL—three artists performing a medley of Broadway and popular standards. Donations of canned goods supported Ruth Ministries at the church.

The Tamiami Brass along with Community Minister Rev. Wesley Sneedeke performed at Fort Myers Congregational UCC at its December 22 service. The new Praise Dance Ministry at the church began in January for anyone 14 years and older.

The Art in the Library display at the United Church of Gainesville titled “A Year of Making Faces” features the work of UCG member Heidi Stein and is the product of a year-long mixed media class.

Naples UCC hosted the Festival Singers for a concert in the Sanctuary on Saturday afternoon, January 4. Under the direction of Dr. Kevin Fenton, the group is a highly select, auditioned choral ensemble consisting of men and women from throughout Florida. A concert featuring soprano Sarah Moyer with Nathan Salazar on the piano took place on Friday evening, January 10, with the Naples debut of Ansel Norris on the trumpet on Saturday afternoon, January 18. Tuesday evening, February 18, will be a concert with violinist Daniela Shtereva and collaborative pianist BJ Miller.

The “Three Cantors and a Pastor Concert” is back by popular demand at Sanibel Congregational UCC. This major interfaith community event will take place on Sunday afternoon, March 1. Bat Yam Temple of the Islands (which shares space with SCUCC) will have another memorable musical program that will include liturgical music, light classics, pop songs, Broadway songs and sing-a-longs. The performers will be led by Bat Yam’s Cantor Murray Simon, who will once again be joined by SCUCC Pastor Rev. Dr. John Danner and Cantor Elizabeth Shammash of Tiferet Bet Israel/Blue Bell, PA. Also performing for the first time will be Cantor Rachel Brook of Park Avenue Synagogue/New York, NY. They will be accompanied by two pianists (Abbey Allison and Toby Simon) as well as other musicians to enhance the program. A reception will follow the concert, giving guests an opportunity to mingle and socialize with each other and the performers. No tickets required—a love offering will be taken.

Tim Zimmerman and The King’s Brass Concert performed at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach on Thursday evening, January 23, sharing hymn classics with a contemporary flair. Three trumpets, three trombones, a tuba, percussion and keyboards blend together to create a time of innovative worship.

Reverb A Capella, Florida State University’s premier tenor-bass a cappella group, performed at Jensen Beach Community Church on Tuesday, December 17.

The United Church of Marco Island enjoyed a Rock & Roll ’50s party on Sunday, January 12, “in the spirit of Christ as our Rock.”

Miami Shores Community UCC hosted Performer’s Music Institute-MIAMI–VOICE & Piano Instruction on Saturday evening, December 14. The program by students of voice in recital featured vocal selections from opera, musical theater, art songs and popular music. The event was free.

Grammy-award winner Carrie Newcomer performed in the Sanctuary of First Congregational UCC/Sarasota on Friday evening, January 17. On Sunday afternoon, January 26, the church choir was one of many other local church choirs which performed in a Festival of Sacred Music with combined church choirs. The choral event, with hymns, anthems and other sacred music was presented with brass, choir and organ, was free and held at First United Methodist Church/Sarasota.

Members at Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples were able to take advantage of a workshop in the Family Life Center on Saturday afternoon, January 18, to create special gifts or personal keepsakes of an individually-designed canvas collage. Themed-clip art, mantras, Scripture verses and decorations were provided as well as supplies and folks could bring their own photos.
Spring Hill UCC is presenting a dinner and murder mystery show on Saturday evening, February 22. It’s called “A Taste of Wine” and offers a wine tasting beforehand with the cast.

It was kick-off time for the 2020 Jazz Jams at Altamonte Chapel Community UCC/Altamonte Springs on Sunday afternoon, January 26, with a Dan Jordan salute to Antonio Carlos Jobim and the Bossa Nova.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota will host a piano recital by Priscilla Fullerton on Sunday afternoon, February 9. She will be performing pieces by Bach, Beach, Beethoven and Ravel. There is no charge but there will be an opportunity to give a love offering to the church. The Savory Swing Band has been having concerts here to benefit the All Faiths Food Bank. They are held in the Sanctuary on Sunday afternoons with tickets at $10. The most recent one was at the end of January and there will be three more (February, March and May).

The St. Petersburg Saxophone Quartet will perform in the Sanctuary of Faith UCC/Dunedin on Sunday afternoon, March 1. The group will play two sets including bluesy jazz.

The Artist of the Month for December at Sanibel Congregational UCC was Donna Filomio.

Making the Most of Home-Grown Talent
BY SANDY LYNCH, CHAIR OF MISSIONS COMMITTEE
UCC AT THE VILLAGES

For the fourth year our church family and friends were treated to a musical showcase of members and friends to benefit the church music program.

The full choir began with “Every Valley” and the ladies were appropriately scarved for “Let it Snow” — a reminder that it was 25 degrees in many of our original home states. The (mostly) gentlemen octet performed a classic barbershop quartet, “Heart of my Heart.” Jeanne Nakamoto and Cynthia Scribner sent us reminiscing with a medley of Beatles songs. Mike West sang “Someday” and “Skylark,” accompanied by Jeanne. Charlotte Stacey showed us what the organ could do to “Scratch My Bach,” and Mike Lapin performed “The Impossible Dream” with our organist, Elizabeth Ringer.

Carol Wahlenmayer, Patti Wilson and Beverly Hallman — a versatile trio of flute, violin and piano — performed “It is Well With My Soul.” Carla Churchill and Patti Wilson’s violins were accompanied by Carla’s friend, Bruce, on the bass to “Whistle a Happy Tune” and other tunes. Jay Osborne provided guitar and vocals to Gordon Lightfoot’s “Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,” while Brenda Crellen joined him for a cheerier tune, “Take me Home, Country Roads.” The Joyful Noise Ensemble sang “Pharaoh, Pharaoh” (if you know “Louie, Louie,” you know the tune) and a bluesy “Jesus is the Rock.” Fred Wallace closed (because no one can top him) with Billie Holiday’s “Bless the Child,” accompanied by one of our newest members, the smooth sax of Denny Lawson, with Elizabeth Ringer on piano.

F

For the fourth year our church family and friends were treated to a musical showcase of members and friends to benefit the church music program.

The full choir began with “Every Valley” and the ladies were appropriately scarved for “Let it Snow” — a reminder that it was 25 degrees in many of our original home states. The (mostly) gentlemen octet performed a classic barbershop quartet, “Heart of my Heart.” Jeanne Nakamoto and Cynthia Scribner sent us reminiscing with a medley of Beatles songs. Mike West sang “Someday” and “Skylark,” accompanied by Jeanne. Charlotte Stacey showed us what the organ could do to “Scratch My Bach,” and Mike Lapin performed “The Impossible Dream” with our organist, Elizabeth Ringer.

Carol Wahlenmayer, Patti Wilson and Beverly Hallman — a versatile trio of flute, violin and piano — performed “It is Well With My Soul.” Carla Churchill and Patti Wilson’s violins were accompanied by Carla’s friend, Bruce, on the bass to “Whistle a Happy Tune” and other tunes. Jay Osborne provided guitar and vocals to Gordon Lightfoot’s “Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,” while Brenda Crellen joined him for a cheerier tune, “Take me Home, Country Roads.” The Joyful Noise Ensemble sang “Pharaoh, Pharaoh” (if you know “Louie, Louie,” you know the tune) and a bluesy “Jesus is the Rock.” Fred Wallace closed (because no one can top him) with Billie Holiday’s “Bless the Child,” accompanied by one of our newest members, the smooth sax of Denny Lawson, with Elizabeth Ringer on piano.

Friday, December 13, was Intergenerational Movie Night at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park. The film was “The Christmas Chronicles.” The pizza and popcorn were free! The next installment was Friday evening, January 17, when the feature was “How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World.” There were snacks and popcorn and FREE hot dogs!

“The Way” was the flick shown at Coral Gables Congregational UCC on Sunday afternoon, December 8. On Friday, January 10, interested members car-pooled to a theater to view “Just Mercy,” based on the book by Equal Justice lawyer Bryan Stevenson. On Saturday, February 1, members from Christ Congregational UCC/Miami have been invited to CGUCC for a screening of “Screenagers, NEXT CHAPTER” followed by a Q&A, refreshments and Resource Fair.

Dinner and a Movie at Naples UCC on January 12 was “An Ordinary Hero,” the amazing true story of one white Southern woman’s courage to choose her convictions and join the Civil Rights Movement.

The Sunday Cinema and pot luck at Fort Myers Congregational UCC on January 26 was “American Factory.” It’s a documentary set in post-industrial Ohio, where a Chinese billionaire opens a new factory in the husk of an abandoned General Motors plant, hiring 2,000 blue-collar Americans. Early days of hope and optimism give way to setbacks as high-tech China clashes with working-class America.

The next flick at North Port Community UCC will be “Something to Sing About” on Saturday afternoon, February 15.

The Sunday Seminar Committee at the United Church of Gainesville will screen on Sunday afternoon, February 2, “The Two Popes,” a film inspired by true events involving Pope Benedict XVI and the future Pope Francis.
In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality. We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.

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

**Time for Conversations...**

On Saturday, January 25, Spring Hill UCC began a “Sacred Conversation About Privilege” seminar, which began in the morning and ran until mid-afternoon.

Petitions to place an assault weapons ban and legalize recreational marijuana on the ballot for the upcoming November election have been available to be signed at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg.

UCC-DOC/St. Augustine held a Candlelight Community Reading: Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Thursday evening, December 12, as part of Human Rights Week – a Sustainable Development Goals Event of the United Nations. Speakers were Nancy and David O’Boyle, delegates to the recent UN Conference on Sustainable Development Goals.

On December 12 St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota hosted the Brady United Against Gun Violence’s annual vigil for victims of gun violence by remembering those who have lost their lives and honored their memories in words, music and calls to action.

The featured speaker was Brady’s national VP for programming, Kyleanne Hunter, a former Marine combat helicopter pilot in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition Rabbi Jennifer Singer of Congregation Kol HaNeshama, Rev. Dr. John Walker of Bethel CME Church and Rev. Paul Werner of St. Andrew UCC shared their reflections.

The event was covered by WWSB-TV.

---

First Congregational caucus on community problems

At the Community Problems Assembly (CPA) on November 4, Justice Ministry Network Members from more than 20 churches (including First Congregational UCC/Sarasota and St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota) gathered to vote on SURE’s (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity) next project.

The many suggestions made at all the Listening Sessions were grouped into four major categories (homelessness, elder care, criminal justice and mental health).

Criminal justice received the most votes of those present at the CPA. Because of SURE’s earlier work with the state and local criminal justice systems, civil citations are now available (throughout Florida!) for young students and teens, instead of arrests that would damage their future opportunities. In the past two years, about 10,000 kids have avoided an arrest record in our state, thanks to SURE’s unrelenting pressure at the state level.

At the research kickoff on November 18, a new team was formed to work with state and local officials in the criminal justice system to determine future directions and programs.

---

On December 12 St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota hosted the Brady United Against Gun Violence’s annual vigil for victims of gun violence by remembering those who have lost their lives and honored their memories in words, music and calls to action.

The featured speaker was Brady’s national VP for programming, Kyleanne Hunter, a former Marine combat helicopter pilot in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition Rabbi Jennifer Singer of Congregation Kol HaNeshama, Rev. Dr. John Walker of Bethel CME Church and Rev. Paul Werner of St. Andrew UCC shared their reflections.

The event was covered by WWSB-TV.
Sanibel Congregational UCC has joined others working to end the human right abuses currently being experienced by 10 young people. As part of the “Write for Rights” campaign, the church has joined millions of people who are writing letters so that “prison doors will open, families will be reunited, justice will be achieved, and human rights activists will be safe and supported in continuing their important work to change the world.”

This annual campaign sponsored by Amnesty International gets real results. Foreign governments have received thousands of letters from individuals during past efforts, bringing about the restoration of rights and freeing of unjustly imprisoned people. To participate, a church member:

1. Decides how many letters he/she will write — even one letter on behalf of one young person makes a difference.
2. Goes to Fellowship Hall and picks up the packet that contains each case, sample letters, instructions and envelopes.
3. Returns completed letter(s) in unsealed envelope(s) to Associate Pastor Rev. Deb Kunkel so address labels and postage can be adhered.

The “Theological Studies Course” in February will be “After 1865: Reconstruction, Jim Crow and Race in 2020.” The three-part series will explore the complex history of race relations following the Civil War and the end of slavery.

Interested members of Fort Myers Congregational UCC participated in its Justice Ministry Team’s meeting on Sunday afternoon, January 19, to receive the latest updates on LIFE (Lee Interfaith for Empowerment) issues for the year. Planning was discussed for involvement in the Nehemiah Assembly on March 9 when discussions will take place on the lack of affordable housing in Fort Myers, inadequate services for children and criminal justice reform. The church had a table at the 2020 Women’s March in Fort Myers on Saturday, January 18.

The World Beyond War chapter at the church has a meeting set for Sunday, February 2, to discuss the intersecting threats of nuclear war and climate change while also considering upcoming peace events in the community.

The United Church in Tallahassee has begun a Spiritual Formation class that is focusing on restorative justice. Speakers have or will include Doris Strong (a victim advocate), State Prosecutor Jack Campbell and Janelle King (Restorative Practices Specialist for the Florida Department of Children & Families). An antiracism class continues to meet.

A certificate program for training on human trafficking, sponsored by Survive & Thrive Advocacy Center, Big Bend Coalition Against Human Trafficking and hosted by the church, was held on Friday afternoon, January 17. It focused on the myths vs. the realities of human trafficking and what one can do as member of the media, faith or civic group, state agency, nonprofit or as an individual to help build awareness and end human trafficking.
Members of the Social Justice and the Racial Justice Task Forces and others at the United Church of Gainesville participated in the Martin Luther King Jr. March, which took place on Monday, January 20, at the Bo Diddley Plaza at noon for presentations and speakers, and then marched down University Avenue to the MLK Center.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota celebrated MLK at both services on Sunday, January 19, with Bettye Smith sharing reflections on Dr. King and the choir singing, “True Light.” [drawing by Lenny Hoffman.]

Special guest musician Buckley Griffis of Rhythm Weavers created a drum circle with the children at Union Congregational UCC West Palm Beach celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminding the children to be the drum major and lead toward justice!

Worship at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami on Sunday, January 19, focused on Jesus’ question to the men who would be his disciples: “What are you looking for?” (John 1:29-42). Congregants were invited to consider the life and work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and speculate on how he would have answered that question with the words justice, freedom and equality and how they would ask that same question.

Worship on January 19 at Coral Gables Congregational UCC was “A Service of Gratitude, Memory and Hope: Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” The special speaker was Harold Bunton, a church member since 2012, who is one of the last living Americans to have known a family member who was a slave – his great-great grandfather born into slavery in 1847 and who died in 1951.

On Saturday, January 18, members from Faith UCC/Dunedin joined with members of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church (with whom Faith has partnered in past events) and the city of Dunedin for a unity day breakfast and diversity march in recognition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Bill Harris Experience added lively music largely based on spirituals and the works of Duke Ellington to the annual “MLK Jazz Sunday” at Sanibel Congregational UCC.

On Sunday afternoon, January 12, members at Coral Gables Congregational UCC had the opportunity to hear from Dexter Gunders of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition speak on voters’ rights for released felons. A former corrections officer who ended up a felon himself, he helped the FRCC lead in the successful 2018 drive to pass Amendment 4 to restore voting rights for over 1.4 million Floridians with past felony convictions.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach had a showing of “Two Raging Grannies” on Friday evening, January 17. The award-winning film by Havard Bustnes is about the grannies versus Wall Street as two feisty women ask, “Why do we have to keep growing the economy?”

The admission was free but donations were accepted to support the work of the Central Florida Raging Grannies.

The Christian Education Ministry at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale held four sessions in January on violence in our schools.
The “Newest” UCC Conference

The “new” Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ has a new logo designed to symbolize the Conference’s vision: “Living the Love and Justice of Jesus.” The new entity (combining the Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences) officially came into being on January 1.

That phrase is a distillation of the Conference’s overall Vision and Mission Statement.

The logo features four hearts arranged to form a cross. Each of the hearts represents one of the four main values of the Conference: Making Disciples of Jesus, Making God’s Love and Justice Real, Bringing New Life as Agents of Change, and Forming Covenant Partnerships. Each heart is in a different color — all drawn from the national United Church of Christ’s brand guidelines — and those colors will be used on the Conference website and in other publications to draw connections between various ministries and the part of the vision to which they relate.

“We are really excited about this logo as an expression of what the new Conference stands for,” said Tiffany Vail, Associate Conference Minister for Communications.

A number of concepts were considered for the logo. One idea was to have three strands coming together into one piece — such as in a rope or braid — to represent the three historic Conferences joining together. Another idea was to use ship’s sails or a lighthouse to connect with the Pilgrims and the Amistad which are part of the histories of the Conferences.

“In the end, we decided to move away from those ideas, because they were about looking back, rather than looking forward,” Vail said. “This logo represents who we are today, and who we are striving to become as a new Conference.”

Message from Our UCC General Minister and President

Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, the UCC General Minister and President, issued a call for a return to common decency in a message to mark the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words about judging not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character, are especially meaningful today. What standard are we, as Christians, holding ourselves to if we remain silent in times of great injustice?

I have always believed as a person of faith and a minister of the gospel that to be a follower of Jesus is to lead with love. As we remember the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., I reflect on his belief that people should be judged by the content of their character.

I am weary of the discourse in our society and among our elected leaders and feel concerned about what it says about the content of our character. I am weary of our President fueling our worst impulses by regularly degrading, dehumanizing, and disparaging our fellow citizens, cities and entire countries, continents, and religions.

Like the clergy to whom Dr. King’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail was addressed, too many of us remain silent and do nothing even as Jesus calls us to lead with love. Reasons for our silence are many: fear of offending supporters and members, reluctance to cross the line between religion and politics, belief in the President and his policy agenda, and respect for the office.

But, shouldn’t the President and all US leaders be judged by the content of their character?

As an authorized member of the clergy, I believe It is time to find common ground on one thing: calling the country, our elected representatives, ourselves, and our President to higher standards of decency.

I believe that followers of Jesus can agree on the following:

No US leaders should for any reason call for violence, overtly or sarcastically, at public rallies, press appearances, or via social media. Postulating that torch-bearing neo-Nazis have as much good on their side as those who demonstrate peacefully against racism is unacceptable.

No US leader should call political opponents by derogatory names and hurl insults at them that seek to degrade them by body type, physical appearance, or intellect.

I believe that followers of Jesus can agree on the following:

No US leaders should for any reason call for violence, overtly or sarcastically, at public rallies, press appearances, or via social media. Postulating that torch-bearing neo-Nazis have as much good on their side as those who demonstrate peacefully against racism is unacceptable.

No US leader should call political opponents by derogatory names and hurl insults at them that seek to degrade them by body type, physical appearance, or intellect.

Click on image below to view Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer’s message.
A New Space at First Congregational in Sarasota

The Oasis Center for Reflection and Renewal at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota is a newly-designed space to facilitate the journeys for all seeking a deeper connection with God and others. The Center is located in what was the Little Pilgrim Preschool, which the church closed in 2018 due to declining enrollment and increasing costs.

The generosity of the church continues to be a blessing in helping the vision come to life — including anonymous donations that are helping fund the Oasis Center’s renovations beyond what had originally been planned. The timeline is for the Oasis Center to open in late January. The renovations include new drywall, newly-tiled restrooms, acoustic ceiling tiles and dimmable LED lighting and green-certified carpeting and furniture. Also installed is a small kitchenette. After the space is dedicated, windows will be replaced to bring them up to current hurricane code.

In the coming year, a class on “Mapping YOUR Life” is being planned, with the inaugural class scheduled for Thursday evenings beginning on January 30. As people are living longer, the “maps” of retirement are no longer as helpful as in the past. However, since this is true for people of all ages, everyone can benefit from new practices for faithfully living in such a time as this. Future classes include Dr. Adam Clark, African-American scholar, in February and healing services and dialogue around racism and another on homophobia. There will be music and art therapy classes. Oasis Center is “future-ready” as it will grow with God’s guidance in the years to come.

The Growing and Caring Team will be working on marketing the classes in Oasis to reach out to others who are hurting in the community. It is the heartfelt prayer of Pastor Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby that this new ministry “will continue to grow in ways we might not even be able to imagine in the coming years.”

Capital Campaign Renovations Coming to a Close at PAG

Extensive interior and exterior renovations at Pass-a-Grille Community UCC/St. Pete Beach are nearing completion. Pictured are a water fountain feature in the entryway to the narthex and the completed pavilion with a new roof and steeple atop.

The new curtains are certainly a beautiful addition to the Sanctuary at First UCC/Orlando

Opportunities and they will come

Build It...

and they will come

The new curtains are certainly a beautiful addition to the Sanctuary at First UCC/Orlando

Gardening aficionados have been busy at First United Church of Tampa creating a garden — the Seeds of Peace Community Garden — through a series of work days over recent weeks. There was a design contest for its sign.

The Operations Team at Port Orange UCC has reported that its Operations Matching Funds Campaign exceeds $12,500 and that all funds raised are being used 100% for maintaining the church property, inside and outside. Already accomplished on the church grounds is the clearing of unnecessary trees, bushes, brush and plants. That was followed by the sodding of all the cleared areas to bring back the lawn, making the church more visible and eye-appealing and the landscaping of the church front entrance area along with the driveway center island and the relining of all parking spots and no parking zones.

Inside the church new programmable thermostats have been installed with a customized heating and cooling management system that is set for year-round conditions. Fans in all areas of the church help keep these costs down, and this system is projected to save about an estimated $3,000-5,000 per year in electrical costs.

The Team is also looking at the church’s insurance costs and is projecting another possible $2K-$3K saving there also.
I was happy to receive a new 2020 Mary Englebreit calendar for a Christmas gift. It has become kind of a tradition that my daughter Darcy gets me one every year. I really enjoy the artist’s illustrations and the various quotations listed month-by-month. One January’s quote was from Mark Twain who wrote, “Knowledge without experience is just information.” I find that thought particularly relevant to Sunday’s Gospel lesson from Matthew 2:1-12 about the wise men’s search for the baby Jesus.

The wise men, learned astrologers from the East, no doubt had a great deal of knowledge. They must have read and studied about the stars, observed the movement of planets, moon and asteroids. They were from a very different culture than the one into which Jesus was born.

Herbert O’Driscoll writes:

“The Magi fascinate us because they do not fit into this tiny stage of hill village and humble stable. Their sophistication clashes with this simplicity; their obvious power sits uneasily beside the vulnerability of child and family. They are urban in a rural world, affluent in the midst of poverty, cosmopolitan amid the provincial.

We discern their wisdom even as we read of their dealings with the court of Herod. Civilized and mannered, they pay their respects to Herod, yet with contemptuous ease they see the reality behind the pathetic physical and mental wreck Herod has become. They have gained experience at a far more powerful court, and have no illusions about Herod’s ability to be dangerous and vicious, even in his decline.

Theirs is a deep wisdom. The Magi represent forever and for all of us the wisdom that recognizes human life to be a journey, taken in search of One who calls us beyond ourselves into faithful service—One before whom we are prepared to kneel, and to who we offer the best of our gifts, flawed, and unworthy though they be.”

“Knowledge without experience is just information,” Twain wrote, a wise man himself. So it follows that it might be said that knowledge with experience can lead to wisdom. We may know facts in our heads, but it is in the living of life, participating in experiences, that we learn in our hearts the deep truths. Some experiences we choose; some are thrust upon us, but we still have choices as to how we will deal with them.

If we view life as a journey, we know that every journey has a beginning and an end. Every journey worth making is a quest, a search for something outside ourselves—meaning, purpose, that which we can worship with our whole selves—God. Journeys are time-limited, and we are reminded, as we take down our 2019 calendars and hang up the fresh, new 2020 calendars, of how quickly human time passes. Some of us still make New Year’s resolutions, joking that they probably won’t be kept very long—losing weight, exercising regularly, taking a class, searching for a new job.

Let each of us challenge our self to resolve to make choices in our own life’s journey that will give us the opportunity to have experiences that make us wiser in our faith. Let us risk uncertainty, guided by our star, Jesus Christ. Let us resolve to become better acquainted with who he is and what he taught, by studying scripture and listening to it preached regularly as we worship with our faith community. Let us travel to places near and far where it seems he might be found in our interactions with others when we are doing the work his disciples are called to do.

Let us try hard to look beneath the surface of daily life for eternal meaning. Let us search, remembering Christ’s guiding words in Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

God-speed to each of you on your own journey.

From the weekly e-message from Christ Congregational UCC/ Miami, January 3
Disaster Ministry Update

With the recent disasters taking place in different parts of the world, it is hard to know where to begin and how to help. Australia seems so far away as well as the Philippines as the people of those areas are in the midst of wild fires and a volcanic eruption. Recently on a “60 Minutes” episode, the city of Venice, Italy, was highlighted as it has experienced record flooding in recent months and how the people of the city are coping with what is an ongoing disaster. Closer to home Puerto Rico — still reeling from hurricane damage — is being rocked to its core with earthquakes that as of this writing show no sign of ending. Over 900 earthquakes of varying intensity have been recorded. It was only nine years ago on January 12 that a deadly earthquake struck the nation of Haiti. That is not much of a time gap by geologic standards for earthquakes to happen in the same region [see accompanying note about Puerto Rico.].

If we step back from our desire to respond (note: in the immediate time, post-disaster money is always the best response of the heart), we see the imagery of the earth shaking and quaking as it does and has done since this planet was formed. On Sunday, January 12, the lectionary psalm of the day was Psalm 29 reminding us that we live on a dynamic, living and moving earth and we are at the mercy of this planet.

As the year 2020 unfolds, we give thanks and praise to God for blessings received, the ability and compassion to respond to humanity in need whenever and wherever we are called to do so.

When the earth is shaking and things are happening of biblical proportion, where do we turn? We turn to our faith to guide how we prepare for and respond to events that may happen in the state we live that may affect us directly. We also look to how we may reach out to our neighbors either in other areas of the country that suffer from a disaster or other parts of the world. Given the gifts and talents each of us has, how do we use those to the glory of God and assist people in disaster response?

I encourage you to keep abreast of what the United Church of Christ disaster response ministry is doing in various locations by looking at www.ucc.org/disaster on a regular basis.

Two things to mention that may be of interest to you and your church:

- There are two active work sites for groups in the state of Florida. Information and registration may be found at the UCC website link above to bring a group to Volusia County (Hurricanes Maria and Irma) or the Panhandle in Bay and Washington counties (Hurricane Michael).

- The Florida Conference has four cargo trailers and is going to cut back to two trailers for use in disaster response. If you are interested in one of the trailers, please contact me at acoe@uccfla.org

January 17 Message from The United Church of Christ Church House

More than 1,000 earthquakes have hit Puerto Rico in the past few weeks, forcing people to sleep outdoors, take refuge in shelters and live in fear of additional quakes. The United Church of Christ is providing immediate assistance and seeking support for our long-term recovery program for communities still recovering from Hurricanes Maria and Irma.

The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, UCC Associate General Minister and Co-executive for Global Ministries, is dispatching funds to Global Ministries partner Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico (IEUPR) so the church can assist with needs of first response. With IEUPR, UCC Disaster Ministries is on the ground working to mend the lives of those who have suffered so much.

The people of Puerto Rico know that we will be there for the long haul. We once again need your help to provide long-term recovery through your gift to Emergency USA. Please give today. Thank you.

Support Earthquake Recovery in Puerto Rico

CLICK HERE TO DONATE

Fort Myers Congregational UCC has been collecting funds to aid relief efforts. At worship on Sunday, January 12 and 19, more than $2,400 was collected.

A shout-out to Faith UCC/Bradenton for its contribution of $3,025 to the Conference Disaster Relief Fund.
What does it mean to be intergenerational, specifically as a church? Intergenerational is often confused with multigenerational; there are some places where they are used interchangeably. It’s no wonder, for multigenerational and intergenerational describe churches with different generations active in the life of the congregation.

The difference between the two is how the generations interact and live as a community of faith. A multigenerational church has multiple generations with programs targeting one or two specific age group. Picture multiple train tracks running parallel to each other. The start and stop in the same place, but rarely intersect. Or as silos on a piece of farmland — they share a common base, but each contains only one “crop.”

A multigenerational church develops children programs and worship and classes, then the same for youth, for young adults, for singles, for married couples with young families, for post-retirement, etc. They default to developing age specific programs and ministries around age cohorts, with an emphasis on getting things done most efficiently.

An intergenerational church also has multiple generations, but they are more of melting pot or weaving of strands into one tapestry. There may still be some age specific programs, but they prefer to find ways to involve any age in their activities and ministry. Relationships are emphasized. There may still be a singles group or a youth group. But the default of this church is to develop and nurture programs and ministries where all ages can be involved.

According to Holly Catterton Allen in *InterGenerate* (no, that’s not a typo) “getting things done is not as important as with whom and for whom we get things done. How many times in churches are young children and older adults excluded from activities or experiences because they ‘might slow things down’?” Intergenerational churches put a heavier emphasis on relationships than on accomplishments: only when necessary will they put getting something done over creating the opportunity to participate for anyone who desire. Caring relationships form across generational dividers that enrich all.

So how are intergenerational churches formed and nurtured? It takes time, but it can start (and continues to grow) through three simple steps that any age group can do:

1) Find someone from a different generation — whether older or younger than you — make eye contact and smile;
2) Make a point to greet them before or after church;
3) Ask them about their hobbies, work, school, friendships, etc.

Being an intentionally intergenerational church is one way we can share faith across generations — no matter if we have one or 100 members from any generational cohort — and embody Jesus’ prayer in John 17 “that they all may be one.”

*From The Light newsletter of Sanibel Congregational UCC, January 2020*
North Port Police Officer Erin Finnegan received five sleeping bed mats from Mina Sundeen at a recent “Bags to Beds” workshop held at North Port Community UCC. Working with the Circle of Women of South West Florida, the church provides workspace and manpower for this worthwhile community project. Officer Finnegan spoke to the group regarding the homeless in North Port and how these “beds” benefit the homeless. The NPPD works in conjunction with the Salvation Army as a liaison with homeless in the community.

The Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton had its Pet Blessing worship service on December 1, celebrating the special bond between pets and their owners. All pets received a personal blessing from Pastor Rev. Tom Lacey. Following the service there was a raffle benefitting Big Dog Ranch Rescue, a local no-kill shelter, which raised $388.

Cocoa Beach Community Church had its second annual Arts+Market Craft Show on Saturday, November 23. There was food, music, fun and lots of vendors both inside and outside.

Plymouth Congregational Church held its Ministry Fair after worship on Sunday, January 12. It was an opportunity for members to meet and talk with representatives of the faith and community groups that the church supports through its various outreach efforts. It was also a chance to learn about volunteer opportunities that are available to interested individuals.

As part of the Hunger Vigil Day, Coral Gables Congregational Church celebrated the Festival of the Flea on Saturday, January 18 in the Green Space across from the church. It’s a flea market at which sellers had tables for $25 (which went to the church’s Hunger Pantry) selling all sorts of items.

At Spring Hill UCC you can bring to the church for recycling the following items: used ink cartridges and cellphones plus grocery bags, produce and bread bags, cereal box liners, ice bags, newspaper sleeves and bubble wrap. Large boxes are provided in the Narthex for these items.

The “Calendar that Cares” were sold at Faith Family UCC/Brandon for a cost of $25 each with 100% of sales going to nonprofits: Faith Family received 80% and the Tampa Special Olympics received 20%. Calendar-holders need a four-digit number to have a chance to win $25 every day, twice a day, in 2020 unless your number comes up on the 15th of any month when you will win $250. The calendar depicts touching scenes that are near and dear to the hearts of most people.

It was one of those fun Trivia Nights again at Pensacola Beach Community UCC on Friday evening, January 31. Teams of eight squared off against one another. Players brought snacks to share and their own beverages.

Chalk boards have been made available in the Sanctuary at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg for members to write a finish to the sentence, “Before I die, I am going to...”
Across Florida

New Vision Congregational UCC/Yulee held a World AIDS Day event on December 1 organized by Dr. Theresa Sparks.

A support group — S.O.S., Supporting Our Spouses — for people who are taking care of a spouse with Alzheimer’s/dementia in their home has been initiated at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach. Because this can be overwhelming and often very lonely for the caregiver, S.O.S. aims to create an opportunity for the caregiver to not only share his/her feelings but to also access resources and receive suggestions on how to manage the exhausting demands of this illness. The group will meet for 90 minutes once a month at a private residence and is open to anyone who is taking care of a spouse or partner with dementia at home. The facilitator has a Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology and personal experience in this area.

Stars with special guiding words for 2020 were in baskets in the Sanctuary foyer at the United Church of Gainesville on Sunday, January 5. When congregants attended worship that morning, they were invited to find the basket, close their eyes, let a star pick them and then share its wisdom throughout the year. Another time members were given the opportunity to brighten the lives of those experiencing homelessness by filling Valentine gift bags, which contained a short list of gift items to consider obtaining to fill the bags.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon will he holding an all church retreat on Saturday, February 15. It will be a time of recharging, spiritual grounding and refocusing — the time for birthing new ideas, new ministries and breathing new life into long-established ones.

Naples UCC had a Habitat Build Day on Saturday morning, January 11, in Immokalee to help build one of the eight homes the church has funded. On February 1, members from Coral Gables Congregational UCC will participate in a Habitat for Humanity Blitz Build in southwest Miami. Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami partnered with Rebuilding Together on Friday, January 31, to help revitalize homes in West Coconut Grove.

Faith UCC/Bradenton will have a folk rock worship service on Sunday, February 9, led by singer Tret Fure.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City will be hosting a free community health fair on Saturday, March 21, that will feature local health care and social service agencies.

Volunteers from Church of the Palms UCC/Delray Beach support the Live Fresh Shower truck, which provides this welcome respite to the homeless in the area.

“Whoever you are or wherever you are...”

Fergie Kightley enjoys services at Coral Gables Congregational UCC all the way from Nottingham, England.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton is having their big rummage sale on Saturday, February 22.

The rummage sale at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park will be a two-day affair – Friday & Saturday, February 21-22 – with furniture, housewares, antiques, books, artwork and more.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC will be holding its Attic Treasures sale on Saturday, February 15. Lots of items from small appliances and tools to jewelry and housewares in good condition and baked goods will be on sale. The event is sponsored by the church’s women’s group with proceeds going to support several local organizations as well as for purchases benefitting the church.

Yard Sale

Fergie Kightley enjoys services at Coral Gables Congregational UCC all the way from Nottingham, England.

“Whoever you are or wherever you are...”

Volunteers from Church of the Palms UCC/Delray Beach support the Live Fresh Shower truck, which provides this welcome respite to the homeless in the area.

“Whoever you are or wherever you are...”

Fergie Kightley enjoys services at Coral Gables Congregational UCC all the way from Nottingham, England.

Across Florida

New Vision Congregational UCC/Yulee held a World AIDS Day event on December 1 organized by Dr. Theresa Sparks.

A support group — S.O.S., Supporting Our Spouses — for people who are taking care of a spouse with Alzheimer’s/dementia in their home has been initiated at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach. Because this can be overwhelming and often very lonely for the caregiver, S.O.S. aims to create an opportunity for the caregiver to not only share his/her feelings but to also access resources and receive suggestions on how to manage the exhausting demands of this illness. The group will meet for 90 minutes once a month at a private residence and is open to anyone who is taking care of a spouse or partner with dementia at home. The facilitator has a Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology and personal experience in this area.

Stars with special guiding words for 2020 were in baskets in the Sanctuary foyer at the United Church of Gainesville on Sunday, January 5. When congregants attended worship that morning, they were invited to find the basket, close their eyes, let a star pick them and then share its wisdom throughout the year. Another time members were given the opportunity to brighten the lives of those experiencing homelessness by filling Valentine gift bags, which contained a short list of gift items to consider obtaining to fill the bags.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon will he holding an all church retreat on Saturday, February 15. It will be a time of recharging, spiritual grounding and refocusing — the time for birthing new ideas, new ministries and breathing new life into long-established ones.

Naples UCC had a Habitat Build Day on Saturday morning, January 11, in Immokalee to help build one of the eight homes the church has funded. On February 1, members from Coral Gables Congregational UCC will participate in a Habitat for Humanity Blitz Build in southwest Miami. Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami partnered with Rebuilding Together on Friday, January 31, to help revitalize homes in West Coconut Grove.

Faith UCC/Bradenton will have a folk rock worship service on Sunday, February 9, led by singer Tret Fure.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City will be hosting a free community health fair on Saturday, March 21, that will feature local health care and social service agencies.

Volunteers from Church of the Palms UCC/Delray Beach support the Live Fresh Shower truck, which provides this welcome respite to the homeless in the area.

“Whoever you are or wherever you are...”

Fergie Kightley enjoys services at Coral Gables Congregational UCC all the way from Nottingham, England.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton is having their big rummage sale on Saturday, February 22.

The rummage sale at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park will be a two-day affair – Friday & Saturday, February 21-22 – with furniture, housewares, antiques, books, artwork and more.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC will be holding its Attic Treasures sale on Saturday, February 15. Lots of items from small appliances and tools to jewelry and housewares in good condition and baked goods will be on sale. The event is sponsored by the church’s women’s group with proceeds going to support several local organizations as well as for purchases benefitting the church.
Across Florida

**BOOKS WE'RE READING AND DISCUSSING TOGETHER...**

*Secret Daughter* by Shilpa Somaya Gowda and *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr (Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples)

*Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans, *Rise: How a House Built a Family* by Cara Brookins and *Evolution of the Word* by Marcus Borg (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)

*Blowout* by Rachel Maddow (United Church in Tallahassee)


*Table Talk: Rethinking Communion and Community* by Mike Graves (Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park)

*Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans (Cocoa Beach Community Church)

*Krazy Kinsfolk: Exploring Dysfunctional Families in the Bible* by Barbara Essex (UCC at The Villages)


*The Courage to be Disliked: The Japanese Phenomenon That Shows You How to Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga (Pass-a-Grille Beach Museum of Fine Arts, portrayed Louisa May Alcott at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

*The Lost Girls of Paris* by Pam Jenoff (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)

*The Challenge of Paul* by John Dominic Crossan (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

*When Demons Float* by Susan Thistlethwaite (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)

*Christ in Crisis: Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus by Jim Wallis (Faith UCC/Dunedin)*

*Beautiful Ruins* by Jess Walter, *Breakfast with Buddha* by Roland Merullo and *Inspired* by Rachel Held Evans (Spring Hill UCC)

*Maybe You Should Talk to Someone: A Therapist, HER Therapist and Our Lives Revealed* by Lori Gottlieb, *The Girl Who Wrote in Silk* by Kelli Estes and *Lost Connections* by Johann Hari (First United Church of Tampa)

*Nan Colton, performing artist in residence at St. Petersburg’s Museum of Fine Arts, portrayed Louisa May Alcott at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach on Tuesday afternoon, January 21. In her career Ms. Colton has brought to life passionate, live portraits of other remarkable women and unforgettable tales of fact and fiction.*

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

*“Who Was on the Road for Christmas and Who Stayed Home: Joseph, The Magi, The Shepherds and Mary” (UCC/Fort Lauderdale)*

*“NEAT: Network, Empower and Transition” (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)*

*UCC History, Polity and Theology (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)*

*Gospel of Luke (chapter 2) and CPR/AED class (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)*


*“Introduction to Permaculture” (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg)*

*The Gospel of Luke and “After 1865: Reconstruction, Jim Crow and Race in 2020” (Sanibel Congregational UCC)*

*The Gospel of Mark, “Lament Psalm” and “Healing Prayer” (UCC/New Smyrna Beach)*

*“Atomic Spies,” “The Pueblo Incident: Cold War Intelligence,” “Comey’s Higher Loyalty,” “Loss of a Spouse”* seminar, “Focused Prayer: Paul’s Four Life Transforming Prayers” and *The Gospel of John (United Church of Marco Island)*

*Soul Telling Writing workshop and “A Month of Meditation” (First United Church of Tampa)*

*“The Four Sages: Confucius, Buddha, Jesus & Muhammad” [from the Great Courses series] (Faith UCC/Dunedin)*

*The Book of Revelation (Altamonte Chapel Community UCC)*

*“Planning for the New Year” (Port Orange UCC)*

*“Self Help Credit Union for Underserved Residents,” “The 2020 Census” and “Hindu Spirituality and Practices” (United Church of Gainesville)*

*“Stress Busters: 10 Toolkit Techniques” and “Faith, Freedom and the End of Democracy” (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)*

*“Good Things: 2020 Vision” (United Church in Tallahassee)*

*“Enjoying Your Kids: Parenting Today” [four night series] (Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton)*

*“A Glimpse into the Mind of an Artist” (UCC-DOC/St. Augustine)*

*“Great Stories from the Bible” (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)*
On Tuesday, January 6, 2015, less than 24 hours after the Florida ban on same gender marriage was lifted, Coral Gables Congregational UCC made history by having the first legal same-sex marriage ceremony in the history of the church. That evening, four couples who had traveled to Broward County to get marriage licenses shortly after midnight on January 6 returned to their church home to be married. This was a joyful celebration for Gables UCC and across the state of Florida. They had worked, prayed and longed for that day when all people, regardless of sexual orientation, could marry the person they love. Since then many same sex couples have been married at Gables UCC, and they were recognized at worship on Sunday, January 12.

On January 15 Rev. Dr. Hal McSwain (First Congregational UCC/Ocala), an ONA consultant, met with members of First Congregational UCC/Orange City to outline the ONA process. A decision was made to organize a task force to steer the monthly educational sessions.

Scholarships and Grants in the United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ’s Scholarship and Grant award system provides broad support, increased access and ease of use to a large, diverse pool of qualified candidates.

The streamlined Scholarship and Grant award system increases efficiency for applicants, recommenders and evaluators; establishes consistent practices; improves communication; and strengthens relationships with recipients. Visit www.ucc.org/scholarships for detailed information.

Members in Discernment may apply for the Brown Endowment Scholarship and ONE other UCC Ministry Education Scholarship per year. Our online Scholarship application process is safe, secure, and user-friendly!

Important Dates to Remember:

All online Scholarship application forms open on December 1 each year and close on March 1 of the following year at 5pm Eastern time. Scholarships are processed for use in the fall.

The online application form for The Genesis Fund, a program grant, opens on December 1 each year and closes on March 15 of the following year at 5pm Eastern time.

Mailed, hand-delivered, shipped, e-mailed and faxed applications, references and transcripts will no longer be accepted or acknowledged.

Applications are not complete until we have received ALL required items within the online application, including transcripts and required recommendations from references. You are fully responsible for ensuring that ALL required items are received by the due date.

Applicants are advised to notify their references that they will receive an e-mail request. The e-mail will come from automated.email@smarterselect.com.

When you submit your application, it will display as “Pending.” Your application will not be “Submitted” until ALL required documents (transcripts, letters of reference, etc.) have been received. You will receive a confirmation e-mail once all requested information has been received and the status of your application has been changed from “Pending” to “Submitted.”

It is your responsibility to ensure that your application is complete and marked as “Submitted” by the due date. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

The UCC provides a wealth of scholarships. They are worthy of your donations, as they ensure the future of our church. If a Scholarship does not exist that speaks to your particular passion and you wish to create a Scholarship, please visit click here to view our Gift Acceptance Policy.
The women’s group at Christ Congregational Church/Miami held their annual Christmas luncheon on Saturday, December 7 at the Tea Room at Cauley Square and continued their Silly Santa gift exchange (re-gifting).

The Anam Cara Women’s Circle at Faith UCC/Dunedin launched the global giving circle “Dining for Women” on Saturday, December 7. The regional leader of the DFW Southwest Florida was present to discuss the program, which in December supported the Kenya Nurse Mentoring Program. Dining for Women was founded 17 years ago and is dedicated to transforming lives and eradicating poverty among women and girls in the developing world. Faith UCC is the 496th chapter in the U.S. and raised $210 at this event.

The United Church of Gainesville’s women’s overnight, titled “Wonder-Full Women,” will be held Saturday/Sunday, February 1-2, at the Episcopal Conference Center in Live Oak.

Women at Naples UCC gathered for lunch on Tuesday, January 14, to hear from the executive director of the area’s Guardian Ad Litem Foundation, a community organization the church has been supporting for many years. The Women Engage! discussion group met on Thursday, January 16, on the topic of the empowerment of women. “Soul Collage,” a women’s retreat, will be offered on Saturday, February 1 – “a simple, creative process for using images, imagination and intuition to gather insights about one’s personal and unique Soul.” The Women’s Fellowship luncheon on Monday, February 10, will feature a discussion of Love & Passion: A Brief Exploration of Music as Science and Art.

The women’s group at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota on Tuesday, January 7, heard from Dr. April Glasco, founder and CEO of Second Chance Last Opportunity, which serves low income and/or homeless in the city’s Newtown community. Each attendee was encouraged to arrive with at least one flip-top can of food—ravioli, soup not requiring water—to help replenish Second Chance’s pantry, where hungry people arrive every day.

The First Congregational UCC/Winter Park COME ALIVE! Women’s group held a retreat in Daytona Beach on Friday, January 10-Saturday, January 11. The group is led by Lisa Rotenberger and Rev. Kim Wells (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) helped lead the gathering.

Sanibel Congregational UCC’s Women in Mission are preparing for this year’s annual bazaar to be held on Saturday, February 29.

The First Congregational UCC/Sarasota Women’s program on Tuesday, February 4, will feature Doug Smith from the Mote Marine Laboratory. He will discuss what Mote scientists are doing at the Mote Aquaculture Research Park to develop sustainable aquaculture systems to help feed the world and restock depleted fish species.
3 Great Loves is a denomination-wide story telling initiative, collecting and lifting up the stories of our local churches and affiliates about how we are living out God’s love and expressing love of neighbor, children and creation — the 3 Great Loves. From knitting clubs making hats for newborns, collecting food for food pantries, starting a recycling program at your church, standing together against social injustice — these are the stories of 3 Great Loves and no story is too insignificant to share!

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

Lynn Jones, Western Region Ambassador (honickyl@gmail.com)

Members at the Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton organized a beach clean-up on Saturday, December 7, and Sunday, January 19. The days began with a prayer and walk on the beach for an hour. These were the first two of six regular beach clean-up walks.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach reports they are still working toward replacing all the foam plates and cups with paper this year as the congregation transitions to more environmentally-friendly products. The church stopped purchasing foam plates and cups last year and will begin using paper as soon as the foam supplies are used up.

The United Church in Tallahassee hosted the Tallahassee Green Faith Alliance at its bi-monthly potluck lunch meeting in December. Church members were invited to attend and learn what the growing faith community is doing to care for Creation.

The Green Team at First Congregational Church/Sarasota will spend most of the morning on Saturday, February 29, in a natural area on local public land reflecting on attentiveness, gratitude, grace and awe by walks (about two miles on dirt trails that may be muddy), times of silent reflection (a pen and paper might be handy), quotes to nurture one’s soul and sharing (as one feels led). The Green Team is also collecting church member ideas about the church “going green.” It is inviting consideration of the question: What ideas do you have for concrete ways that First Congregational UCC could “go green”?

Thanks to the Green Team at First Congregational Church/Lake Worth, future generations will have some beautiful towering oaks (and a maple) on its campus to enjoy. They can thank Carol, Harold, Victor, Arturo, Ella and Eva for spending Christmas Eve planting trees acquired from the Audubon Society by Arturo. Not only will they beautify the church campus for decades to come but will contribute to a greener planet!

The Green Team at Sanibel Congregational UCC sponsors a pickup of electronics at the rear of the church in January every year; this year it was on January 18. Items were brought in small cardboard boxes, separating things that work from things that don’t and marking them as such. Computers that work were donated to Komputers for Kids. All personal and business data on hard drives and storage devices were destroyed before they were disposed. What was accepted included: all kinds of electric wire, mouse and keyboards, laptops, notebooks, computer towers, battery backups, hard drives, flat panel monitors, lithium batteries, automotive batteries, cell phones, standard phones and phone equipment, generators, industrial switching gear and test equipment, electric motors of all kinds, routers, speakers, external hard drives, smart phones, florescent light ballasts, marine electronics, servers, video equipment, electrical switches, circuit breakers and panels, and starters and alternators. Whew! The only electronics that were not accepted were glass-screen CRT televisions and monitors, LED and LCD televisions, printers and copiers. Working printers and copiers and flat screen TVs could be donated to Goodwill.
Youth Ministries

Summer Travel Opportunities for Youth Ministry

Florida Conference Youth Summer Mission Trip
National Memorial for Peace & Justice
Montgomery, AL
June 13-19

Join youth from around your Florida Conference in fellowship, sustainable gardening projects and missions of understanding as we travel to Montgomery, Alabama, to learn from the local community and experience the Rosa Parks Museum, the Freedom Riders Exhibit and the National Peace & Justice Museum. Please contact nwatkins@uccfla.org for pricing, chaperone requirements and specific travel details.

National Youth Event
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN
July 21-25

The United Church of Christ’s National Youth Event will take place at Purdue University July 22-25. This four-day event is celebrated as the largest denominational gathering.

Often bringing in 4,000 participants, this time together is centered on faith, leadership, service and social justice to empower our youth.

Please visit http://www.uc-cpages.org/nye2020/ for details and contact nwatkins@uccfla.org to let the Florida Conference know how we can support your group in attending this event!

Youth Around the State

This year’s Chili Lunch fundraiser on Sunday, December 15, at the United Church of Gainesville helped fund the youth summer Work Tour to Chicago and attendance at the UCC National Youth Event in July. Raffle tickets were sold for many amazing themed baskets. The youth also served the evening meal on Sunday, January 5, at Grace Marketplace (a homeless resource center).

Middle and high-schoolers at Fort Myers Congregational UCC met on Thursday, December 19, to watch the movie “Spirited Away!” They enjoyed a good film and an even better discussion.

Teens in Action at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach gave residents at the Beacon (formerly called the Domestic) Abuse Counsel shelter for women and children their annual Christmas party, complete with Santa, gifts and a wonderful holiday dinner. The kids also went caroling on Sunday, December 15, to the church’s shut-ins and visited a nursing home in Port Orange.

Teens in the WA VE youth group at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach sold gift cards to help raise funds for its mission trip to Peru to help build a church.

Youth at Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami had a cookie bake sale on Sunday, December 22, with proceeds supporting the youth ministry. The Youth Lock-in began at 5pm on Saturday, January 25, when the sequestered enjoyed food, fun and
friendship and created their entry for the church’s annual chili cook-off that Sunday.

Middle and high school youth at Coral Gables Congregational UCC gathered for dinner and luminary making for the church’s Christmas Eve service. Also, Connor Smith, his family and fellow Boy Scouts dreamed into reality a butterfly garden at the church for his Eagle Scout project.

Youth at Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville held their annual Chili Cook-Off Fundraiser on Sunday, January 12, to raise funds to attend Rock the Universe January 25-26.

Youth at the Community Church of Vero Beach helped at the Food Pantry sorting out the many donations in its warehouse.

The holiday craft fair for pre-K-5th graders at the United Church of Gainesville took place on Saturday, December 14. This annual event had 10 craft stations that allowed kids to make gifts for friends and family. This year’s theme was recycled/upcycled materials. The cost to participate was a donation of the giver’s choice. January 12 was Good Behavior Celebration Sunday for all kiddos age three through fifth grade. They were invited to wear pjs, and bring a blanket, pillow and/or lovey with them on this morning. And they watched the movie “Ugly Dolls” together.

The Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton held its annual bake sale on Sunday, December 8, following the Christmas Cantata. All money raised benefited the Sunday School. On Sunday, January 5, there was an after-church special soccer skills program teaching basic skills, no experience necessary.

On a recent Sunday morning, the Sunday School students at Faith UCC/Dunedin talked about things they would like to improve during this new year and new decade. They discussed the difference between New Year’s resolutions and intentions. The children were each provided a new journal to keep track of their intentions progress, drawings or writings and were also given a little calendar to track important events. Readings came from The Te of Piglet by Benjamin Hoff and Do Greater Things: Following in Jesus Footsteps by Felicia Blanco Searcy. Part of the discussion included how we perceive things can make the event either positive or negative. Some of the topics they suggested were working on math in school, improving one’s diet or cleaning up the streets.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC will have a movie screening on Saturday evening, February 1, of the film “Screenagers: Next Chapter.” Physician and filmmaker Delaney Ruston saw that with her own kids that the average child spends 6.5 hours a day looking at smartphone and computer screens. In her first film she probes into the vulnerable corners of family life, to explore struggles over social media, video games and Internet addiction. In this sequel she sets out to understand these challenges and how parents can empower their children to overcome mental health issues and build emotional agility, communication savvy and stress resilience. A Q&A session will follow the screening. The event was open to the public.
There are traditional Christmas happenings that take place in just about all our congregations — like the Hanging of the Greens in Sanctuaries and Chancel areas and decorating with poinsettias in honor or memory of family members and friends.

Another is the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund. The theme of the 2019 offering was “The Light Shines in the Darkness.” This is a special mission offering that congregations have been supporting for over 100 years. The offering is administered through the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (the charitable arm of the Pension Boards). Funds provide direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Active and retired clergy, lay employees and their surviving spouses may be eligible for the supplementation of small annuities, supplementation of health premiums, emergency grants and/or Christmas “thank you” gift checks.

Here are some of the ways in which a number of our Florida UCC congregations celebrated the Advent and Christmas seasons during the year just past. We learned about them from your e-blasts, newsletters, websites and inquiries. The events and practices are grouped in the following categories:

Advent • Angel Trees & Related Drives • Blue Christmas
Christmas Parties • Pageants • Caroling
Concerts • Christmas Eve Services
Other Seasonal Events

Okay, since we knew you’d be looking for your own church we’ve made it harder for you by not putting the entries in alphabetical order. Give your eyes permission to fall upon submissions for other churches that did something quite interesting, different or creative. Be open to discovering a few new ways in which your church may decide to observe Advent and Christmas in 2020.

Sanibel Congregational UCC — Rev. Dr. John Danner preached a four-part series of sermons called “Playing a Part.” Each Sunday during Advent he highlighted one of four individuals who play a role in the stories of this season: Isaiah (the 8th century prophet), John the Baptizer, Mary and Joseph.

Community Church of Vero Beach — On December 5, 2019, the church organized an Advent workshop that took place on Saturday afternoon. It was a reflection booklet that contained all original artwork, music, photos and writings by UCG members.

Windermere Union Church — The church organized an Advent workshop that took place on Saturday afternoon, December 7, when all were invited to create fun Christmas crafts. Participants were requested to bring their favorite Christmas cookies to share.

Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples and Fort Myers Congregational UCC — Church members were invited to begin reading on December 1 a chapter in the Gospel of Luke each day. By Christmas Eve, the 24 chapters in the Gospel will have been read providing an entire account of Jesus’ life.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach — The Advent theme was “Joy,” in recognition of the 300th anniversary of the Christmas classic, “Joy to the World,” by hymn poet Isaac Watt and his interpretation of Psalm 89 inviting us to sing a “new song.” Joy was the theme for each Sunday worship message.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale – The Sunday worship sermon titles during Advent were: “The Hope of Christmas,” The Promise
Faith UCC/Dunedin – The Sunday School created a unique Advent calendar. The days from December 1 through December 24 were represented by children’s socks. Their conversation included how children of the world differ in how they live and differences in quality of life. They discussed gifts that can be shared with others that cost nothing — things like kindness, joy, food, peace, sunshine, clouds, hugs, aloha, friendship and inclusion. The group wrote the words from the gift list onto pieces of paper that were then placed inside the socks on the Advent calendar, the purpose of which was to be able to share these gifts of well-being with members of the church. Church members were asked to draw words or peace cranes from the calendar socks. These were gifts from the church’s children to the adults in the congregation. The 12 pairs of socks on the calendar were donated after Christmas.

First Congregational Church/Lake Worth – An Advent study, “A Geography of Salvation,” was held on Wednesday evenings.

Naples UCC – The Precious Cargo Academy had a special evening of exploring and celebrating the season of Advent for children and their families and friends on Wednesday evening, December 4. Dinner was provided and the program offered craft activities and resources for families to celebrate Advent at home. The event was free and open to the public. The church offered mid-week Advent meditations at Noon on December 4, 11 and 18 in the Sanctuary with Dr. Becky Weese-Rumpf on the organ and piano followed by a guided labyrinth walk. Meditations were led by Associate Pastor Rev. Dr. Deb Kaiser-Cross, Executive Pastor Rev. Dr. David Kaiser-Cross and Associate Pastor Rev. Dr. Sharon Harris-Ewing with music provided by Glenn Basham (violin), Cindy Dallas (piano) and Blair Francis (flute).

Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey – There was a Wednesday morning Advent study using “The Case for Christmas” by Lee Strobel.

Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey – There was a Wednesday morning Advent study using “The Case for Christmas” by Lee Strobel.

Right: Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour – Adults and children enjoyed a wreath-making workshop during Advent.

Left: Lighting the Advent candles at North Port Community UCC.

Christ Congregational UCC/ Miami – The Angel Tree gifts were destined for those children who live in foster care and have Guardians ad Litem within the church family. When entering the Sanctuary for the Christmas Eve service, a cardboard stable was made by Lia Smith for her confirmation project. Congregants were invited to fill the stable with canned goods (with pull-tab lids) that would be donated to students at Southridge High School who are currently living with their families in cars and other temporary accommodations.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton (R) participated in the Back to Basics Angel Tree program sponsored by a volunteer non-profit whose mission was to provide 7,500 children in Palm Beach County with underwear, socks, new sneakers and a toy during the holiday. Back to Basics partners with over 50 elementary schools in identifying children who need assistance. Church on the Hill generously helped 33 children.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach – More than 100 Angel Tree gifts went to either the Pinellas Association of Retarded Citizens or Brookwood Home for Abused and Neglected Girls. Members also delivered home-baked or store-bought cookies, packed in festive boxes, to families residing in CASA, a local domestic abuse shelter for parents with children.

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park – The gifts benefited children at the Great Oaks Children’s Home.

Cocoa Beach Community Church (R) – Church members filled stockings for the Salvation Army and they made Christmas special for three families, two of which had been homeless.
Spring Hill UCC – Twenty-five needy children at Pine Grove Elementary School received either clothing or toys. The church also provided a Toys for Tots collection box.

Port Orange UCC – The Angel Tree mission for children at Spruce Creek Elementary School resulted in 67 children receiving gifts.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City – The Red Bow tree’s decorations provided fast food certificates for 43 needy homeless students in Volusia County.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC – Members were invited to bring in socks to decorate the “sock tree” with the adult socks going to Abundant Grace and children’s to L.A.M.P. (Lee Adolescent Mothers Program); 53 pairs of women’s and 71 pairs of men’s socks were collected for Abundant Grace and 131 children and baby socks went to L.A.M.P. The church’s Mission Board offered its “alternative giving program” by providing a list of local organizations that would benefit from member support.

Key Biscayne Community Church/Miami – The church held its packing party on Wednesday, November 13, to fill shoeboxes with gifts for Samaritan’s Purse: Operation Christmas Child.

United Church of Gainesville – Gifts (suggested cost in the $25-$30 range) were taken to Rawlings Elementary School where parents could purchase a gift for their children with a minimal amount of money ($3-$5).

Coral Gables Congregational UCC – The 250 Angel Tree gifts filled the van that went to support current residents of Lotus House Homeless Shelter in Miami with gift cards, toys, puzzles, books (including in Spanish) and jewelry but NO Barbie Dolls or toys that suggested violence.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota – Because seniors in need are often overlooked during the holiday season, the congregation decided to have its Angel Tree help provide Christmas gifts for local seniors who may need some additional holiday cheer.

Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples – The church collected new, unwrapped toys for the Greater Naples Fire District’s Annual Toy Command.

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg – Toys were collected for Maximo Elementary School (where almost all the children are from under privileged families). The children were also able to choose gifts for others so small gifts for parents were appropriate. A collection was also taken during the Christmas Eve service to provide rent, utility and other assistance to people in the congregation and community in need.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale – The church filled 238 empty socks with goodies for those in the community in need served by the church’s Ruth Ministry. The Angel Tree supported the St. Stephen’s AIDS Ministry at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Coconut Grove with a collection of gift cards, toys and games for over 300 children of clients at the CareResource AIDS agency in Broward and Dade counties.

Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie – The church collected toys for the WPSL Christmas Kids drive.

Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami – Boxes of Christmas gifts donated by Plymouth members and preschool families went to more than 200 children in foster care.

United Church of Gainesville – Each year during the Christmas Eve services, a special offering is received to help support UCG members and others in the community who are in need of help during a time of crisis or transition with utilities, rent, food and emergency shelter. Also, every December a donation is received for Ray Meeks, a church member who was on death row for 42 years when his sentence was commuted to life in prison. He uses the funds for personal items like clothing, toiletries and snacks. There was also an Angel Tree, with gifts provided to a local elementary school.

Windermere Union Church — As in the past, a special offering was taken for KIVA, a non-profit international organization with the mission to connect people through lending small sums of money to alleviate poverty in many of the poorest countries of the world.

Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach – After a luncheon on Sunday, December 15, the gathered filled close to 100 bags of goodies for the homeless and hungry.

Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg — Christmas items were collected for three organizations: Jacaranda Manor residents, Red Tent Project (a local organization committed to reducing recidivism while creating a sense of community
and support for any women in need) and foster care kids.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota – Church women engaged in their annual outreach project of assembling the Herald Tribune Senior Christmas Boxes. They collected items to include such as sample shampoos, soaps, feet warmers, pads, note paper, postage stamps, etc. for shut-in seniors. Church members also participated in the Home Instead Senior Care-sponsored annual program titled “Be a Santa to a Senior.” The initiative is designed to bring smiles and joy to seniors who might not have a pleasant holiday because of financial limitations or because they are socially isolated. The suggested gifts were delivered to needy seniors in the Sarasota County area in the days before Christmas.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach – The Gifts of Love Toys Drive began in the fall, with volunteers registering needy families for “wish list” Christmas gifts for their children. Parents provided their children’s gift wishes for two items (no more than $25). Many churches, organizations and individuals were “angels,” purchasing as best as they could, the gifts that each child wanted. In the end, the program served 394 children with each child receiving about five gifts. In addition, the Teens in Action group gave residents at the Beacon (shelter for women and children) their annual Christmas party, complete with Santa, gifts and a wonderful holiday dinner.

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour — Each Christmas the congregation gathers toys and clothes for children and donates them to the families in the Redlands School for migrant farm worker families.

Church of the Palms UCC/Delray Beach – The church participated in the fourteenth annual Project Holiday: One Soldier at a Time to support local men and women deployed overseas during the holidays. Items collected included snacks, socks, note cards, hand lotion and shampoo.

First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce – Toys were collected for Castle, a local non-profit whose mission is preventing child abuse.

Jensen Beach Community Church – The Boy’s and Girl’s Club of Indiantown was the recipient of Christmas gifts.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon – The music team hosted a fundraiser for the church in early December by inviting congregants and friends to join them as they performed and entertained at their Coffee Café. A love offering was collected and attendees baked and brought goodies for a donation. Over $400 was raised for the church with many donated gift cards for homeless students attending Mintz Elementary School. Kim Ressler also collected donated toys to take to St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital and Cancer Center in Tampa.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach – A Blue Christmas service at 7pm on Tuesday, December 17, preceded by a soup dinner at 6pm.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota – A service of wholeness, healing and remembering was offered at the church on Wednesday, December 18, for those who found it difficult to make it through a festive holiday and those who wished to support them.

United Church of Gainesville – The Longest Night Labyrinth Service was held on the evening of December 18 with a time of candlelight, beautiful music, prayers and peace for those for whom the holidays can be a time when companions, reassurance and comfort are sought.

Naples UCC – The Longest Night Service was observed on Sunday afternoon, December 15, that included musical contributions from soprano Pamela Jimenez and violinist Glenn Basham.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC – The Longest Night Service was held on Saturday evening, December 21, as an intentional time together to recognize and commemorate losses and join in the darkness to speak within it not in fear but in hope.

First United Church of Tampa – A Blue Christmas service was offered on Thursday evening, December 19.

Community Church of Vero Beach – The Longest Night Service was held on Sunday afternoon, December 15, in the Chapel with a service of Communion, anointing, remembrance and healing.

Faith UCC/Bradenton – A Service of Hope took place on Tuesday evening, December 7.
First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce – The Blue Christmas service was conducted at Noon on December 22.

CrossRoads UCC/Melbourne – The Candlelight Labyrinth Walk — lighting the way on the longest night — was rescheduled from Saturday evening, December 21, to Saturday, January 4, was a time for prayer and meditation.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach – A Blue service was held in the Sanctuary on Tuesday evening, December 10.

CrossRoads UCC/Melbourne – The Candlelight Labyrinth Walk — lighting the way on the longest night — was rescheduled from Saturday evening, December 21, to Saturday, January 4, was a time for prayer and meditation.

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park — The all-church Christmas party was thrown on Sunday, December 15, immediately following worship in Fellowship Hall. It was a free lunch prepared by church member and chef extraordinaire Drew Weisner.

First UCC/Orlando – The church held its first Christmas party for adults on Saturday evening, December 7. Guests brought a snack to share and a wrapped gift for the gift exchange.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon – The congregation enjoyed a Christmas dinner on Sunday, December 15, after the service, and many plates went out to feed those in need of a hot meal. A Christmas Eve hot breakfast was served on Tuesday, December 24, from 9-11am with dine-in or carry out.

Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach — Members gathered after worship on Sunday, December 15, for a Christmas potluck luncheon. Their 50/50 raffle resulted in half of the take going to the church for its benevolence fund.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale – On Thursday, December 19, the church had a worship service attended by 109 persons in the congregation’s Ruth Ministry, which serves the needy in the area, followed by a meal for which Temple Adath Or provided food and volunteers.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC – The annual Three Kings Party was held on Saturday evening, January 4, with dancing, drinks and delicious food with all proceeds benefiting the church. The next day there was a Family Celebration of Epiphany with an intergenerational worship service and piñata party.
**Pensacola Beach Community UCC** — Members were invited to bring their favorite baked goods to the congregation’s Christmas brunch and bake sale on Sunday, December 8. There was also a cake and pie silent auction.

**Spring Hill UCC** — On Christmas Day at 5pm, the church welcomed all in the community to “A Community Christmas Dinner & Movie.”

**United Church of Gainesville** – The December 29 service was titled “Fresh Start,” and was followed by a potluck finger food brunch.

**United Church in Tallahassee** – Christmas time at UCT means going to wonderful Christmas parties with the Spiritual Formation Sunday morning class teachers throwing Christmas parties with delightful food and fellowship. Also, church members gathered in the Sanctuary on Friday, December 20, at 7pm to sing Christmas Carols and enjoy light refreshments.

**Church on the Hill Congregational UCC** — The Christmas potluck luncheon took place on December 15 following the Christmas youth program.

**Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville** – The Family Christmas party was on Saturday, December 21.

**Faith UCC/Bradenton** – The Christmas potluck was enjoyed after the service on December 8, and Moderator Richard Dlits hosted a buffet dinner at his home on Friday evening, December 20.

**UCC/New Smyrna Beach** — When John Buchanan and Donnie Coleman realized that none of the local feeding programs served food to needy families, homeless and folks who just felt alone on Christmas Day, they decided to serve a full Christmas Dinner to those less fortunate. Supported by Colors of Hunger and the UCCNSB church family, the 8th Annual Christmas Dinner took place in UCCNSB’s Community Hall. Over 190 meals were served, and 44 volunteers helped cook, serve and cleanup. John and Donnie also had warm clothing, blankets, toiletries on-hand for those who needed it and Christmas gifts for children.

**North Port Community UCC** – Women of the church gathered to share a potluck meal, exchanged gifts, played games of 1950s happenings and then packaged dozens of homemade cookies to give to house-bound and infirmed members as well as donating a purse and baby items to Pregnancy Solutions.

**Boynton Beach Congregational UCC** – Pastor Rev. Jack Copas and sister Laura Ciocca hosted the first Christmas party the church has enjoyed in decades.

**Cocoa Beach Community Church** – The women made snowmen at their Women’s Fellowship Christmas party on Tuesday, December 17.
Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda – The Christmas pageant was during the 10am service on December 15.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC – The children’s program “A Child Shall Lead Them” took place during the December 15 service. A group of children are on a school field trip to an art museum, and they are having a lively discussion while looking at reproductions of Rembrandt paintings that tell the Christmas story. The younger children performed two Christmas gospel songs after the big kids performed.

United Church of Gainesville – The annual Christmas Pageant “Follow That Star” with pre-K and elementary children took place during the first service on December 15.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton – Sunday School children and youth presented a special Christmas program during worship on December 15. There was a live nativity scene produced on Saturday, December 21.

North Port Community UCC – “The Innkeeper’s Daughter” was performed as the Christmas Cantata. The choir performed eight traditional seasonal anthems, and members of the congregation created the narrative of the innkeeper’s daughter that special night in Bethlehem.

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg – The congregation had a special interactive intergenerational service on December 22 in which those attending formed a tableau of the nativity scene. They were invited to bring with them any appropriate costuming or props for shepherds, angels, Mary, Joseph, the animals in the barn, the three kings and so forth. It concluded with the lining the cradle in preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Windermere Union Church – A multigenerational Christmas Pageant was presented on Sunday, December 15, titled “The Invitation,” which was a really different and fun take on the Christmas story. Chris Stumpf wrote and directed the pageant, as she has in previous years.

Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park – Children reenacted the nativity during a December worship service, with Chris Osberg getting all the participants ready.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach – Thanks to Debbie Hughes, the new costumes designed and created for this year’s pageant were such a big hit that even getting to wear a donkey or sheep costume was a big deal.
Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg – Because not everyone could make it to church during the season, a group of members visited the residences of homebound members to cheer them with song on Sunday afternoon, December 15.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale – On Sunday afternoon, December 15, carolers from the church enjoyed a soup-and-bread meal after worship before heading off to sing to those who were home-bound or living in nursing or assisted living facilities.

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park – Eleven church members sang their way into the homes and facilities of shut-ins and delivered homemade cookies on Sunday, December 15.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota – On December 17 some members and friends of the congregation visited a couple of assisted-living facilities to sing Christmas carols and share holiday fun with residents and with members of the church family who live in them.

Community Church of Vero Beach – Sunday afternoon, December 15, carolers hopped on the Holly Jolly Trolley to bring seasonal music out into the community.

Faith UCC/Bradenton – Carolers visited homebound members and local nursing homes on Sunday afternoon, December 15.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC – A shuttle bus on Sunday afternoon, December 22, delivered church members of all ages who brought carols to home-bound members and friends.

UCC/New Smyrna Beach – Carolers visited shut-ins after worship on December 15, including the Teens in Action group who caroled at a nursing home in Port Orange.

Union Congregational Church/Avon Park – Some members of the youth praise team sang for Changing of Pace adult care clients.

CrossRoads UCC/Melbourne – The carolers made the rounds singing all the favorites to residents at three assisted living/retirements homes in Brevard County, having a wonderful time singing all the favorites.
First Congregational UCC/Winter Park – The family-friendly holiday concert was held in the Sanctuary on Wednesday evening, December 18, with proceeds benefiting the church and the Orlando Gay Chorus. **Dr. John Sinclair**, the Director of Music at FCUCC, directed the Bach Festival Choir in the “Bach Festival Classic Christmas” broadcast on the local PBS TV station on Christmas Day.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton – The Christmas Cantata was performed on Sunday, December 8, featuring the Chancel Choir and solos by choir members and guest artists.

Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples – Church musicians, bell ringers and singers presented a variety of Christmas music selections during worship on December 8.

Windermere Union Church – The church choir performed a Christmas Cantata that began with the service on Sunday December 9 led by Music Director **Kevin Harris**. On Sunday, December 22, at the 10am service there was a very special musical presentation, which gave a new and zany look at the nativity story as told by Kevin and the Windermere Union Church Praise Team.

United Church of Gainesville – Carrying on its 28th annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, this UCG tradition of instrumental music, choral anthems and scripture took place during services at 11am and 7pm on Sunday, December 8. A reception followed the 7pm service. There was a children’s cantata at the early service on December 15 and special music from the Ukulele Orchestra of Gainesville at the later service. The All Church Band played its medley of sing-a-long carols on Sunday, December 22.

United Church in Tallahassee – Members and friends gathered in the Sanctuary on Friday evening, December 20, to sing carols and celebrate the season while enjoying light refreshments.

Spring Hill UCC – The free outdoor Sing-a-Long took place in the evening of Friday, December 13, and featured musical performances by choral groups from Spring Hill Elementary School and Challenger K-8 Magnet School. The event was open to the community and complimentary hot chocolate and sweet treats were served – along with a visit from Santa.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach – The holiday choral concert of holiday favorites was
presented by Bay Voices, an 11-voice male ensemble, on Saturday, December 7, in the Sanctuary.

Naples UCC – “Christmas with Dr. Becky” (Director of Music Dr. Becky Weese-Rumpf) took place on Sunday afternoon, December 8, with a free will offering to one of the congregation’s Mission Partners, People for Guatemala.

Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami – The service on Sunday, December 15, was a “Musical Sunday Service” that featured the Christmas portion of Handel’s “Messiah” sung by soloists and the church’s Chancel Choir with organ and orchestra.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota — On Sunday, December 29, the congregation had its Christmas Singspiration Celebration. The gathered sang favorite Advent and Christmas songs and hymns from the New Century Hymnal, plus there was time for spoken word and beautiful music from the Chancel Choir.

Community Church of Vero Beach – In the Sanctuary on the evening of December 8, the Chancel Choir, Dasie Hope Children’s Choir, Vero Beach Choral Society, Tapestry Brass and pianist Rochelle Sallee and Jacob Craig combined for a “O Come All Ye Faithful” celebration.

Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda – The Christmas with the Celts concert was held on Thursday evening, December 5.

Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie – The church choir was one of three that performed in the “Love Made a Way: The Journey of Christmas” concert on Sunday evening, December 15.

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park – The Synchrony Arts Players and the Good Sam Choir took a “frolic through commercial, magical and playful aspects” on a “holidaze” theme.

First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce – The Christmas Cantata took place on Sunday, December 22.

Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach – The “Sing Along Messiah” was enjoyed on Sunday afternoon, December 1, conducted by music directors from the local Catholic and Episcopal churches.

Riviera UCC/Palm Bay – The Cantata took place during the December 22 service.

Pilgrim Church/Port Charlotte – The “Bethlehem Child” Cantata was performed on Sunday, December 8.

Sanibel Congregational UCC – The Jazz Lessons and Carols Service was featured on Sunday afternoon, December 15, with saxophonist and vocalist Shawn Allison, pianist Abbey Allison and guitarist Dave Dust who presented upbeat pieces, beautiful ballads and other Christmas music with a jazz twist. Shawn led the carol singing, which featured familiar Christmas songs.

Also participating in the service was Pastor Rev. Dr. John Danner. The trio chose readings from sources including Christmas sermons by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Archbishop Oscar Romero and Christmas poems by Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. There were selections by other poets, orators and theologians, as well with the readings emphasizing Christmas miracles, peace and the joy of the season.
Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg -- 6:30pm music of the season followed at 7pm with a candlelight service and Communion

Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach -- 6:30pm candlelight service

First Congregational UCC/Ocala -- 6pm service

First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen -- 7pm service with lessons, carols and candles

New Vision Congregational Church/Yulee -- 5pm candlelight service with Chris Porth and five guest musicians on hand for the music.

Miami Beach Community Church -- 8pm service

Mayflower Congregational UCC/Naples -- 7pm candlelight service

Deltona UCC -- 6pm service

Pensacola Beach Community UCC -- 5:30pm traditional candlelight service with Communion and song

Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville -- 6pm candlelight service with Christmas music from the traditional to wonderful jazz versions by three accomplished and talented jazz artists. The service included Communion and an “instant pageant” for the children.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton -- 4pm family service with children’s choir, 8pm candlelight family service with caroling

Union Congregational Church/Avon Park -- 7:30pm candlelight in the Millenium Sanctuary, 11pm candlelight in the historic church

Faith Family UCC/Brandon -- 7:30pm service of lessons and carols; Christmas Day 10am informal family service with meal following

Riverside UCC/Jacksonville -- 7:30pm celebrating at manger and table

Port Orange UCC -- 7pm candlelight service

Miami Lakes UCC -- 5:30pm candlelight service

Church of the Palms UCC/Delray Beach -- 7pm service

United Church in Tallahassee -- 7pm candlelight service

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota -- 4pm carols, harp and soloist, poetry and Communion; 7pm family-friendly service, carols, children process with the crèche scene and combined choirs and guest instrumentalists; 11pm guest instrumentalists, Communion

North Port Community UCC -- 7pm candlelight service. Three year old Mia Rose Dougherty proudly delivered the Baby Jesus to the manger at the beginning of the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service.

Chrst Congregational Church/Miami -- 6pm service with gathering in the Garden Chapel at the close to hold lit candles while singing “Silent Night”

Cocoa Beach Community Church -- 7pm candlelight service

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park — 6pm candlelight service with string quartet

Lighthouse Congregational UCC/Naples -- 5pm candlelight service with carols, choir and special music

United Church of Gainesville -- 4:30pm, families with babies, preschoolers and younger elementary (each child received a figure from the Christmas story and brought it forward to create the manger scene); 7:30pm, families with older elementary, teens and adults (opportunity for children to bring manger figures forward); 9:30, families with teens and adults for sermon and Communion; all services concluded with a candlelight circle in the memory garden as “Silent Night” was sung

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park -- 5pm family service; 9pm candlelight, lessons and carols

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour -- 7:30pm candlelight service of lessons and carols; Christmas Day 10:30am followed by brunch

Fort Myers Congregational UCC -- 5pm candlelight service and carols
First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce – 4pm candlelight service
Faith UCC/Bradenton – 7pm candlelight service
First UCC/Orlando – 7pm service
Naples UCC – 4pm Interactive children’s and family service with the children and youth choirs (preceded by 3pm Christmas Eve Extravaganza with crafts, goodies and snow!); 6pm and 8pm candlelight service of lessons and carols with tenor Javier Abreu, the Sanctuary Choir and Chamber Orchestra; 10pm candlelight service (as 6 and 8pm services but with Communion)
Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda – 7pm candlelight service
Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole – 7pm service
Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg – 8pm candlelight service with carols and special music in the Chapel followed by cookies and coffee in the courtyard
Altamonte Community UCC/Altamonte Springs – 7pm candlelight service in the historic Chapel
Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach – 4pm children and family service; 7pm carols and candles service; 10pm carols, candles and Communion service
Venice UCC – 7pm service
Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami – 5pm family worship (and birthday cake for Baby Jesus); 8pm candlelight service of lessons and carols; 11pm candlelight service with carols and Communion; Christmas Day 10am family service
First United Church of Tampa – 7pm preceded by an appetizer potluck
Jensen Beach Community Church – 7pm candlelight service
Sanibel Congregational UCC – 5pm service at Lighthouse Beach; 9pm carols and candlelight service in the Sanctuary
Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda – 7pm service
Emmanuel UCC/Sebring – 7pm service
Union Congregational UCC/Tavares – 4pm service
First Congregational Church/Lake Worth – 7pm service
Community Church of Vero Beach – 3pm Chapel service with soloist and homily; 4:30pm family service in the Sanctuary; 7 and 9pm lessons and carols in the Sanctuary with orchestra and chancel choir; 11pm C2 Rock the Manger in Community Hall
Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach – 6pm candlelight service with carols and special music
Longwood Hills Congregational UCC – 7pm candlelight service
Windermere Union Church – 6pm traditional candlelight service with carols
Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie – 7pm service
United Church of Marco Island – 5pm and 7:30pm services
CrossRoads UCC/Melbourne – 6pm candlelight service
Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey – 4pm candlelight service with the “Adore” cantata and a Christmas dramatization
First Congregational Church/Orange City – 4pm service
Riviera UCC/Palm Bay – 7pm candlelight service with lessons and carols
Pilgrim Church/Port Charlotte – 6pm and 8pm services (Christmas service at South Port continuing care retirement community on Thursday morning, December 19)
Coral Gables Congregational UCC – 3pm German language service; 5:30pm family service [photo]; 8 & 11pm, candlelight worship (pre-service concerts at 7:30 and 10:30pm)
UCC/Fort Lauderdale – 8pm candlelight service with carols, harp, flute and string quartet
St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota – 6:30pm special music followed at 7pm by candlelight celebration with lessons and carols
UCC/New Smyrna Beach
First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
**Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton** – The annual bake sale was held after worship on December 8.

**Community Church of Vero Beach** – Families were invited to the Jingle Jam on Saturday, December 14, to enjoy Christmas crafts and activities, cookies and pictures taken with Santa.

**UCC/Fort Lauderdale** – A discussion was offered over four evening classes, “Who Was on the Road for Christmas and Who Stayed Home: Joseph, The Magi, The Shepherds and Mary.”

**Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach** — The Piecemakers delivered over 70 quilts and 20 baby hats that were holiday-themed to All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg in early December to be given to the babies in the neonatal unit. December 15 was “Wear-your-favorite-ugly-Christmas-sweater-to-church” Sunday.

**United Church of Gainesville** — The “Holiday Toy Shoppe” at the church was filled with gently-loved toys — brought by kids ready to part with them — before the 9:15 service on Sunday, December 1. After the service, they returned to “shop” for a different toy, which could be given to a family member or friend (they “shopped” for the same number of toys they had donated). Elves were handy for help with wrapping! Church members were invited to celebrate New Year’s Eve in the church hall with the Dances of Universal Peace’s “Global Peace Dance” Tuesday evening, December 31, from 7:30-10pm – a joyful candlelit atmosphere live music, singing and dancing.

**First Congregational UCC/Winter Park** – Church members participated in Winter Park’s “Ye Olde Hometown Christmas Parade” on Saturday, December 7. On Friday, December 13, the film “The Christmas Chronicles” was shown in Fellowship Hall – with free pizza and popcorn! December 29 was “PJ Sunday” at the church. Everyone was invited to wear their pajamas to worship and then retire to Fellowship Hall after the service for a carol sing and cocoa and cookies.

**Coral Gables Congregational UCC** – The German Christmas Market, hosted by the church’s German Language congregation, was held Sunday, December 1, after worship. The German Language congregation had a special New Year’s worship service in the Chapel on Sunday afternoon, January 5.

The Prayer Shawl Ministry raised almost $4,000 through their annual Christmas sale and raffle to help purchase yarn and other supplies for upcoming projects and also made a generous donation to the WISE Team for future programming.

**First Congregational UCC/Port St. Lucie** – Mr. and Mrs. Claus visited the church’s preschool on Wednesday, December 18.

**First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce** – The Christmas Bazaar took place on Saturday, December 7, and offered home-baked goods, jewelry, gently-used items, arts and crafts and sandwiches and soups.

**Jensen Beach Community Church** – The annual Christmas Thrift Shop Sale happened on Saturday, November 16.

**Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie** – The All You Can Eat Pancakes with Santa for WPSL Christmas Kids was hosted by the church on Saturday, December 7. Donations of unwrapped toys for a child age infant to 12 years old were requested.

**First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen** – A Cookie Walk took place on Saturday morning, December 7, at which you could buy a tin to fill with homemade goodies.

**Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey** – The Cookie Walk and Christmas Bazaar happened on Saturday, December 14, with the sale of cookies and seasonal items.

**Longwood Hills Congregational UCC** – The annual Pancake Breakfast with Santa was held on Saturday morn-
ing, December 7. Plenty of food and crafts were available for the kids as well.

**Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie** – This was the second season Faith Church offered to assist the Salvation Army with their Red Kettle Christmas Campaign. The shifts were outside a Publix beginning the Friday after Thanksgiving and the following three Fridays thereafter.

**Spring Hill UCC** – The tenth annual Christmas Bazaar & Cookie Walk was the happening from 9am-2pm on Friday, December 6, and Saturday, December 7. There were homemade cookies and baked breads, a gift basket raffle, unique crafts, gifts and Christmas decorations. New this year was the “Kids’ Shoppe” where they could purchase gifts and do activities. The sale of cookies alone brought in over $1,800 (that’s over 267 pounds worth). Over 52 baskets were raffled off along with 107 gift cards. Total sales were over $7,000.

**Year’s end Bowl Burning ceremonies** — at which participants list their shortcomings and challenges of the outgoing year on slips of paper before coming forward to drop them in a burning pot — were held at several of our churches including **UCC/Fort Lauderdale** and **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park**.

In some instances, affirmative affirmations for the new year are written down and placed in self-addressed envelopes that are mailed as reminders.

**North Port Community UCC** – Breakfast with Santa took place on Saturday morning, December 14. Santa is John McKean with Becky Rooney.

**Riviera UCC/Palm Bay** – Locals enjoyed the third annual Cookie Walk on Saturday, December 14.

**Serving a holiday meal to the members of Ruth’s Ministry at UCC/Fort Lauderdale**