A Time for Patience and Grace

Who would have guessed that more than two months later we’d still be in the situation we find ourselves in today? It gives power to the Psalmist’s cry of “How long, O Lord, how long?” and serves as a stark reminder that we are not as in control of every outcome as we often like to think we are.

I remember — way back in March — how we started answering questions about serving Communion and collecting offerings and other such pieces of public worship. Now, of course, our main question pertains to whether and when we will hold public worship again.

I am aware that a few of our congregations have chosen to open in the coming weeks, and that is certainly their prerogative. I recognize that some areas of the state were impacted to a lesser degree than others and some might feel safe coming together.

I hope that, whenever we choose to open our buildings, we will do so based not on emotion and political pressure but on science and gathered data and guidelines offered on a regular basis by the CDC. I’ve been saying the same thing to congregations for 10 weeks now: listen to the CDC and your local health department to best know when it will be safe for you to gather.

Those guidelines are specific and important. Here is a link to a document from the United Church of Christ Insurance Board that will help you assess your readiness to reopen:

https://www.insuranceboard.org/preparing-your-church-property-after-lockdown/

...continued on page 2

Our Churches Respond
Going Virtual, Being Relevant

Much of Lent and then Holy Week and Easter this year were experienced by our Florida congregations in ways no one ever could have imagined. In the previous issue of Celebrate Florida, we followed some of our churches through Lent until the last week in March and shared what we learned. In this issue we have noted what the schedules were for some of our congregations during Holy Week and Easter.

Churches have been experimenting with different ways in which to provide “virtual” Sunday morning worship services (encountering more than occasional glitches especially with the “live” productions — including the Zoom platform, which wasn’t working on Sunday morning, May 17 — and having to change course and improvise). Some even have been able to note new visitors to their churches who have found them through the Internet. And most have been able to offer the usual educational and fellowship opportunities in new ways and all while maintaining engagement with the broader community. Most of these efforts have been successful, even in face of the challenges. As you read this, some of our churches already may have re-opened for worship while others are tentatively planning to wait until summer.

All churches are reminding their members about pledges and tithing as the bills and expenses keep filling the inbox even though the pews and seats on Sunday mornings remain empty. Congregations continue to participate in the “Strengthen the Church” appeals. And there is often the friendly reminder about the CARES Act stimulus payments and the opportunity it affords to help non-profits — and our churches. Many are also extending financial and other support to their members through pastors’ discretionary funds and other vehicles.
There are other important resources available to you at www.chhsm.org and you can contact us directly by phone at 877-776-9472. We are here to assist you in any way possible. Through the Florida Conference, you can connect with each other, share ideas, and learn from one another. We encourage you to remain active and engaged in the life of your congregation and your pastor. Doing so with patience and grace will be a gift of the Holy Spirit as we seek to be faithful in ways we never imagined. I pray for you such gifts, and our staff’s ready to work with you to find them for your setting in this season of Pentecost and beyond.

Thank you for your ministry and your engagement in serving your communities. You truly are the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ, that they may all be one.

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

Thank you for your ministry and your engagement in serving your communities.

Friends, I am clear that the churches of the Florida Conference are not immune to the challenges of this year’s 2020 election. So as we move toward whatever the new normal will look like for us in the coming days, I’ve been overwhelmed by the creativity I’ve witnessed across the life the Conference and pray that those creative energies will continue to flow even as I encourage everyone involved to step back and breathe for a moment. Creating a sustainable level of ministry is vital to so as we move toward whatever the new normal will look like for us in the coming days, I’ve been overwhelmed by the creativity I’ve witnessed across the life the Conference and pray that those creative energies will continue to flow even as I encourage everyone involved to step back and breathe for a moment. Creating a sustainable level of ministry is vital to all that is being done in those ministries. See something that intrigues you, maybe an idea to “borrow” (hey, that’s why we are in covenant)? Contact the church if you need more info about what they are doing and how.

ALTAMONTE SPRINGS
Altamonte Chapel Community UCC
- The church board met on May 17 and decided to resume worship on Sunday, May 24
- The church continues to support the food pantry at the Sharing Center in Longwood

AUBURNDALE
Christ’s Promise UCC
- Sunday worship available on YouTube

AVON PARK
Union Congregational Church
- Virtual worship Sunday is at 9 and 11am via church website and Facebook

BAL HARBOUR
Church by the Sea
- Worship service at 7pm on Facebook and YouTube

BOYNTON BEACH
Boynton Beach Congregational UCC
Rev. Jack Copas posted a video on YouTube on April 27 with a message of faith and hope incorporating photos of church members and “Morning Has Broken” by Cat Stevens

BRANDON
Faith Family UCC
Easter – The 10am service was live via Facebook

CORAL GABLES
Coral Gables Congregational UCC
Easter – 7am sunrise service (posted on Facebook); 11am service (live on Facebook); 12:15pm Connection Café for coffee and conversation (live on Facebook); 1pm family service geared for children and young families (posted on Facebook)

Good Friday – Noon service (online)

Maundy Thursday – 7pm service (online)

Palm Sunday – 11am (online)

Members were invited to share pictures holding or standing by a palm for a special Palm Sunday collage, which was posted on Facebook and the church website

- Sunday services are being livestreamed at 10:30am via Facebook
- Church meetings are held via Zoom
- Members are encouraged to support the food pantry at Boca Helping Hands
- Rev. Tom Lacey conducts a weekly Bible study via Facebook

Easter – The 10:30am service was live-streamed via Facebook

Good Friday – A pre-recorded message was posted on Facebook and the church website

- Sunday services are being livestreamed at 10:30am via Facebook
- Church meetings are held via Zoom

Good Friday
- Virtual worship on Sunday, May 31
- E-blast messages are in English and Spanish
- Regularly scheduled gatherings during the week are offered including “knitting & conversation,” the prayer shawl ministry, therapy sessions (for parents), koinonia and music lessons (all via Zoom) and meditation
- Graduates from kindergarten, elementary or middle school were celebrated in a special service on Sunday, May 31
- Grocery distribution takes place periodically from the church office for those in need

BOCA RATON
Church on the Hill Congregational UCC
Easter – The 10am service was live via Facebook (the bulletin was e-mailed in advance on Friday); members were invited to take a picture of their family celebrating Easter and text or e-mail it to the church for later publication in the church bulletin

Maundy Thursday – The live worship was via Facebook at 7pm

Palm Sunday – Live worship was via Facebook at 10am

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Palm Sunday – Live worship was via Facebook at 10am

Rev. Tom Lacey led a Bible study on Facebook during Holy week.

- The Sunday service is on Facebook. Live at 10am and the bulletin (with the full text of the sermon) is posted ahead of time in an e-blast
- Members are encouraged to support the food pantry at Boca Helping Hands
- Rev. Tom conducts a weekly Bible study via Facebook

BOYNTON BEACH
Boynton Beach Congregational UCC

BRANDON
Faith Family UCC
Easter – The 10:30am service was live-streamed via Facebook

Good Friday – A pre-recorded message was posted on Facebook and the church website

- Sunday services are being livestreamed at 10:30am via Facebook
- Church meetings are held via Zoom

Good Friday
- Virtual worship on Sunday, May 31
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- Members are encouraged to support the food pantry at Boca Helping Hands
- Rev. Tom conducts a weekly Bible study via Facebook
• Sharing stories and survival strategies are discussed via Zoom on Tuesdays at 7pm
• “The Acts of the Apostles: Embracing the Spirit of Easter” was a series presented over Zoom on Sunday mornings during May
• On Wednesday noon the Called to Care Team offers prayers
  • W.I.S.E. offers a weekly support and chat group to give parents an opportunity to connect with one another
  • Links were provided on how to make a homemade mask and an online meeting was offered to explore career transitioning
  • The Fair Trade Marketplace remains “open” for curbside pickup and delivery

DELTONA
Deltona UCC
• Sunday worship is at 10:30am on Facebook

DUNEDIN
Faith UCC
Easter – 10am on Facebook Live and YouTube
Good Friday – service 3pm on Facebook Live and YouTube
Maundy Thursday service 7pm on Facebook Live and YouTube
Sunday services continue to be streamed on YouTube and Facebook Live
Links are provided to spiritual resources
A Spiritual Study Group via Zoom meets on Wednesday mornings
Microsoft Teams meeting page has been established for groups, chatting and support

FORT LAUDERDALE
UCC/Fort Lauderdale
Easter – Pre-recorded service was available on Facebook and church website
Palm Sunday – Pre-recorded service was available on Facebook and church website (church members were encouraged to affix a palm branch on their front doors)
A seven-minute video workshop was provided for creating homemade masks (30 pieces of silver!) to allow participants inside the mind of Judas as he contemplated his misgivings about Jesus. Bags were returned by mail to the church.
Members are invited to e-mail their photos so they could be affixed to the pew where they usually sit to help Pastor Rev. Dave Bucey visualize when he prays for his congregants
The prayer chain continues to pray for those in need
Members are invited to send to the church office a photo or a personal story to share that give inspiration in stressful times
The church has a weekly e-blast newsletter that provides helpful information including ways in which to deal with grief during a pandemic

FORT MYERS
Fort Myers Congregational UCC
Easter – service available on YouTube (bulletin was available in advance in e-blast)
Maundy Thursday – a devotional from the Gospel of John was shared
Palm Sunday – service available on YouTube (bulletin was available in advance in e-blast)
• Sunday worship is at 10am on YouTube
• On Sunday, March 1, worshippers were given a small hand-sewn cloth bag in which to place coins (“30 pieces of silver”) to allow participants inside the mind of Judas as he contemplated his misgivings about Jesus. Bags were returned by mail to the church.
• Members are invited to e-mail their photos so they could be affixed to the pew where they usually sit to help Pastor Rev. Dave Bucey visualize when he prays for his congregants
• The prayer chain continues to pray for those in need
• Members are invited to send to the church office a photo or a personal story to share that give inspiration in stressful times
• The church has a weekly e-blast newsletter that provides helpful information including ways in which to deal with grief during a pandemic

FORT WALTON BEACH
Eternal Hope UCC
Easter – 10am service livestreamed on Facebook
Palm Sunday – 10am service livestreamed on Facebook
• Sunday morning worship is livestreamed at 10am on Facebook
• Members participate in preparing and serving meals to those in need twice weekly in Fort Walton Beach and Pensacola

GAINEVILLE
United Church of Gainesville
Easter – live on YouTube (bulletin provided in advance in e-blast)
Maundy Thursday – 7pm service via Zoom
Palm Sunday – live on YouTube (bulletin provided in advance in e-blast)
Members were invited to make a sign that says something about the kind of world they want to live in (it could be one of gratitude, protest or inspiration; it could be on a simple sheet of paper, an upcycled political sign, anything) a picture or a video with the sign and/or one waving palms were sent to the church office and edited into a Palm Sunday parade video

GALESBURG
Collinsville
Arlington Congregational UCC
• Sunday worship at 10am via Facebook and posted on website

MIAMI
Christ Congregational UCC
Easter – 10:30am service livestreamed on Facebook (bulletin provided in advance in e-blast; viewed by over 425 people)
Palm Sunday – 10:30am service live-streamed on Facebook (bulletin provided in advance in e-blast)
• Sunday worship is livestreamed at 10:30am on Facebook
• Zoom coffee fellowship after worship began May 31
• Members are encouraged to support financially member David Williams’ Rotary Club’s outreach to provide hot meals to homeless students at a local high school
• The women’s group celebrates their sisters by sending cards, texts and calls to those who are celebrating, recuperating, mourning or struggling

NAPLES
Naples UCC
Easter – 10am service livestreamed (special offering benefiting the David Lawrence Center program for Mental Health Outreach to Faith Communities)
Sunday service is pre-recorded and available for viewing on YouTube Sunday morning
Sunday morning seminars are offered via Zoom
There are virtual Friday lunch meet-ups for both men and women (via Zoom); youth (separate middle and high school) “hangout” gatherings via Zoom and elementary children via Google and Zoom links

NEW SMYRNA BEACH
UCC/New Smyrna Beach
Easter – 10am service via Zoom
Good Friday – 6pm service via Zoom
Maundy Thursday – 6pm worship via Zoom
Palm Sunday – 9:30am service via Zoom
Sunday worship is pre-recorded and available for viewing on YouTube Sunday morning
Sunday morning seminars are offered via Zoom
There are virtual Friday lunch meet-ups for both men and women (via Zoom); youth (separate middle and high school) “hangout” gatherings via Zoom and elementary children via Google and Zoom links
Conferece Call Message from the Conference Minister
“Dear local church pastors and lay leaders have been working so hard to bring worship to the church during this pandemic. Many have been learning a whole new skill set as technology is being employed in ways previously not imagined. Please receive my thanks and appreciation. From where I’m sitting, it looks like you could use a break.
The Council of Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ invites you to worship with us on May 17 or any other Sunday in Eastertide depending on what works for your schedule. The materials – full video, video segments, bulletin, and read-only service – can be found on this calendar event: https://ucccm.org/event/worship-with-the-council-ministers/ I am hopeful that this worship service might be a blessing to you while providing connection to the wider church with whom we all are in covenant. I pray it will be so and that you will find ways to use the service, in whole or in part, in keeping with the Spirit’s calling in this moment.
From e-Celebrate, May 13 was available for pick-up at the church porch (the Friday before)
Sunday service is livestreamed at 10am; the Executive Committee of Church Council has decided to remain virtual through September 20
“Going the Distance,” the weekly e-blast, is authored by members of the clergy and program staff
Midweek meditations are livestreamed on Wednesday and Sundays
“An Evening with Your Pastors” was Zoomed on Thursday evening, April 30
Discussions of If Grace is True by Phil Gulley and The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World by Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama were livestreamed on Wednesdays at 5pm; discussion of An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith by Barbara Brown Taylor followed
E-blasts provide links to various resources including TED Talks, puzzles, trivia contests, meditation videos, virtual museum and park tours, suggested books to read, workouts, recipes and crafts
On one Sunday afternoon the Chamber Choir led a virtual Hymn-Sing, with lyrics included on the screen
Over 100 children were welcomed back to the Precious Cargo Academy at the end of May

REV. DIANE LANGWORTHY
A Geography of Faith
An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith by Barbara Brown Taylor followed
E-blasts provide links to various resources including TED Talks, puzzles, trivia contests, meditation videos, virtual museum and park tours, suggested books to read, workouts, recipes and crafts
On one Sunday afternoon the Chamber Choir led a virtual Hymn-Sing, with lyrics included on the screen
Over 100 children were welcomed back to the Precious Cargo Academy at the end of May

NEW SMYRNA BEACH
UCC/New Smyrna Beach
Easter – 10am service via Zoom
Good Friday – 6pm service via Zoom
Maundy Thursday – 6pm worship via Zoom
Palm Sunday – 9:30am service via Zoom
Daily devotions by Rev. Dr. Diane Langworthy leading up to Easter were shared via e-blast
• A three-part “Praying in Color” program (a book that encourages folks to use doodling/drawing to help focus prayer time) was offered via Zoom April 13 and 17
• There was a Shawn Proctor Zoom concert on Friday evening, April 3, and Melanie Erika Galiardo put on a Facebook Live concert Friday evening, May 21
• Wednesday evenings of fellowship via Zoom were scheduled in May involving a selection of selected documents (available on Netflix)
• The church continues its outreach to feed those in need through Colors of Hunger, teens struggling with anxiety via Surf’s Edge and Gifts of Love (the local Southern Volusia County foodbank)
Palm Sunday – 10am service livestreamed on Facebook
Sunday worship at 10am is on Facebook Live or viewed on YouTube.
Pastor Rev. Mike Ford posts his “Morning Light” daily devotions on Facebook.
Thursday Bible Study is at 1pm on Zoom.
The Social Justice Ministries Committee is meeting via Zoom and working on various projects including meals for school children and helping migrant farmworkers.
A Caring Friends Committee has been organized to phone members and keep in touch.
The church invites donations for the food pantry at St. Vincent DePaul.
Target date for corporate worship is Sunday, August 2, following specific guidelines.

ROCKLEDGE Hope UCC
Easter – 10am service on Zoom
Palm Sunday – 10am service on Zoom
Closing weeks of the Lenten Bible study based on The Great Spiritual Migration by Brian McLaren was accessible via Zoom.
Sunday worship is at 10am on Zoom.
Tuesday and Thursday morning coffee hour chats are available and Wednesday evening “gatherings” via Zoom.

SANIBEL
Sanibel Congregational UCC
Easter – 10am livestreamed service on YouTube
Good Friday – Noon livestreamed service on YouTube
Palm Sunday – 10am livestreamed service on YouTube
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm livestreamed service on YouTube
Palm Sunday – 10am livestreamed service on YouTube
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm livestreamed service on YouTube
Palm Sunday – 10am livestreamed service on YouTube
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm livestreamed service on YouTube
Palm Sunday – Noon livestreamed service on YouTube
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm livestreamed service on YouTube

SARASOTA
St. Andrew UCC
Easter – 10:30 service livestreamed from church website
Good Friday – 6pm service livestreamed from church website
Palm Sunday – 10:30 service livestreamed from church website
Good Friday – 3pm reflective reading by Pastor Rev. Robin DeAngelis on Zoom.
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm service on Zoom (bulletin e-blasted in advance)
Palm Sunday – 11am service on Zoom (bulletin e-blasted in advance)

SPRING HILL
Hill UCC
Easter – 11am service on Zoom (bulletin e-blasted in advance)
Good Friday – 3pm reflective reading by Pastor Rev. Robin DeAngelis on Zoom.
Mauldy Thursday – 7pm service on Zoom (bulletin e-blasted in advance)
Palm Sunday – 11am service on Zoom (bulletin e-blasted in advance)

Rev. Robin records a reflection/sermon for YouTube (in lieu of a service on Zoom, which was the platform before COVID-19) on the first of every month beginning June 7 that will include drive-thru communion.
Zoom meetings are held every Wednesday after—
A newly-formatted weekly e-newsletter, "Connections," is now being sent to members. Virtual Sunday worship takes place via Zoom at 10am. Palm Sunday – an Easter video from over 170 pictures that were sent in from the members of the congregation was posted on YouTube. Videos of the Bach Festival performing Theodore Dubois’ "The Seven Last Words of Christ," the Rollins Choir singing "O Vox Omnes" and "Amazing Grace" and a montage of the crucifixion scene from "Jesus of Nazareth" with music provided by Vangelis from his album "Heaven and Hell" were available on the church website.


The Sunday worship video goes out late on Saturday both to those who opted to receive it and on Sunday morning to those who opted in. The church sent out a survey to congregants late in May. The church began offering virtual Zoom classes on a fundraising quilt and a book club and spiritual formation Zoom classes began in May. A meditative devotion is posted every Wednesday morning on the church’s new meditation webpage and there are "Thankful Thursday" posts on Facebook as an opportunity to share gratitude with others. Board and committee meetings are held via Zoom.

First United Church of Tampa – 10:30am service via Zoom. Palm Sunday – 10am service via Zoom (12pm Spanish-language service on Facebook). Maundy Thursday – 7pm service via Zoom. Sunday morning worship is on Zoom. The Sunday morning discussion group meets via video-conferencing and has been reading Karen Armstrong’s "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life.

The annual Sunrise Service – a decades-old tradition held waterside – had to be canceled this year. A video was created of Easter greetings submitted by church members. "The Last Hours of Jesus’ Life" was shared via Zoom webinar on Tuesday evening, April 7. The church applied for and received a Federal stimulus grant. Members have been invited to send to the church office another has been created to help keep members in touch with one another. The Care Team sent Easter cards to all members who live at a distance or are routinely homebound; Easter message were posted on YouTube with interactive links.

On Wednesday, May 6, it was "party time" at 5pm on Zoom. A newly-formatted weekly e-newsletter, "Connections," has been created to help keep members in touch with one another. "Corona Sabbath" posts on Fridays with readings, a video and music from Hilton Jones on the church website and Facebook; daily "corona prayers" are posted on the website. Weekly e-blasts contain elements of: devotion and prayer, daily Mini Mindful Moment exercises, "Bible, Coffee & Keith" sessions with Senior Minister Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann, "Zoombaya" with Associate Minister Rev. Dr. Guillermo Marquez-Stirling, "The Last Hours of Jesus’ Life" and "The Last Days of Christ." "Corona Sabbath" posts on Fridays with readings, a video and music from Hilton Jones on the church website and Facebook; daily "corona prayers" are posted on the website. Daily e-blasts contain elements of: devotion and prayer, health & wellness tips, youth, parents & families and a "smile" – "Bible, Coffee & Keith" sessions with Senior Minister Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann are offered on Zoom. "Zoomdaya" with Associate Minister Rev. Dr. Guillermo Marquez-Stirling took place Thursdays from 5-6pm in May with dialogue over a pre-sent essay or video involving a theological interpretation or opinion. Two church members are offering free chair "holy yoga" on Facebook Live Tuesday and Thursday mornings and daily Mindful Moment exercise sessions.

"Thankful Thursday" posts on Facebook as an opportunity to share gratitude with others. Board and committee meetings are held via Zoom. Church meetings and Bible studies, book club and youth group meetings are Zoomed. The Visitation Team reaches out via cards and letters and Zoom, Facetime and a members-only Facebook page. Senior Minister Rev. Shawn Garvey’s daily e-mail meditations (begun during Lent) continue. Rev. Dr. Sherie Lindamood leads “Journeying Together” classes on Sunday mornings and Tuesdays via Zoom as do Rev. Shawn’s Sunday morning Bible class and Wednesday Night “check-in” gatherings.

For a complete listing of available courses or more information, Click here.

ST. PETE BEACH Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC
Easter – 7am, 8:45am and 10am services livestreamed on church website. (Pastors are available in front of the church after each service to offer blessings as congregants passed in cars.)

The annual Sunrise Service – a decades-old tradition held waterside – had to be canceled this year. A video was created of Easter greetings submitted by church members. "The Last Hours of Jesus’ Life" was shared via Zoom webinar on Tuesday evening, April 7. Good Friday – "Stations of the Cross" video available through church website.

Maundy Thursday – Zoom classes began in May. The church began offering virtual Zoom classes on a fundraising quilt and a book club and spiritual formation Zoom classes began in May. A meditative devotion is posted every Wednesday morning on the church’s new meditation webpage and there are "Thankful Thursday" posts on Facebook as an opportunity to share gratitude with others. Board and committee meetings are held via Zoom.

First United Church of Tampa
Easter – 10:30am service via Zoom. (12pm Spanish-language service on Facebook). Maundy Thursday – 7pm service via Zoom. Sunday morning worship is on Zoom. The Sunday morning discussion group meets via video-conferencing and has been reading Karen Armstrong’s "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life.

First United Church of Tampa
Easter – 10:30am service via Zoom. Sunday worship is at 10:30am through Zoom. Pastor Rev. Kim Wells shares weekly "Corona Sabbath" posts on Fridays with readings, a video and music from Hilton Jones on the church website and Facebook; daily "corona prayers" are posted on the website.

A Zoom conversation sharing favorite poems was held on Wednesday evening, May 21, on the theme of "change." Portions of the weekly e-blast message are in Spanish.

WINDERMERE Windermere Union Church
Easter – 10am (Spanish language service 11:30am) Palm Sunday – 10am (Spanish language service 11:30am)

Sunday virtual worship on YouTube is at 10am with La Iglesia del Pueblo services at 11:30am. WINTER PARK First Congregational UCC
Easter – posted on YouTube. An Easter video from over 170 pictures that were sent in from the members of the congregation was posted on YouTube. Good Friday – reflection posted on church website. Maundy Thursday – service posted on church website.

Zoom class sessions are every Sunday at 10am. The church began offering virtual Zoom classes on a fundraising quilt and a book club and spiritual formation Zoom classes began in May. A meditative devotion is posted every Wednesday morning on the church’s new meditation webpage and there are "Thankful Thursday" posts on Facebook as an opportunity to share gratitude with others. Board and committee meetings are held via Zoom. First United Church of Tampa – 10:30am service via Zoom. (12pm Spanish-language service on Facebook). Maundy Thursday – 7pm service via Zoom. Sunday morning worship is on Zoom. The Sunday morning discussion group meets via video-conferencing and has been reading Karen Armstrong’s "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life.

Rev. Kim is at the church from 10:30-11:30 on Sunday mornings where the peace candle is lit and prayers offered — a symbolic witness that the church is still here, still serving, still active, still shining light even in these drastically changed circumstances.

Labyrinth walks have been scheduled on Wednesday mornings at 10am.

TALLAHASSEE United Church in Tallahassee
Easter – 10am service via Zoom


The Sunday worship video goes out late on Saturday both on a streaming service and YouTube channel. The church sent out a survey to congregants late in May seeking thoughts and feelings regarding issues around reopening. Church meetings and Bible studies, book club and youth group meetings are Zoomed. The Visitation Team reaches out via cards and letters and Zoom, Facetime and a members-only Facebook page. Senior Minister Rev. Shawn Garvey’s daily e-mail meditations (begun during Lent) continue. Rev. Dr. Sherie Lindamood leads “Journeying Together” classes on Sunday mornings and Tuesdays via Zoom as do Rev. Shawn’s Sunday morning Bible class and Wednesday Night “check-in” gatherings.

Opportunity
As the pandemic gained steam and had a particularly negative impact on the underclass and homeless, Lakeview UCC Supports Local Community and Ministries

Rev. Sean Garvey (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park) recently wore an N95 mask (for the first time and what he hopes will be the only time) to officiate at a wedding— with family and friends in attendance, siblings and a few close friends, all maintaining appropriate distancing. “In the midst of deep concern about the future,” he writes, “the joy and promise of new beginnings continue.”

“DRIVEWAY VISITS: Dealing with the coronavirus virus has added some new words and phrases to our everyday vocabulary. Just a few months ago, would you have thought about a drive-by party? Now they are happening right in our neighborhoods!”

As Donna Ives of the Diocesan Ministry at Spring Hill UCC

“Driveway Visits: Dealing with the coronavirus has added some new words and phrases to our everyday vocabulary. Just a few months ago, would you have thought about a drive-by party? Now they are happening right in our neighborhoods!”

Joyce Long and Jim Muggert were married at Maxine Barritt Park in Venice on March 7 by their North Port Community UCC Pastor, Rev. Attila S nemes. It was truly a blessing as their original choice of date was March 21, but the park was not available. God knew!

“Called to share the final journey” was the title of the above-the-fold front page article about Rev. Victoria Long in the May 24 Tampa Bay Times. Rev. Victoria (a member of Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg and former Associate Pastor at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach) is a chaplain at Suncoast Hospice serving Pinellas County. Every week during the pandemic she serves 20 non-covid-19 patients and their families, saying, “It’s an honor to take that final journey with them.”

“they are unselfish heroes working behind the scenes to help patients,” loved ones who can’t visit them, and medical staff deal with grief, anxiety, anguish and loss. I give thanks for everything they are doing to heal and make whole a wounded people.”

From Rick Carson (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/ St. Pete Beach)

“Who was that masked man?”

Early one during “stay at home,” I was at BayCare for a doctor’s appointment, dutifully wearing my fashionable homemade mask. As I was leaving and walking down the virtually empty hallway, a masked man was approaching me who — from his eyes — looked familiar. As we passed, I noticed he had changed his mask and kept going.

As I drove home I thought for a moment someone from church. So I got out my old picture directory of church members, flipped through a few pages and there was the person I’m thinking about now. I had no idea if he was a member, but I knew he was dressed up. Then I looked at his e-mail address and dropped him a note. I believe...
we passed in the hallway at BayCare this morning — hard to be sure when you are seeing only half a face but I think it was yours. If it was, it good to see you (though it would be better at church). And if it wasn’t you, I hope you are doing well and that we’ll be back at PAG before too long.” And within a few minutes I’d received this nice response: “Rick, I thought that was you! Thanks for saying hi! I was surprised they kept the appointment but glad they did. We are doing fine and getting our walking in. We will head north next week so hope you have a good summer and hope we will see you for real in October. Stay safe.”

So during these challenging times — even when you may only see half a face — the eyes can be the window to the soul, and I think that must have been what I saw.”

Over the past two months, our world has hit pause and many families have struggled to make ends meet due to lost wages and increased expenses connected to the pandemic. During this time, farmworkers have been identified as “essential workers” yet, at the same time, the majority of these workers did not receive stimulus checks. This means that millions of U.S. citizen children and parents throughout the country did not receive any relief.

In south Putnam and west Volusia counties — the “Fern-Belt” — several families are now dependent upon community giving and relief to get through these difficult times. As many similar relief funds have popped up across the country, it has been difficult to find relief for the families in the Fern-Belt communities. So the Rev. Donna Cooney (United Church UCC-Boca Raton, Augustine) and the church’s The Turning Table, and its community partners have created a GoFundMe campaign to raise money for such families.

Funds will be used to aid families directly with rental assistance, food, medical necessities and taking care of children.

The Luxury of Small Complaints
By Rev. Dr. Deb Kaiser-Cross
Minister for Congregational Care, Naples UCC

You have heard the adage: “The longer you live, the more likely it is that you will start quoting your mother.” Many of you know that my mother lives in a retirement community in California. They have been in “lockdown,” as she calls it, for seven weeks now. We talk each night via Facetime trying to stay as connected as we can without physical contact.

Every Saturday, my mother and all my siblings meet for a virtual happy hour through Zoom. A couple of Saturdays ago, we were all feeling a bit down and discouraged, and we could tell that we were heading down a path that would only lead to negativity, so we all began to share the highlights of our week.

My brother’s small town has the residents standing outside every evening at 8pm to howl — yes, you heard right — to howl into the night — to remind them that they are not alone. One of my sisters started her own victory garden, painted the signs into the night — to remind them that they are not alone. One negativity, so we all began to share the highlights of our week.

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The United Church of Gainesville is asking its members if they need a mask, are making masks they are willing to donate, have materials to donate (or need materials to make masks) to fill out a form that’s provided so the church can connect. The church also provided a slideshow tutorial on how to sew a facemask.

Any and all at Naples UCC who are willing to sew have been invited to contact the church’s Mighty Mask Ministry to help make masks for members and friends of the congregation. This included its Precious Cargo Academy School, which needed 20-25 washable masks for its teachers.

Jeanne Haemmeltmann, a retired nurse with “at home” time now as an Associate Minister at Passavant-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach, has dusted off her old sewing skills to make lots of masks for healthcare workers. Some went to St. Anthony’s Hospital and others to Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital in St. Pete.

At the United Church in Tallahassee, Kathy Heinz and some of her sewing friends helped make protective masks for local hospital medical staff. A creative doctor at Shands had the idea to use the fabric for surgical drapes, called Halyard H600, to make these masks, which are thought to be even more protective than the N95 masks. They passed in the hallway at BayCare this morning — hard to be sure when you are seeing only half a face, but I think it was yours. If it was, it was good to see you (though it would be better at church). And if it wasn’t you, I hope you are doing well and that we’ll be back at PAG before too long.” And within a few minutes I’d received this nice response: “Rick, I thought that was you! Thanks for saying hi! I was surprised they kept the appointment but glad they did. We are doing fine and getting our walking in. We will head north next week so hope you have a good summer and hope we will see you for real in October. Stay safe.”

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The Year’s Fashion “Must-Have”
Don’t Leave Home Without It!

Sandi at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton has been sewing face masks since she first realized she needed one. She thought she could sew one up real fast, and because she had extra fabric she decided to make some for her family. And then the neighbor needed one. And a friend wanted one. And she’s making face masks for anyone who wanted one as long as the fabric stash holds out.

Anne Heetders, a good friend of Coral Gables Congregational UCC, is working with some doctors to get masks made using fabric that was originally intended as a sanitizing wrap for tools used in surgery. Testing shows this fabric is as effective as an N95 mask and passes hospital respirator fit tests. She has made a series of videos on how to sew down the sewing process into a step-by-step guide and extended an invitation to church members to help her. Here is one of her videos: https://youtu.be/gajWzZF9cWc. Photo is of Janet Copeland multi-tasking sewing masks while worshiping.

Three hundred face masks were provided in a one-time gift to Port Orange UCC and distributed on April 9 and April 20.

At UCC Port Lauderdale, Arlene Culliney, Carole Loyer and members of the Nason Martin family are among church members making masks. As of early May over 600 face masks had been made and distributed to church membership, mailed to people in the community and some donated to Broward General Hospital. The Chaplain at Broward General and a local artist (both church members) collaborated and took small rocks and each one is hand painted with a message of hope. These were given to the health care workers at Broward General as a reminder that they are loved and appreciated.
Being Church

Because local hospitals in Hernando County are in need of face masks, hospital volunteer Lawanah Strongbear is reaching out to the sewers in Spring Hill UCC and the wider community who are willing to sew or make masks.

Myra Smith and Jan Sullivan at UCC-DOC United/St. Agustine and helpers have been churning out lots of face masks. Myra, who has been a quilter for about 35 years, said she had “loads of the right fabric ‘saved up’ so I provided some to the other sewers and used a lot myself.” The sewers used a basic pattern Jan provided, although they modified it as they went along, such as making the masks with two layers rather than one. Jan and Myra don’t know how many masks the whole sewing team made, but Jan reported that she was supplying fabric and Myra Smith provided, although they “saved up” so much herself. “The sewers are very handy. They are making gowns for a dentist’s office, to replace costly throwaway gowns,” Myra reported. “I provided some to the sewers and it’s been a quilter for about 35 years, said she had ‘lots of the right fabric ‘saved up’,“ Myra Smith said. “I provided some to the sewers and we’ve been a quilter for about 35 years, said she had ‘lots of the right fabric ‘saved up’ so I provided some to the other sewers and used a lot myself.” The sewers used a basic pattern Jan provided, although they modified it as they went along, such as making the masks with two layers rather than one. Jan and Myra don’t know how many masks the whole sewing team made, but Jan reported that she was supplying fabric and Myra Smith provided, although they “saved up” so much themselves. “It is fun for Myra and me to see some of our fabrics in the masks being worn at the local grocery store,” she said. Unlike Myra, Jan says she is not a seamstress. She is “a hack, but a good organizer.”

Mackenzie Searl Remington (daughter of FCUCCWP’s Mary Joe Searl) hard at work making gowns. Members at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park are hard at work sewing 80 cloth medical gowns for a dentist’s office, to replace costly throwaway gowns where about 10 are needed per staff member per day. So a kit and instructions (and link to video instructions) are being provided to the other sewers. The dentist is making a donation to the church of $20 per gown provided.

Conference staffer Dana Ney, who has been furloughed during the pandemic, has been using her sewing skills to make masks. He made 35 for Advent Health, where First UCC-Orlando Pastor Rev. Terry Hood works.

Blog click here to visit the World Conference website

Preparing to Reopen Your Office

• Your state may advise that although it is safe to resume daily operations at your church, it may not be safe to conduct worship services in-person (recognizing the population of your congregation may be weak).
• Identify a COVID-19 coordinating team to be responsible for COVID-19 issues at your church once your state says it is safe to reopen.
• Visit the CDC website to download and print post and alerts related to COVID-19 and church operations for employees and volunteers.
• Prior to return of operations make sure all workspace has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Follow CDC guidelines. Use products that are U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered for use against COVID-19.
• Develop policies for employee/ volunter protection and provide training to all cleaning staff. Wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process including handling trash.
• Ensure employee/volunteer are trained on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals used in accordance with OSHA’s Hazard Communication standard (29 CFR 1910.1200).”
• All employees/volunteers should bring their own cloth face mask to the church office.
• Communicate with all staff and volunteers in advance regarding return to work requirements.
• Include cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces: tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.
• Identify critical job functions, cross-train staff and volunteers to help ensure that essential jobs will be covered.
• Employees/volunteers (or their household members) returning to the church office must be COVID-19 negative for a minimum of 14 days. If an employee/volunteer’s job function does not require their physical presence in the church office, allow them to work from home.
• Establish flexible hours/schedules for essential jobs to limit the number of people in the church workspace at one time.
• No employee should be required to return to work without adequate transition time to secure care for loved ones for whom they have responsibilities (children or older adults).
• Many employees may opt to use the emergency family and medical leave provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Insurance Board recognizes the important role churches play in their communities; congregations are eager to resume daily operations of your church, check the Governor’s website for your state. According to The White House Guidelines for Opening Up America Again, “State and local officials may need to tailor the application of these principles to local circumstances. Additionally, where appropriate, Governors should work on a regional basis to satisfy these criteria and to progress through the phases outlined.” Insurance Board advises churches to also stay current on the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). According to the CDC, “COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning about how it spreads and the severity of illness it causes.”

Daily Operations

• Each employee/volunteer should take their temperature daily prior to coming to the church office. Monitor the readings.
• If temperature is less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, employee/volunteer may go to the church office.  
• An employee/volunteer who experiences fever and/or respiratory symptoms should not report to work.
• An employee/volunteer who has a fever at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in the last 12 hours and experiences respiratory symptoms should consult their doctor before returning to work.
• A non-medical mask covering the mouth and nose should be worn.
• Provide hand sanitizer, tissues and no-touch disposable receptacles near hand washing locations.
• Encourage frequent hand washing with soap and water, and hand sanitizing when tasks are completed.
• Organize the church space so employees/volunteers can practice social distancing and maintain distance (6 feet) from others.
• Increase physical spaces between employees/volunteers and guests (such as pews, tables, or standing room) at the church office, drive through, or parking lot.
• When ready to exit the building, sanitize hands, and do not touch the door with hands. Use elbows if possible.
• All other previously established infection control practices are to be maintained during work, lunch and break period.
• Any necessary meetings should have a minimum of 10 people at the church office.
• Discourage people who are at high risk from教堂 attend any gathering in person.
• Tight spaces like coat areas, kitchenets, bathrooms and elevators should be closed and all should be cleaned and disinfected. Those in need to be treated as in 1, 1 out when possible. Provide sanitizing wipe for any shared equipment or common areas.
• Discourage employee interactions using others’ phones, desks, offices or refires work tools and equipment, when possible. Clean and disinfector before and after use.
• Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces: tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc. on a daily basis.
• Enable natural workspace ventilation (such as open windows) and internal doors to allow airflow.

Your Ministry During COVID-19: Reopening Your Church Office

Understanding How COVID-19 Spreads

• The virus is thought to spread mainly between persons in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
• The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure.
• COVID-19 can be spread by people who are not symptomatic.
• Respiratory droplets are produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. Droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or be inhaled into the lungs.

https://www.urd.org/4c-681-virus.html

Rev. Dr. Wes Bishy (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): www.acresartecnes.blogspot.com

Rev. Shawn Garvey (First Congregational Church/Winter Park): www.firstconfchurxc.com


United Church of Gainesville: (www.ucgainesville.org)


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

REV. SEAN GARVEY (FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC/WINTER PARK)

I'm sure like many of you, I listened with great interest yesterday to our pastor's reading of Micah 6:8 that houses of worship reopen tomorrow, deeming whatever the current situation might be. In the words of the ancient prophet, we need to ask, “What does justice require of us?” The answer, at least for our church, is to love and support one another. Jesus teaches us that we need to give more than we receive and that God loves us.

Let me begin by saying First Congregational Church of Winter Park will not be open for worship tomorrow, nor any Sunday soon. We will be sending out a survey on Tuesday to begin to see what the feelings and thoughts are of our congregation regarding issues around reopening and we will move forward based on the decisions of our own congregation and keeping the health and safety of those in our church the utmost priority.

The use of the term “essential” yesterday was an interesting one, though, as it got me thinking, “What is essential about Church?” I reflected a number of weeks ago that the Church isn’t the building, it’s the people and the spirit that fills the church. As people begin to come into the world to create a great change, I heard from a great many of you in agreement with that sentiment. We miss each other, to be sure, but the heart of our church isn’t our building; it’s the love we have for one another and the love we are called to have for the Creation that we share.

Fellowship is, absolutely, a critical part of the life of the Church. We come together to celebrate, to give, to pray, to sing, to learn, and to support one another on our journeys. Yet, we have continued to be in fellowship with one another, albeit in a new way that may be different. This feels like the essence of our fellowship has not diminished. And to the sentiment that we need more prayer, not less, we most certainly don’t need to be in-person, whether we come to pray, or for God to listen and respond to our prayers. God can still hear us when we aren’t in the building.

Given that fact, what is truly essential about Church? I think that the words from Micah and John’s gospel help us with this regard. Do we need to be in our building to pray, or for God to listen and respond to our prayers? God can still hear us when we aren’t in the building.

Should Churches Return to Worship in Their Sanctuaries?

A s the country debates how, when, and under what circumstances life might return to normal, leaders in every setting of the church are deliberating about returning to their sanctuaries for worship.

As leaders in the United Church of Christ, we want to send a clear and strong message to congregations and others consid- ering going back to meeting in person: We urge you to wait until all safety concerns have been addressed. We want to offer what guidance we can about issues you should consider in your deliberations.

We are sure that, like us, you have been inundated with materials about the Covid-19 virus. Some of it seems to be contradictory at times. Much of it is being and has been politicized. Discerning fact from fiction can be tricky. We would like to share with you the resources that we have found helpful in our own deliberations, as well as any wisdom we have that could be useful to you.

Among the most impactful articles we have seen is “The Risks—Know Them—Avoid Them,” by Erin Brom- age. The article talks in great detail about how the virus is spread and mentions particular church life which we experience as normal could prove to be a threat to our wor- shipers. We strongly encourage you to read this article as a part of your decision-making process. Here is the link to that article.

One of the things we could say, we lead with this principle: Please make every decision based on what it will affect the most vulnera- ble among you. Many of us are able to attend services and other activities as fully healthy, low-risk individuals. Others, though, will come out of a deep love for and obligation to their church, deciding to take a risk as they attend your church family. We urge you to keep that in mind as you process your options.

Conference leaders have sent guidance to churches about the process of deciding how and when to return. We, as national and regional leaders are encouraging churches to consult their Conference website for materials relevant to their setting for ministry.

In a recent email, the Rev. Nigel Uden, Moderator of the United Reformed Church (United Kingdom), offered his prayerful support. In it, he wrote about a portion of the church in Coventry. That deacon was trying to persuade a young pastor to serve that church in the decade that followed, not just the Second World War, but the destruction of the city of Coventry at the hands of the Germans. Their precious church was laid bare. What the deacon said to the young pas- tor convinced him to come and serve, “There is nothing in this church that cannot be changed as long as the Gospel is preached and the Kingdom of God extended.”

Those words have proven to be quite precious and present. They have reminded us that when the world changes upon us, and with it the tremendous burden of grief and loss, our task remains but this: preach the Gospel and extend the Kingdom. No matter what we decide in the coming days, even if it means sheltering in place a while longer, the gospel will be preached and the realm of God will grow through our efforts.

In the words of Julian of Norwich, written from her cell at the church in Norwich that was built as her own shelter in the time of the Plague, “All shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well.”

Faithfully,

The Council of Conference Ministers United Church of Christ

The National Officers of the United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President

Rev. Traci Blackmon
Associate General Minister, Justice and Local Church Ministries

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson
Associate General Minister, Wider Church Ministries
I started off as a busy quarter, full of Lenten anticipations and promise for wrapping up another “season” with all our winter friends. I’m reminded of the magnet on my fridge that says: “I plan; God laughs.” Wow, I might have thought of a lot of scenarios for which things may have played out differently, but I guarantee that a pandemic wouldn’t have been on them!

Until about mid-March, I had the opportunity to visit in several churches, have in person conferences with pastors and lay leadership, continue search and call meetings and COM gatherings. Of course, after that all travel stopped. I must tell you, however, neither the church nor its people have stopped for one minute. The herculean effort of our pastors has absolutely amazed me. Not only has the vast majority of both clergy and lay that had resisted an online presence — are now both familiar and comfortable in that realm. In moving to a 100% virtual church, two things have changed about my particular ministry to the Florida Conference: 1) of course, there is no physical meeting, therefore no travel, and 2) the online work has increased. Because of everything’s enhanced comfort level with an online presence, no meetings or communications are being cancelled and communications are at the highest level ever. Search and call — and a lot of it — in my region marches on as does my work and care for pastors. I will gladly say that the conflict management aspect of my job has decreased. For this, I am most grateful!

During this unprecedented time, I’ve had the privilege of seeing many more of my pastors preach than I could have before. As a confessed “church geek,” I love this. It also provides me with yet another reason to communicate with them. I had a pastor tell me once that if one listens to a sermon with an open heart, at least some kernel of truth, wisdom or profundity will be received. I’ve never forgotten that. To hold it to hold much truth and make a point to thank my pastors after I’ve been part of their service. Of course, I’ve also checked on them constantly through texts, calls and e-mails providing encouragement, resources and praise… probably even more than I would have under “normal” conditions. There are silver linings to all this.

Who knows what the future holds for us and our churches, but it is quite evident to me that church, though seen in “normal” conditions. There are silver linings to all this.

It is my sense that people are finding ways to move through whatever emotional impact they have experienced to an appreciation — and in many cases insights into new ways — of doing and being church. I personally think that some of the “new normal” is here to stay as the Church is being transformed from what was into what is to be. These are times of great challenge and what I hope are proving to be valuable insights for all of God’s people.

With the advent of the travel restrictions during this pandemic, I am maintaining regular communication with local churches digitally. I am truly grateful and impressed by the resilience and creative spirit that I see among our churches. People seem to be using technology as they explore new ways to worship, new ways of being in community as well as new ways to continue to support the church financially. I am aware of four congregations in the region who applied for and received the PPP funds.

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Our Calming Presence

O n behalf of your Florida Conference UCC Board of Directors, I pray you, your family and your congregation are healthy and well. The Board of Directors met via Zoom on May 2, and your church leaders are adjusting to the new normal in the way we are conducting the business of the Florida Conference. Our meeting started with a devotional led by Neal Watkins. Neal sent the following questions to the Board Members before our meeting so everyone had time to reflect upon them.

• Where are our churches struggling?
• What do we need?
• Where have we been surprised by the Holy Spirit in the last six weeks?
• Where does our hope come from?

Everyone present took time to share. There were two big takeaways for me as I participated in the devotional. The first one was that it was very healing hearing everyone’s stories. One of the consequences of shelter in place is in a sense of isolation. It was empowering to be a part of this incredible group of leaders. My second observation from the devotional was how incredibly resilient our pastors, church leaders and our congregations have been during the pandemic. None of us have a template to follow on how to continue to do ministry during a crisis like this. We are creating it as we go, and our churches and leaders are meeting the pandemic challenges differently from each other. Regardless of the methods, our churches are still doing ministry! It was fascinating to hear how our UCC churches are being creative in providing worship and ministry for their members. We have been very resourceful in figuring out how to be engaged with our worship communities without being physically with them.

The Board also discussed when it would be safe and responsible to gather for worship again. The general consensus was not for another month or longer. The national UCC and Florida Conference have been very helpful providing church leaders with articles and guidelines on how to reopen safely. I found these two links to be helpful:


We continued with our meeting hearing the reports from our staff and committee members. Overall financially the Conference is holding its own. Our churches have been supportive in sending the Conference their OCWM and Per Capita funds. Our Legacy Funds lost last year’s gains during the first quarter of this year because of the volatility of the stock market. However, our Florida Conference is still solid financially.

Please let our Conference staff know how they can assist your congregation. There are grants available to help our churches during this new normal we are dealing with. Some of our churches need to purchase new technology to help them provide virtual worship and outreach to their members. Our Conference is committed to helping our congregations with funds and resources in order to meet your worship and ministry needs during this time of Covid-19.

We are all in this storm together. When will it ever end? It seems to me an important question to ask is; “Who are we going to be during this storm?” I am reminded of that Gospel story when the disciples got caught in a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee. They thought they were going to die. But Jesus told them to look up and it seemed all was lost they saw Jesus walking toward them. Jesus calmed the winds and led his disciples to safety. Who are we going to be during Covid-19? We will be the confident calm during this storm as we lead each other and the world around us to safer shores. Peace to you all!

A Message From Our Moderator

BY REV. BARTON BUCHANAN
PASTOR, WINDERMERE UNION CHURCH

Our Calming Presence

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Leadership Opportunities 2020-2022 from Your Nominating Committee

• Dyanne Edds (Hope UCC/Rockledge), Chairperson
• Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
• Bunny Grooter (Sunset Congregational Church/Miami)
• Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach)

Greetings to the United Church of Christ in Florida!

It is that time of year when we begin thinking about our slate for the Fall Gathering 2020, whether it be held in person or online! The Nominating Committee announces that there are openings in several positions, and we would like you to think and pray about stepping up and offering your skills and service to your Conference.

All these positions have two-year terms (2020-2022) except the chairperson for Budget & Finance, which is a three-year position. The two-year slots are renewable twice, and the chair position is renewable once.

Read on!

Conference Treasurer

We are seeking a Conference Treasurer who will work with the Financial Assistant and Conference Minister to review the status of Conference operating funds. From the by-laws:

• Collect, account for, administer and disburse the funds of the Conference as provided in the Conference budget or as authorized by the BoD. The Treasurer shall perform or ensure the chairperson for Budget & Finance, which is a three-year position. The two-year slots are renewable twice, and the chair position is renewable once.

Rev. George Miller (Emanuel UCC/Selbyville)
Brett Perry (New Hope UCC/DeLand)
Jan Steinberg (First Church of North Miami Congregational)

This committee shall manage the unrestricted, temporarily restricted and permanently restricted net assets of the Conference as well as properties owned by or given to the Conference as legacy gifts. Its work will be accomplished through four subcommittees: Gift Development, Investment Management, Grants and Awards and Property Management. Its duties include:

• Establishing and maintaining committee policies and operating manuals
• Ensuring performance reviews are conducted

Legacy Funds Committee

We are seeking additional volunteers to lead the Legacy Funds Committee. From the by-laws:

This committee shall manage the unrestricted, temporarily restricted and permanently restricted net assets of the Conference as well as properties owned by or given to the Conference as legacy gifts. Its work will be accomplished through four subcommittees: Gift Development, Investment Management, Grants and Awards and Property Management. Its duties include:

• Recommending subcommittee chairs and committee members
• Overseeing the operations of the subcommittees
• Reporting to the BoD and to the Conference as directed by the BoD
• Focusing on and monitoring the Conference balance sheet

Delegates to General Synod

We are seeking nominations from those desiring to serve as delegates to General Synod in 2021 and 2023. There are guidelines which we adhere to in building a delegation that is inclusive of diversity in age, clergy and lay, male and female, ethnicity, areas of the state and such considerations that present us as the church we strive to be.

Conversations for Ministry, Church and Faith Formation During Such Times as These

Il clergy are invited to join me via ScreenSide Chats on Zoom on Wednesday at 1pm to be led in conversation by various persons discuss faith implications on our ministries in these times. We’ll discuss topics such as mental health as it relates to caring and receiving care, technological matters such as reclaiming old ministries and identifying new approaches to timeless needs during a time of social distancing and even collegial times of collective conversations about what each of us are finding to be best practices.

Join us by logging on to Zoom ID: 361-687-8295. To suggest topics for discussion, please e-mail me at NWatkins@uccfla.org

Love in Action

The overall mission of The Turning Table is to nurture the spirit of community by advocating for the inclusion of all people and creating a safe space for everyone to share talent and story.

The Turning Table, an initiative of the United Church of Christ in Florida Conference, has received a grant of $5,000 from the National Benevolent Association to address mental health needs in a rural setting. Putnam County, where The Turning Table is located, is in desperate need of mental health providers.

According to school counselors in Putnam County, it takes three days to obtain professional help in a time of crises. By then a crisis has taken on a different shape, so the search for appropriate help is either abandoned, or it takes on a different form. People in need of mental health care in Putnam County are sent to Gainesville, Jacksonville and Daytona Beach, which presents transportation problems.

With the N.B.A. grant, The Turning Table will offer free edu-
3 Great Loves is a denominational 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!

3 Great Loves

By Barbara Smith-Bacon and Sarah Melcher

First Congregational UCC

F irst Congregational UCC/Sarasota is working toward becoming a UCC Creation Justice church, an established brand inspired by “Creation” — and all that it encompasses as one of the 3 Great Loves and with the unanimous support of our Church Council — we spent several months obtaining input from leadership teams, congregation members and established church groups (UCC Women, Men’s Breakfast, College, etc.). The rich and diverse guidance from this outreach provided us with the information to draft a Covenant for adoption by our church, a draft application and a checklist of green actions our church has taken and hopes to take as we move forward toward a vote on the Covenant.

In compiling this information, we found that we are blessed to have already done quite a bit! With the Creation Justice designation, we are formalizing our efforts, seeking to establish agreed-upon goals and planning to expand our efforts more broadly within our community. We have benefited from being wrapped into the UCC network of churches who have taken this step before us, even as we know of only one other Florida UCC church (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) which has sought and obtained Creation Justice designation.

Just a few examples of the things we have done to date are: hosted an Interfaith Religion and the Environment workshop; consciously incorporated “Creation” into our theology, sermons and music; held book studies on relevant literature, such as Laudato Si (Pope Francis’ encyclical) and Inhabiting Eden by Patricia Tull; conducted reflective nature walks; created our church “green brand” in “Living Green for God and Creation”; and provided monthly informative newsletter articles, action alerts and “green” educational opportunities for our congregation.

In honor of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, the national office of the UCC hosted two Zoom webinars about the historical significance of the UCC in the fight for environmental justice and what we can do in the continued call to extend God’s ultimate Kingdom.

There was an Earth Day Town Hall featuring Ohio U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and “The Earth is the Lord’s” featuring Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chavis.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach in an April 20 e-blast, reminded that we are the keepers of God’s creation and this year’s Earth Day theme is Climate Change. The message encouraged that kids be engaged in virtual activities and reminded us that we are the keepers of the Earth. A link (Earth day) was provided for some virtual Earth Day activities. On April 22 a prayer walk was provided for families to do to celebrate Earth Day. There was also an Earth Day photo challenge asking for pictures of one’s child/children doing something in nature (maybe on a nature prayer walk???) for a chance to win a prize.

The 50th anniversary of Earth Day was recognized at worship on April 19 at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota with the help of a e-blast message sent earlier in the week, which encouraged members to prepare for the service by doing several suggested things. As you walk outside, pay attention to what you are noticing.

In compiling this information, we found that we are blessed to have already done quite a bit! With the Creation Justice designation, we are formalizing our efforts, seeking to establish agreed-upon goals and planning to expand our efforts more broadly within our community. We have benefited from being wrapped into the UCC network of churches who have taken this step before us, even as we know of only one other Florida UCC church (Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) which has sought and obtained Creation Justice designation.

If you are not mailing us your church newsletter or placing us on your e-mail list to receive it, then we can’t share your good news with our other churches.

Please send your electronic newsletter to Facebook posts and e-blasts to zach@unionucc.net.
Music and the Arts

When it looked as though the pandemic was going to cancel the variety show, one of the great traditions featured at the annual all-church retreat at the United Church of Gainesville (which had to be canceled this year), creative minds came to the rescue. A bunch of church members got their act(s) together and brought more than 40 minutes worth of variety into member living rooms via its first ever virtual variety show “broadcast” on YouTube (click here). There were acrobatics, dramatic readings, roller skating, throwing clay, playing board games and musical numbers to enjoy. Special instrumental music for the Mother’s Day service included “Ubi Caritas” performed by Mary Fukuyama, Jackie Davis and Tane DeKrey.

“The Gospel According to Elton John” was the online worship theme at Coral Gables Congregational UCC on Sunday, April 19, with musical selections performed by professional musicians.

Naples UCC offered a recital by Cameron Daly, one of the newest members of the Naples Philharmonic violin section, on Tuesday afternoon, April 14. The Livestream/Facebook Live performance was J.S. Bach’s Minor for Solo Violin.

Mary Fukuyama, Jackie Jeanor Rigby and Jackie Su family donated an All Seasons liturgical banner for display in the Sanctuary. Following worship, all gathered in the Social Hall for cake and refreshments and to play a game of 10 questions about Ethel’s life. The children had created special cards for her, and she was overwhelmed by all the cards and well-wishes.

Duke Energy installed an enhanced street light on the north side of the Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg building in the parking area, which helps facilitate the use of the new electric vehicle charging station located there. Security is a plus, as well. LED lights have been installed in the ceiling of Fellowship Hall at First Congregational Church/Orange City.

Another project he oversaw was preparing a music video featuring pictures of mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers and those who have been mothering figures. He collected the pictures electronically from church members in time to be ready for Mother’s Day.

Virtual worship at Church by the Sea/Bar Harbour on May 3 celebrated Cinco de Mayo with tortillas and special music by a six-piece instrumental ensemble and tenors. Congregants (at home of course) were urged to wear their brightest colors (including pyjamas) and join in the fun. Virtual worship on Mother’s Day was filled with music: the choir was on Zoom with “What the World Needs Now” and “Lean on Me,” four members of the Naples Philharmonic played “How Beautiful” and “Elton John” on four instruments, four members of the Naples UCC Choir led a virtual Hymn-Sing, with lyrics included on the screen.

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The United Church UCC-DOC/S. Augustine is holding virtual "Sacred Conversations to End Racism" meetings every third Wednesday afternoon from 5-6pm.

The church has encouraged its members to contact the Houston ICE office regarding the health safety of immigrant families held in ICE detention. Church members also urged to contact the office of Senator Marco Rubio to request support more funding for the food stamp program (SNAP).

On Tuesday, April 28, the Church Council at Naples UCC authorized the creation of a new church-wide Justice Committee. This action is a positive response to congregation members who first met in May 2018 to discuss how to enhance and expand NUCC justice ministries. Early meetings led to the formation of a Task Force of people who talked with boards, committees and interested members of the church; contacted other churches with active justice ministries; researched denominational resources; and reflected on Biblical calls to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

Although we were not able to meet together at an annual conference in May, I’d like to share some of the activities that were being finalized for the Conference. Our theme for this year is an exploration of how we, as a people of faith, can use our unique gifts and perspectives to overcome structural and systemic racism in our country.

Update on Florida UCC Women

BY TERRI CRAWFORD, PRESIDENT

was scheduled to speak at the Conference. The Reading for Renewal list for 2020/2021 is usually released at the Conference. The list was posted to our web page in early May. You will find on the list books that support both the Mission Study topic and the worship themes added in addition to books that touch on current and cultural topics.

I encourage you all to consider the books on this year’s Reading for Renewal list, follow our Facebook page (where we will be adding posts related to our Mission Study topic and worship themes), and share updates on future group gatherings.

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A t the end of April Spring Hill UCC announced that it would be starting its own food pantry on the church campus. The name of the food pantry ministry is “Leaves and Fishes,” and it hopes to be able to serve its congregation and the community as well. The plan was to begin collecting food every Saturday beginning May 2 between the hours of 9am-Noon. Food distribution would be every Sunday beginning May 16, with church members (and friends) receiving items between the hours of 9am-Noon and community members between the hours of 1-3pm. Those requesting food would be required to register ahead of time by e-mail or phone and would receive an appointment date and time for pick-up. Due to physical distancing restrictions, no one (whether dropping off or picking up food) will get out of their car and instead drive up to the sidewalk in front of Davis Hall and pop open the car trunk. A volunteer will either collect the food from the car or put it in the trunk. A list is being circulated of the food and other items needed.

Rev. Booth Iburg and members from Eternal Hope UCC/ Fort Walton Beach continue to help prepare and serve meals weekly in need, both in Fort Walton Beach (usually about 75) and Pensacola (around 100).

The Food4Kids backpack program at the United Church of Gainesville is the recipient of a grant of $8,800 from The Children’s Trust to pay for food the rest of 2020. Since UCC began the program at Duval Elementary in 2010, the cost of food and snacks has increased each year. It now costs approximately $10/week/child, which translates to about $350 annually for each child UCC serves. UCC members have been very generous in supporting the Food4Kids effort for 10 years. Until this year, UGC was able to cover the costs of the program with donations, but this year almost twice as many students signed up as had been being served. In November 2019 the church announced that it would be asking for donations to be put outside on doorsteps or driveways on Good Friday. Leanne and her children were able to pick up food donations from 12 families and delivered the food to BHH. In early May the church began collecting food to help restock BHH’s food pantry. The church placed its shopping cart outside the church entrance so people could stop by and leave their contribution on certain days, which Leanne and Pam have volunteered to deliver. The church is also recruiting members to volunteer at BHH distribution centers. In another effort, a group from the church helped harvest 9,000 pounds of fresh cabbage to be distributed by the Palm Beach County Food bank to feeding programs and distribution sites around the county.

The bakers at Hope UCC/Rockledge sold an assortment of homemade pies and hand pies in recognition of March 14, which is Pi Day. It was a tasty effort to support the church’s general fund; two Pi Day tee shirts were offered as prizes. The church also supports a community endeavor to supply food for Cocoa High School students, earning the name the “Peanut Butter Church” because that is what they are asked to provide. Hope also continues to support the Central Brevard Sharing Center with non-perishable food and personal hygiene items.

The sermon series that began at the end of April at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota was titled “Comfort Food.” Food plays a central role in scripture. Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby led his members in exploring the ways Jesus served breakfast on the beach, changed water into wine, bread from heaven and angel cakes prepared to sustain the strength of Elijah – helping to see the ways we are living the part of the Lord’s Prayer that goes, “Give us this day, our daily bread.” Congregants listened and leaned into ways these stories connect to our stories — and had the opportunity to share recipes with each other! Also, the church partnered with the Oasis Cafe to provide meals for local first responders. Meals cost $10 each, and for every $100 the church collects the cafe will deliver 10 boxed “Thanks from the Heart” meals in First Congregational’s name. Over $600 was raised for this gift. On May 17, Jim and Jane Huttenlocher made the first delivery of sharing God’s love through a breakfast to local first responders.

Pensacola Beach Community UCC continues in its support of Interfaith Ministries and the Good Samaritan Clinic. Food to donate can be dropped off directly at Interfaith or in front of the church office, and financial gifts can be made to the organization’s websites. The church is also supporting Navy Point Elementary School in Pensacola, which is in need of non-perishable food items, school supplies and personal hygiene items.

First Congregational UCC/Des Moines has been providing bags of food from 9am-2pm on Tuesdays-Fridays.

The church also supports a community effort to bring hot meals to coordinated sites, and the church is helping with donations to CROS Ministries. As the pandemic’s impact was growing, donations were down at Boca Helping Hand’s food pantry. Just before Easter, BHH sent out a request for donations, and church member Leanne immediately went to work. Offering to pick up the food, she asked for donations to be put outside on doorsteps or driveways on Good Friday. Leanne and her children were able to pick up food donations from 12 families, and delivered the food to BHH. In early May the church began collecting food to help restock BHH’s food pantry. The church placed its shopping cart outside the church entrance so people could stop by and leave their contribution on certain days, which Leanne and Pam have volunteered to deliver.

The church is also recruiting members to volunteer at BHHS distribution centers. In another effort, a group from the church helped harvest 9,000 pounds of fresh cabbage to be distributed by the Palm Beach County Food Bank to feeding programs and distribution sites around the county.

Beach is collecting non-perishable food donations for the St. Petersburg Free Clinic, asking church members to leave their donations at the parking lot entrance to the church.

The food ministries at UCC/New Smyrna Beach are maintaining outreach with the Colors of Hope (feed- ing those in need) and which can be channeled through the church office.

Donations from members of Faith UCC/Dunedin have entailed the church to make a $500 contribution to the Dunedin Cares Food Pantry.

The food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinelas Park remains open and busy. During February it was open 12 days and served 159 adults and 49 children; first-time clients numbered 73. In March and April it was open for 27 days to serve clients. In March, 280 adults and 98 kids (totaling 378) were helped; in April the numbers were 511 adults and 241 children for a total of 752. One day a gentleman from the storage and management office came to the pantry and said, “I’ve been watching you work and wanted to help,” and presented the pantry with a $500 check. The LDS Church’s Bishop’s Storehouse in Edgewater serving southern Volusia County.

The church offered a “Drive-Thru Meat- loaf Dinner” on Sunday, May 3, from 4-6pm. You drove through the church parking lot, handed over $10 per meal (cash or check) and drove off with meat- loaf, mashed potatoes, green beans and a roll (hey, where was the dessert?).
Helping Closer to Home

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour wants to ensure that if anyone needs groceries that the church can assist. They have a supply of groceries including eggs, fish, rice and canned goods and soup for those who are in need. Items are distributed at its office on Thursdays between 4-7 pm for those in need who sign up. Food may also be dropped off.

A group of volunteers has stepped forward at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/Pete Beach to help people who should remain at home by going to the grocery stores, picking up prescriptions and doing other small chores. They will happily enter the store, purchase what is needed, deliver it (while keeping a distance) with reimbursement left in an envelope at the door.

Sanibel Congregational UCC (in conjunction with Temple Bat Yam, which worships in SCUCC’s space) continue working together with Bailey’s General Store and Jerry’s Food grocery stores to provide help for those unable to get out to shop or pick up groceries during the pandemic and for whom it might be a hardship to utilize a shopping service. Orders are placed online at the stores’ websites for delivery two days a week. The church is also encouraging support for food and financial donations to F.I.S.H. of Sanibel/Captiva and the Gladiolus Food Pantry.

Several members of the Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg congregation have offered to help others as needed, securing items from the grocery store or help with an errand or some other kind of assistance.

The “Easter Flower” donations at Naples UCC benefited the Harry Chapin Food Bank while food items and general supplies collected during a drive up/drop off drive for the virtual Palm Sunday service went to Grace Place.

The Community Action Committee at the United Church in Tal-ahassee donated $250 to the farm worker community in conjunction with Temple Bat Yam, which worships in SCUCC’s space.

Almonte Chapel Community UCC/Almonte Springs continues to support the food pantry at the Sharing Center in Longwood.

Beginning in mid-May, Fort Myers Congregational UCC began collecting pasta and sauces for the South Fort Myers Food Pantry. It is a replacement for its usual “Peanut Butter Sunday” collections.

Is there too much information and misinformation about the coronavirus? We are inundated with news and information every day. The Florida Conference and the national setting of the UCC publish helpful information on a regular basis. The UCC National Disaster Ministries publish an article online almost daily about the coronavirus. Some of that information is not covered on mass media so the information provides a fresh perspective along with links to other sources. You may sign up to receive it in your inbox or go to www.ucc.org/disaster and it is the one on the front page. Please make sure whatever information you are listening to or reading about the coronavirus is from a reputable news source.

The UCC Conference Disaster Coordinators across the country are in the midst of a completely different type of disaster for us. As hurricane season begins, we must turn some of our attention to make sure we are prepared. With restrictions and social distancing, it is vital to listen to your county Emergency Management officials. Going to a shelter will be a lot different than it has been in the past. You may want to spend some time thinking about whether you will evacuate or not. If your plan is to evacuate, know where you will go well ahead of time. If you plan to shelter in place, have enough provisions for seven days. One of the problems with Hurricane Irma was that 6.8 million people evacuated in the state, and only three million were in a mandatory evacuation zone. That severely taxed shelters, roads and everything else.

This year the hurricane season’s early school closings are not likely to happen. On May 29, and ends Thursday, June 4. Now is a good time to do an inventory of what you may need for hurricane season that qualifies for being tax free. There are some dollar amount limits on most items.

The Immanuel Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) began after Hurricane Irma with a desire to provide safe, secure housing for farm worker families and other low-income people. The Florida Conference, churches within the Conference, the national setting of the UCC, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Peace River Presbytery and others raised enough funds to purchase a ten-acre parcel of land in Immokalee. The sale of the land was scheduled to come before the Collier County Planning Commission in March and be put on the agenda for final approval from the Board of County Commissioners. The coronavirus disrupted the schedule. As I write this (mid-May), the time frame is uncertain. The IFHA board has not been given a specific date for their hearing. The hope is it will happen sometime in June.

Disasters — Here Now... and Possibly Coming

"Hurricane Homes” is a program organized by the Deacons at Spring Hill UCC, which matches people who might have to evacuate with host homes if a hurricane is approaching. Potential hosts are asked to contact the church listing the number of people they can accommodate and whether they have any pets and if they’re smokers.

Those who might need a place to stay do the same.

Donnie Coleman
UCC/New Smyrna Beach

Colleen, sung by head John Bu- chanan and Donnie Coleman at UCC/New Smyrna Beach, continues to provide nutritious meals every Monday from 4-5 pm at the church. Colors of Hunger is a joint effort hosted by UCC/NSB along with three other NSB churches (Saint Peters the Fishererman Episcopal Church, Coronado Community United Methodist Church and the First Presbyterian Church). Before the Covid-19 shutdown, diners consisting of elderly, homeless, families or anyone in need of a hot meal were invited into the UCC/NSB Community Hall for a sit-down hot nutritious meal with sides, served on real plates, along with desserts and beverages of their choice. On average 85-90 diners were served every Monday. They may also be able to obtain clothing, jackets, blankets, socks and personal items and help themselves to bakeries donated by Publix.

After the Florida Governor’s Stay-at-Home Order, Colors of Hunger quickly shifted to CDC protocols and physical distancing to be able to continue to serve our homeless community. In conjunction with a healthy nutritious bagged meal-to-go along with snacks and beverages, they now provide facemasks (sewn by volunteers) and hand sanitizer for their clients’ protection. Food and these items are distributed outside on tables spaced apart where clients can pick up their meal one-at-a-time and practice social distancing. In late April, 60 diners were served and this number seems to be growing.

John said the greatest need for Colors of Hunger is to purchase more hand sanitizer as the homeless do not have access to facilities to frequently wash their hands. The program passed out personal hand sanitizer bottles to clients and asked them to return the bottles each week to be refilled. Also, any folks who have taken up sewing facemasks and would like to donate them are asked to please drop them off at the church on Mondays between 2-3 pm. Financial donations are very welcome as the hand sanitizer is expensive.

Adapted from The United Voice, the May newsletter of UCC/New Smyrna Beach
I “Across Florida” our intent is to share with you what is happening at our LGBTQ+ churches throughout the state. It is obvious from these entries that there is an exciting vibrancy evident within our congregations.

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

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

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

The rummage sale on Saturday, February 22, at the Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton brought in over $3,000, proving that all the logistical planning and attention to details pays off.

The United Church in Tallahassee Miracle Walkers continued their fundraising efforts during the pandemic. Their goal was to honor the nine cancer survivors who participate with their team and remember all those who have died from this terrible disease. The team took first place honors raising $3,296.

Hope UCC/Rockledge is another of our congregations engaging in virtual “Theology on Tap” gatherings, mixing theology and conversation with suds or other beverages of choice in the comfort of their homes. At the United Church of Gainesville it was Good Men Drinking Beer (virtually, of course!) on Friday, May 15.

When Russ Kaufman asked if the Mary Martha group at First Congregational UCC/Orlando could supply veterans with lap robes to keep our veterans warm; from mid-March to the end of April she had completed 52 lap robes.

Spring Hill UCC reports success with their campaign to lower their mortgage, which began in September 2017. At that time their mortgage balance was $122,000, and the monthly payment was approximately $1,800. Thanks to the generosity of its members, the mortgage principal has been reduced to $37,000 with a monthly payment of $470. Given the current economic situation due to Covid-19, church leaders are keenly aware that many household budgets are facing challenging times. The Stewardship Committee and the Church Council have agreed to suspend the mortgage retirement campaign on May 20 instead of in December. In view of the extraordinary success of the campaign and the commitment of those who pledged, the church feels this makes sense in bringing some financial relief to our church family this summer.

The United Church of Gainesville has with the Arts Coalition the NAACP and the Women for Wise Growth. The congregation’s Racial Justice Committee was quick to support the fundraising drive and Church Council enthusiastically and unanimously offered its approval as well. A GoFundMe site exists for individuals and members and friends (though any additional gifts to help further reduce the mortgage balance are gladly welcomed!).


Youth Ministries

Faith Formation/Youth Directors
Time of Communion and Fellowship
By Neal Watkins
Minister for Faith Formation

All youth leaders, directors, Faith Formation ministers or anybody throughout the Conference working with youth ministries are invited to a weekly time of communion and fellowship. Perhaps you, too, would benefit from the break from feeding to be fed with other youth leaders? Perhaps you could benefit from conversation with other youth ministers in other areas of the Conference?

If so, we would love to have you join us Thursdays at 1pm by clicking https://zoom.us/j/241326855
(BYOE — Bring Your Own Communion Elements!).

Please feel free to contact me at NWatkins@uccfla.org with any questions!
From e-Celebrate, April 15

Youth Around the State

High school youth at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour are meeting Wednesday evenings via Zoom; middle schoolers meet online after Sunday worship.

Middle school and high school students at the United Church of Gainesville “hang out” on Friday evenings through Zoom and children and their families have been Googling for weekly fun activities and journaling about their experiences during the pandemic.

The youth group at Fort Myers Congregational UCC gathers virtually via Zoom on Thursday evenings.

Youth from the sixth grade to twelfth at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park Zoom together on Sunday afternoons.

Teens in Action at UCC/New Smyrna Beach continue to meet virtually on Wednesday evenings and keep in touch with one another through phone calls, texts and Instagram (a birthday parade drove past one member’s home on his 18th birthday).

Kids in the two youth groups at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach keep in touch posting photos and Zooming on Sundays.

World Premiere Debut — “Together We’re Strong”

An original song, written for NYE:

We may not be able to gather in person this year, but we know without a doubt that God’s love for us remains and we are stronger than we have ever been. This original song, written for NYE, is an uplifting symbol of unity in these extraordinary times. In it, we are reminded: we have wisdom, purpose, and youth. We are here for a time such as this.

This amazing video features the faces of youth and young adults who were volunteering and helping to plan NYE2020, as well as some of the adult volunteers and staff from Justice and Local Church Ministries. You might even see another face or two that you recognize!

Have you checked out the Spotify playlist yet?

Your NYE team has spent weeks curating the perfect playlist for NYE Unitel event — including featured artists and tunes from some of the most beloved artists today.

This working repertoire is the ideal way for you to connect during the pandemic and elicit in yourself a renewed sense of resilience, courage and faith.

Listen today and share with your community.

Listen Now

National Youth Event
(Postponed until 2022)
Now Offering Interactive Digital Experiences
By Hans Holznagel
UCC News, Mar 18

Every four years for four decades, the United Church of Christ’s National Youth Event has attracted young people from all over the denomination for high-energy inspiration, faith-building and educational activities, community service, and in-the-moment actions for social justice.

Now, like so many other events in the Year of the Coronavirus, the live event has been postponed, with online opportunities taking its place this summer.

The in-person gathering is now scheduled for two years from now: July 27-30, 2022, at Purdue University in Indiana. It was originally set to be held on that campus July 22-25 of this year.

However, disappointed youth and young adults can still get in on some virtual NYE options in 2020:

World Premiere Debut — “Together We’re Strong”

An original song, written for NYE:

“Together We’re Strong” is written and performed by Tracy Howe Wispelwey. Instrumental performance and production are by Aaron Strumpel. It is mastered by David Wilton.

Listen Now

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The in-person gathering is now scheduled for two years from now: July 27-30, 2022, at Purdue University in Indiana. It was originally set to be held on that campus July 22-25 of this year.

However, disappointed youth and young adults can still get in on some virtual NYE options in 2020:

Live chat opportunities will accompany the premieres of two original NYE videos on YouTube: “Loving Your Neighbor in Quarantine,” Sunday, May 31; and “Creativity and Justice in Quarantine,” Sunday, June 28. One of NYE’s organizers, the Rev. Tracey Potter, Minister for Youth and Young Adult Engagement, will host the chats — both to be held at 4pm EDT.

She said information on how to view and take part will soon be posted at the NYE website.

A “culminating interactive experience,” taking shape now, will be held online Friday, July 24, and Saturday, July 25. Potter said she encourages people to watch for details and registration information soon at the NYE website.

For musical inspiration, a digital NYE playlist is available now, here, on Spotify. “It’s a great mix of older and new,” said one of its curators, the Rev. Tracy Howe Wispelwey, Minister for Congregational and Community Engagement. “The songs are chosen because they exemplify the themes of NYE2020 as it was coming to life: ‘Unite! Unite for the earth! Unite for justice! Unite in faith!’ “

Potter and Wispelwey said many of the artists and speakers who had been scheduled for this summer’s event are preparing content that will be shared virtually, accompanied by chat opportunities. “We are disappointed but not discouraged,” Potter and Wispelwey said in a recent email announcing the postponement to registered participants. “We have been hard at work to offer meaningful and faithful virtual gatherings this summer. We recognize this is not the same, but nothing is the same. We look forward to welcoming all seniors for whom this may have been your last NYE to join us virtually and in 2022 as youth ambassadors.”

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For information on how to view and take part, information on how to view and take part will soon be posted at the NYE website.

There’s no better time to heed Jesus’ call to love our neighbor than in this moment. Whether it’s helping to plan NYE2020, as well as some of the adult volunteers and staff from Justice and Local Church Ministries. You might even see another face or two that you recognize!

Listen today and share with your community.

Listen Now

”Together We’re Strong” is written and performed by Tracy Howe Wispelwey. Instrumental performance and production are by Aaron Strumpel. It is mastered by David Wilton.

Youth Around the State

High school youth at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour are meeting Wednesday evenings via Zoom; middle schoolers meet online after Sunday worship.

Middle school and high school students at the United Church of Gainesville “hang out” on Friday evenings through Zoom and children and their families have been Googling for weekly fun activities and journaling about their experiences during the pandemic.

The youth group at Fort Myers Congregational UCC gathers virtually via Zoom on Thursday evenings.

Youth from the sixth grade to twelfth at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park Zoom together on Sunday afternoons.

Teens in Action at UCC/New Smyrna Beach continue to meet virtually on Wednesday evenings and keep in touch with one another through phone calls, texts and Instagram (a birthday parade drove past one member’s home on his 18th birthday).

Kids in the two youth groups at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach keep in touch posting photos and Zooming on Sundays.

World Premiere Debut — “Together We’re Strong”

An original song, written for NYE:

We may not be able to gather in person this year, but we know without a doubt that God’s love for us remains and we are stronger than we have ever been. This original song, written for NYE, is an uplifting symbol of unity in these extraordinary times. In it, we are reminded: we have wisdom, purpose, and youth. We are here for a time such as this.

This amazing video features the faces of youth and young adults who were volunteering and helping to plan NYE2020, as well as some of the adult volunteers and staff from Justice and Local Church Ministries. You might even see another face or two that you recognize!

Have you checked out the Spotify playlist yet?

Your NYE team has spent weeks curating the perfect playlist for NYE Unitel event — including featured artists and tunes from some of the most beloved artists today.

This working repertoire is the ideal way for you to connect during the pandemic and elicit in yourself a renewed sense of resilience, courage and faith.

Listen today and share with your community.

Listen Now
The Sunday School kids at Faith UCC/Dunedin have received a “Be the Church” coloring and reflection book, which offers them an opportunity to creatively examine the values we hold as a church. A weekly reflection is being written as well on one of the topics per week such as protecting the environment, caring for the poor and rejecting racism. These and other opportunities are being provided through Zoom.

Associate Pastor Rev. Megan Smith at Coral Gables Congregational UCC is teaching an online five-week Zoom course Sunday mornings for Sunday School children in Kindergarten and first and second grades called “Touch the Water, Taste the Bread” about experiencing Baptism and Holy Communion. The May Sunday School outreach project is collecting new children’s flip flops to benefit families at the Lotus House homeless shelter.

Children and pre-schoolers at Sanibel Congregational UCC can enjoy a special visit from Rev. Deb Kunkel and her friend Shep by checking in at Facebook on Friday mornings.

After a two month Covid-19 hiatus, Fort Myers Congregational UCC’s Sunday School returned in mid-May via Zoom. Karen Kelley and her able Band of Helpers had a fun-filled hour of study and fun planned around the “FLAT STANLEY” theme. Each week the kids appropriately adorned “FLAT JESUS”

At Naples UCC there is “Around the Dinner Table — Steeplelights Stories” on Wednesdays at 5:30pm, which is a weekly video series for kids featuring Bible stories and activities with Children’s Ministry Director Merrill Noble and on Saturday there is the “Kid’s Blast” with children’s ministry news and worship activities.

As in-person Vacation Bible School this year presents a challenge, First Congregational UCC/Winter Park is putting together a virtual version from June 22-26 on the theme “Home is Where the Heart Is.” It will be free and includes supplies and online get-togethers. There will be a day for folks to come to the church and do a drive-by to safely pick up supplies and materials. The same goes for the annual summer art camp.

Virtual Vacation Bible School at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach was scheduled for the end of May. BOLT Backyard VBS here

Kids going “virtual” at the United Church in Tallahassee