Racism and Intersectionality

REV. JOHN VERTIGAN
Conference Minister

I opened my Sierra Club newsletter a week or two ago expecting to read articles related to climate justice, environmental policy and the ecological disaster that is wrecking the planet. Instead, I was met by a headline that read “Racism is Killing the Planet,” written by Sierra Club Director of Strategic Partnerships Mr. Hop Hopkins. Hopkins writes:

“An idea — a long-overdue realization — is growing in the environmental movement. It goes something like this: ‘We’ll never stop climate change without ending white supremacy.’ I know that a lot of people are struggling with the thought that addressing the environmental crises must involve dismantling white supremacy. At Sierra Club meetings, some people hear me say something like that and think, ‘Damn, fighting climate change wasn’t hard enough already? Now we have to end racism and white supremacy too? Seriously, man?’ I get that feeling of being overwhelmed. It’s a lot to carry. It’s a lot to hold. We all have enough to do without feeling like we’re taking on even more. But I want to share another lens from which we can view this moment. I really believe in my heart of hearts — after a lifetime of thinking and talking about these issues — that we will never survive the climate crisis without ending white supremacy.”

Think of this as an intersection, a crossroads where two roads meet or two issues come together. Racism and environmental justice create such an intersection that is just one of many. For some history, check out this story of

... a small working group is forming to raise the possibility of a resolution declaring the Florida Conference an antiracism Conference.

...continued on page 2

Racism and the Challenge to People of Faith

What can we do? Here is one small idea that may help you take a step forward. Talk with someone you know whose skin is of a different hue than yours and bring up what is going on. Start a conversation. Listen. Share with honesty. See what opens up. And what might come next.

UCC General Minister and President Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer shared a commentary on YouTube on June 8 that focuses on the “ongoing dynamics of white power, white privilege and white supremacy.” [Click here.]

As followers of Jesus, we follow his lead and are committed to creating an anti-racist society. To this end, the UCC offered a webinar entitled “Protest During a Pandemic” on June 24. Instead of becoming suppressed by the pandemic, the spirit of justice has arisen with fierce determination and become embodied in countless ways. The webinar reflected upon how protest has manifested itself during this time and the lessons that can be learned for communities of faith dedicated to answering the unrelenting call of justice.

Here in Florida

How have our Florida congregations responded? Here is some of what we have learned, and more actions, programs and events can be found in “Time for Conversations” elsewhere in this issue on pages 22-25.

Fort Myers Congregational UCC joined in a community gathering on Saturday morning, June 13, in Centennial Park in downtown Fort Myers. “Lifting the Knee,” sponsored by Lee Interfaith for Empowerment (of which the church is a member), was a show of support for victims of police brutality and racial violence.

On Friday night, June 5, several members from Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach went to the Pensacola Graffiti...
landmark research and advocacy by your United Church of Christ decades ago, which led to the concept of “environmental racism” www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/environmental-racism that is taught in colleges and universities around the country.

For the United Church of Christ, racism has always been an issue as it is manifested in both church and society; care for the environment has always been an issue; and the intersection of the two with our life in faith has created dynamic opportunities for us to live out our values as a church that seeks a just world for all.

Now is the time for us to act. In the coming months, this e-celebrate newsletter will include both resources and reflections that help us begin to talk about being an antiracist church. This is an invitation for us to reflect on both personal and societal experiences of racism and white supremacy. But the times in which we live call for action as well as reflection, and a small working group is forming to raise the possibility of a resolution that help us begin to talk about being an antiracist church. This newsletter will include both resources and reflections that help us understand the issues we seek to address.

Racism ... from page 1

Bridge to join the peaceful protests and a prayer circle on behalf of Black Lives Matter.

Members from Coral Gables Congregational UCC participated in a Prayer Walk for Change on Saturday morning, June 6, which went from Bayfront Park walking through downtown with stops to offer prayers. The church conducted two book studies via Zoom: So You Want to Talk about Race by Ijeoma Oluo that took place on multiple Wednesday evenings in June and Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do? by Michael Sandel over several Thursday evenings from mid-June to mid-July.

The clergy team at Naples UCC changed the focus of its Clergy Roundtable in early June to engage in “Sacred Conversations on Race and Privilege” during its late afternoon Wednesday Livestream/Facebook Live engagements. Held over eight weeks, it included a discussion of the book, How to be an Anti-Racist by Ibram Kendi.

“A Call for Peace” virtual online rally in memory of George Floyd and in support of the Black community was held in Gainesville on Wednesday evening, June 3. Rev. Talia Raymond (United Church of Gainesville) and others from multiple faith traditions led in interfaith prayer and solidarity.

Rev. Jason Fairbanks (First Congregational Church/Lake Worth) joined with other area clergy and the police chief of West Palm Beach for a prayer vigil at the WPB Police Department in response to the racial unrest.

Profound discussions on matters of race at a Sunday morning Bible study at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park in early June led to a decision to hold Wednesday evening conversations on race via Zoom. The church has sent Peace Cranes to the following churches: Resurrection Church, Houston, TX (this is the church that George Floyd attended) and six UCC churches in the Minneapolis area. Thanks go to Jackie Miller for her continued dedication to the church’s Peace Crane Ministry.

On Friday afternoon, June 19, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota held a Zoom Juneteenth “conversation” commemorating the date in 1865 when the final enslaved Africa-Americans were informed of their liberation under the Emancipation Proclamation. The conversation featured two sermons by Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III (Trinity UCC/Chicago); one was on the killing of Ahmed Aubrey and a recent conversation involving the UCC leadership (click here) And the second was after the killing of George Floyd (click here). The church shared with members an article “97 Things White People Can do for Racial Justice” (click here [Here is the post on 75 actions we can take]) The church council unanimously passed a racial justice statement in mid-July.

Several members of Pensacola Community UCC have begun a Zoom reading/discussion group to explore how racism impacts us personally and as a society and to grow as Christians in anti-racism thinking and acting. They post article and videos of interest and plan to meet every two weeks to share and pray about what they have read and seen.

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Here is a link to anti-racism resources intended to assist white people and parents to deepen an understanding of anti-racism work. It contains lists of books, articles, podcasts, videos, films and organizations to contact for more information. Click here.

Eight members of the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine and Quaker folks stood up for justice on Sunday morning, June 7, on U.S.1 in front of the church and continued the demonstrations on following Sundays.

Hope UCC/Rockledge participated in the almost two mile March for Justice on Saturday, June 6, in the Cocoa-Rockledge area at which some 3,000 people participated. The church supplied free bottles of water to the marchers from their booth.

George Floyd Solidarity Night was recognized on Tuesday evenings from June 2-9 on the busy street in front of Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg as church members “took a knee” for eight minutes/forty-eight seconds holding candles/flashlights/cell phones.

Emmanuel UCC/Sebring responded to the George Floyd killing with a peaceful sign of solidarity for the Minneapolis community on Saturday, May 30.
Because I am White...

"A s a predominantly white denomination, what is our sacred duty to dismantle racism? We need to start by doing some of our own work. And ‘get comfortable with being uncomfortable’.

The national United Church of Christ in a July 11 Facebook posting

What follows was posted on Facebook by our friends at Hope UCC/Rockledge. While we have learned – or should have – that everything we read on Facebook may need to be taken with a wise measure of skepticism, this does deserve our attention. It creatively enables white people to reflect upon racism in a very personal way because it relates to one’s everyday life.

Many of the names cited are familiar to us and although some may not be the point being made should not be in question: these are not human rights if only white people have them.

Because I am White...

I have privilege as a white person because I can do all of these things without thinking twice about it...

- I can go birding (#ChristianCooper)
- I can go jogging (#AmaudArbery)
- I can relax in the comfort of my own home (#BothemSean and #AtatianaJefferson)
- I can ask for help after being in a car crash (#JonathanFerrell and #RenishaMcBride)
- I can have a cellphone (#StephonClark)
- I can leave a party to get to safety (#JordanEdwards)
- I can relax in the comfort of my own home (#BothemSean and #AtatianaJefferson)
- I can ask for help after being in a car crash (#JonathanFerrell and #RenishaMcBride)
- I can have a cellphone (#StephonClark)
- I can leave a party to get to safety (#JordanEdwards)
- I can play loud music (#JordanDavis)
- I can sell CD’s (#AltonSterling)
- I can sleep (#AiyanaJones)

- I can walk from the corner store (#MikeBrown)
- I can play cops and robbers (#TamirRice)
- I can go to church (#Charleston9)
- I can walk home with Skittles (#TrayvonMartin)
- I can hold a hair brush while leaving my own bachelor party (#SeanBell)
- I can party on New Year’s (#OscarGrant)
- I can get a normal traffic ticket (#SandraBland)
- I can lawfully carry a weapon (#PhilandoCastile)
- I can break down on a public road with car problems (#CoreyJones)
- I can shop at Walmart (#JohnCrawford)
- I can have a disabled vehicle (#TerrenceCrutcher)
- I can be a 10yr old walking with our grandfather (#CliffordGlover)
- I can read a book in my own car (#KeithScott)
- I can decorate for a party (#ClaudeReese)
- I can ask a cop a question (#RandyEvans)

These are NOT human rights if only white people have them. White privilege is real. Take a minute to consider a Black person’s experience today. #BlackLivesMatter

From the June Tidings, the newsletter of Hope UCC/Rockledge
Fall Gathering Will be Virtual

By Rev. John Vertigan

At a called meeting of the Conference Board of Directors on June 4, 2020, a motion was voted upon in the affirmative that, the 2020 Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ be held via electronic media rather than as an on-site gathering and that Conference staff and other leaders craft a 2020 event with the aim of bringing a sense of unity to the Conference in these uncertain times.

We are grateful that Coral Gables Congregational UCC was in preparation for an on-site Gathering at their facility, and we’ll hope to return there one day in the future.

In the meantime, we’ve reflected with one another on the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on our common life. While we are saddened that we won’t meet in person, we do believe that a virtual gathering of some type can be lively and less time-constricted and will also symbolize the Conference leaning into the future and helping to model new ways of being the church.

The annual business meeting of the Florida Conference is now tentatively scheduled to be held electronically from 9am to noon on Saturday, October 10, 2020, and an official call to the meeting will be sent when those plans are finalized. We also hope to make available this fall offerings such as Local Church University and some other workshops via the web and are excited for how these offerings might reach a wider audience than we previously imagined.

We are thankful for our common life, shared in covenant, as we seek to be faithful to the prayer of Jesus “that they may all be one,” and we anticipate our fall Gathering will be emblematic of our commitment to the hope that lies within us for the sake of the Gospel. Please stay tuned for further announcements as plans develop, and be in touch, won’t you.

From e-Celebrate, June 10

Our Important Ministry of Relationship Building

During these many weeks of isolation, our Minister for Faith Formation, Neal Watkins, has facilitated a weekly Zoom meeting on Wednesday at 1pm for pastors and lay leaders, and these have varied in the number of participants from a half dozen to 25 or more. We’ve been able to affirm, each week, that it is right and good that we are together in support of our mutual ministries and that we are strengthened by a weekly reminder of our shared covenant of support toward one another not only in this odd time but across time as we seek the vitality of our local churches. Topics for conversation have included:

- Pastoring First Mental Health Concerns (Our Own and Our Congregations)
- Expanding Creativity Because of (Not in Spite of) Digital Platforms
- Building and Reinforcing Community Partnerships and Ministry
- Creating and Maintaining Pastoral Care Structures During Social Distancing
- Exploring Sacred Conversations to End Racism
- Empowering and Identifying Just Peace Ministries in the Local Church
- Exploring and Unpacking COVID-19 Protocols
- Developing Technological Ministries as Non-Technological Peoples
- Covering the Ps, Qs, Is and Ts of Using Technological Sources in Worship
- Eco-Justice in a Time of Pandemic and Beyond
- Public Theology: What Is It? Why We Can’t Escape It? And How ANYBODY Can Do It!

This important ministry of relationship building and covenant sharing is made possible by the continued provision of our churches for gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission basic support, and for that support I offer deep thanks today. Your generosity matters.

Along with my gratitude, please receive this as an invitation to greater participation by our authorized ministers and members in discernment in each of these weekly calls going forward. Bring your lunch. Take your laptop outside to a shady place. When COVID-19 eventually subsides — and it will — these calls will continue, and we invite you to join with your partners in ministry in receiving these topics as important ones, practicing them for the betterment of the church’s ministry and sharing them as a proclamation of the gospel.

Thanks, again, for your philanthropy that makes these calls, and this ministry, possible.

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

By Rev. John Vertigan from “Conference Call,” e-Celebrate, June 24
It was always my instinct to negotiate. I would ask my mother, “Do I HAVE to?” And eventually, she learned my pattern well enough to condition a response, “No, you don’t HAVE to, but you GET to …”

And I suppose I still struggle with the difference in my attitude between understanding what I HAVE to do and what I GET to do. But this much is clear: Friends, as followers of Christ, we get to use our understanding of the extravagance of God’s mercy and insistence of God’s justice to help shape the world that is meant and yet to be, but in order to get there we HAVE to do it in the communal support of one another.

What does it mean to be individuals and unique communities within a region and span that is diverse in thought and varied in makeup yet unified in the essentials of our commitment to understanding God, following Christ and loving neighbor? I submit to you that, in short, the answer is that which is the essence of what it means to be the Florida Conference.

We will live in this together. Our faith formation — as individuals and communities — is as independent as it is interdependent. I marvel at and give thanks for the ways that you have been beacons of hope and pillars of strength in your communities and the ways that so many of you have “gathered” to share in resources, discernment and community.

We GET to continue. Together. We HAVE to continue. Together.

As previous missives have illuminated the work that is being done and the foundation that is being laid for more intentional ministry and conversation(s) to end racism, I would like to focus my conclusion this week on two additional offerings:

Relaunching ScreenSide Chats — Laity Invited!

My next (mass) e-mail to you will include a syllabus of topics for Wednesdays at 1pm beginning August 5 as we look forward to extending more intentionally our invitation to laity throughout the Florida Conference as we gather to hear from leaders within and beyond the Conference as it relates to such topics as:

• Conflict mediation in the local church
• Technological opportunities for post-pandemic ministry
• Confirmation in post-Christendom youth ministry

• Exploring partnerships with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers
• And much more!

You may join this weekly conversation by logging on to Zoom ID: 361 687 8295.

I invite you, also, to consider what conversation topics YOU might feel led to help facilitate, and do let me know by e-mailing nwatkins@uccfla.org.

Launching August 4 — Florida Conference Clergy Lectionary Hour

This is our chance as Florida Conference clergy to come together to compare notes, perspectives and resources for the upcoming Sunday’s text(s). Including:

A brief “starter” reflection from Florida Conference staff and colleagues, including YouTube videos, news articles, artistic references and other resources

An opportunity to swap stories, illustrations, jokes, quotes and other sermon mechanics with colleagues throughout the Conference

Conversation that allows for contextual applications specific to “this week” and Florida-sensitive issues.

An opportunity to challenge and support one another throughout the Conference with ideas, experience and wonderings as we prepare together to lead worship and discuss liturgies, hymnity and “extras” for our services.

This conversation on Tuesdays at 4pm begins August 4 and is open to all Florida Conference clergy and is accessible through ZOOM ID: 361 687 8295.

I would love it if you would indicate your interest in this conversation by e-mailing me at nwatkins@uccfla.org, although an “RSVP” is by no means required.

Hard to believe that summer is almost over. May the days to come bring about a new season for the Church, and for our world. I look forward to “seeing” you soon.

From e-Celebrate, July 22
Florida Conference Legacy Grants at Work

The Grants & Awards Sub-committee of the Florida Conference Legacy Funds Committee is pleased to share that 10 congregations have received “technological” grants since May of 2020. The amounts ranged from $870 to $2,500.

- First Congregational UCC/Winter Park $2,500
- Cocoa Beach Community Church $2,500
- Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda $1,600
- Fort Myers Congregational UCC $2,500
- Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach $1,200
- North Port Community UCC $2,500
- Coral Isles Church/Tavernier $870
- UCC/Fort Lauderdale $2,450
- Christ Congregational UCC/Miami $2,500
- Jensen Beach Community Church $2,500

We congratulate those congregations, and would like to share some of the responses we have received from them, both general overall comments, and specific comments that were shared:

General Overall/Shared Comments:
- All recipients expressed gratitude for the grants.
- Most plan to continue the livestreaming method of worship even after the pandemic is over, due to excellent feedback from members, snowbirds, “new attendees,” community members and others far and wide.
- Most shared that through the new technological equipment they are also able to have meetings, virtual coffee hours, Bible studies, Pastoral visits, daily Zoom offerings and much more.

Specific Comments:
- “A new HD Camera has been purchased and is used to record daily videos for our Facebook page . . . it has motivated many in our church family to contribute towards our technology fund, and they have done so very generously. The grant received from the Legacy Committee was the seed money for this fund.”
  - Rev. Attila Szemesi, North Port Community UCC

- “Mondays we offer meditation, Tuesdays is a spirituality class called ‘Zoom and Commune,’ Wednesdays we have general fellowship followed by an hour-long dialog on race. Thursdays we do yoga, Fridays we have a mental health professional offering an hour on grief and isolation, Saturdays we have kid’s storytime, and Sundays we have two Bible study classes, worship and youth group. We are actually busier than we were when we were in the building! We can’t thank the Conference enough for helping us succeed in this time of COVID to become a new kind of church!”
  - Rev. Shawn Garvey, First Congregational UCC/Winter Park

The Grants & Awards Committee is very pleased that so many of our congregations have applied for, received and put to use new methods of sharing God’s love through monies from the Legacy Funds. We encourage other Florida Conference congregations to contact the Conference office for further information on how to apply for these funds go to www.uccfla.org >Resources >Request Scholarships, Grants, Loans or Awards.
Karen Curtis-Weakley, P INSTALLATION, Hope UCC/Rockledge, June 21
Stephen Heath, P, Union Congregational UCC/Holly Hill, service concluded June 30
Leigh McCaffrey, P, First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen, service concluded June 30
Robin DeAngelis, P, Spring Hill UCC, service will conclude October 31
Joel Reif, INT, First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce, service concluded July 19
John Arens, P, First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce, service began July 19
Mardie Chapman, C, service concluded at St. Anthony’s Hospital/St. Petersburg
Abel Cotelo, AP, Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami, service concluded June 14
Terry Hood, P, First UCC/Orlando, service concludes August 30

Key: P, Pastor; C, Chaplain; INT, Interim; AP, Associate/Assistant Pastor

Dorothy Virginia Crismon died May 13, 2020, in Greenwood, IN, after suffering a stroke at age 92. She is survived by her husband, Rev. Don, of 72 years, their three children, seven grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren. Rev. Don Crismon is the Pastor Emeritus of First UCC/Orlando.

David Heald (Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill), who volunteered in the disaster ministry of the Florida Conference, the Volusia County Interfaith Network in Disaster and helped with volunteer groups who stayed at the Holly Hill church, died on July 9 from complications after surgery. He was 71. David had resigned from the Conference Disaster Ministry due to health reasons a little over a year ago.

Saturday, June 27, was to be a “Drive by and Wave” event to bid farewell to Rev. Leigh McCaffrey upon the conclusion of her service at First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen. But no one could just “drive by” to bid farewell to her, which included a physically-distanced hug for Lily, the church’s 99-year-old matriarch. Rev. Leigh has been called to Barre Congregational Church/Barre, VT.

Shelby Hall, a member of the United Church of Gainesville, is a Member in Discernment studying at the Candler School of Theology and is currently serving this summer as an intern in the areas of worship and pastoral care at UCG.

Conference Members Play Prominent Roles

On Thursday, June 18, the national office of the United Church of Christ hosted the annual MID Gathering via Zoom.

This year two Members in Discernment from the Florida Conference had prominent roles in the event. Chance Martinez-Colon, an MID from Spring Hill UCC, was on the planning committee and helped organize the entire program. He also wrote and delivered the opening devotional thought for the gathering, planned the closing worship service and delivered the benediction.

Tena Nock-Hope, an MID from First United Church of Tampa, delivered the sermon at the closing worship service. Both Chance and Tena were honored to represent the Florida Conference at the annual Gathering.

Nominating Committee Seeks Candidates

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 and Finance, which is a three-year position. The two-year slots are renewable twice, and the chair position is renewable once. Read the full Nominating Committee Report here!

Odds & Ends from the Conference Church House

From e-Celebrate, July 22
All staff travel continues to be on hold pending further decision-making; staff is working from their homes and tasks are being conducted via phone and electronic device.

Please note: Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan has postponed his Sabbatical (originally scheduled for June 1-August 31) for an as yet-to-be negotiated time beyond 2020.

**AUGUST (TBD)**
RM Rev. Raymond Hargrove, MESA Project Working Group

**AUGUST 6**
CM Rev. John Vertigan, Finance and Budget Committee and Legacy Funds Committee

**AUGUST 7**
CM Rev. John Vertigan, RMs Revs. Leslie Etheredge and Raymond Hargrove, Conference Board of Directors

**AUGUST 11**
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Western Region Committee on Church & Ministry

**AUGUST 12**
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Social Justice and Mission webinar

**AUGUST 13**
CM Rev. John Vertigan, Insurance Board Directors

**AUGUST 22**
RM Rev. Raymond Hargrove, Southeast Region Committee on Church & Ministry

**SEPTEMBER 18**
CM Rev. John Vertigan, RMs Revs. Leslie Etheredge and Raymond Hargrove, Committee on Church & Ministry

**SEPTEMBER 25-26**
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Southern Regional Women’s Retreat planning committee

**OCTOBER 2-4**
CM Rev. John Vertigan, UCC Board

**OCTOBER 8-10**
Florida Conference Annual Meeting

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**General Synod 33 to be a Virtual Experience**

BY CONNIE LARKMAN
UCC NEWS, JUNE 4

For the first time ever, the United Church of Christ General Synod will gather virtually in 2021. The biennial gathering is moving entirely online next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The UCC Board made this historic decision this week after considering a number of factors.

“Factoring heavily into our discernment is the likelihood that COVID-19 will be an ongoing presence in our country, requiring our continued vigilance to assure the safety of our neighbors,” wrote the UCC Board leadership team in a June 3 letter to the church. It was signed by: Yvette Wynn, Chair; the Rev. Cameron Barr, Vice-chair; the Rev. Penny Lowes, General Synod Moderator; and Robert Sandman, Assistant Moderator. “We anticipate that an in-person General Synod would require social distancing and other protocols to minimize the risk of coronavirus transmission. Planning for General Synod in Kansas City next year has already been strained by uncertainties about travel and lodging. We also understand that financial constraints and health precautions will prevent some of our Conferences from fielding delegations to General Synod. We were reluctant to proceed with plans for a meeting in-person that would risk not achieving a quorum.”

The UCCB voted unanimously June 2 to go virtual with General Synod after “a long season of prayerful discernment.”

The Rev. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President, said that discernment incorporated months of fact-finding. “We had to interview our own staff around events planning, digital strategies, legal risks, possible conversion of revenue generation from what we know in the live world to what we will experience in the digital world. We had to interview key stakeholders, including Conference Ministers. We had to evaluate conflicting data from the federal government and the CDC and WHO. We have been looking at these options for months — knowing all the while we had to make a first decision before July when the penalty for canceling went up considerably.”

In a special meeting via Zoom, the board and the UCC national officers weighed all those options before agreeing that the health and safety of members of the church family made it difficult to gather in-person in 2021. As did leaders of both host Conferences.
Our churches continue to adapt, expand, tweak, reverse course, innovate — and pray a lot — as they adjust to being church in the age of the novel coronavirus. In the June/July issue, we shared what we had heard from our congregations on ways in which they were conducting Sunday worship and other church activities.

The listing which follows updates some of that information and includes churches which hadn’t contacted us in time for the last issue (we apologize if your church is not found in this list but that is because Celebrate Florida has not heard from you). So skim through and learn what’s happening in the congregations of your brothers and sisters here in Florida. Please keep in mind that all that is taking place keeps changing and the snippets that follow are snapshots in time as of mid-July.

An article about the UCC’s webinars of clergy panels sharing about how congregations are adapting and innovating in response to the novel coronavirus follows the listing of our Florida churches. Conference Moderator Rev. Barton Buchanan (Windermere Union Church) shares what it was like for him and his church shifting gears when COVID-19 arrived.

There is also a reflection from Regional Minister Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove on how he is experiencing the virtual church and one from Rev. Sean Garvey (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park) on stewardship during “virtual church.”

Altamonte Springs – Altamonte Chapel Community UCC
9:30am in-person Sunday worship (taped for YouTube)
Auburndale – Christ’s Promise UCC
10:30am Sunday worship on Facebook Live
• The church is applying the three-phase approach for re-opening our church, all while taking every precaution necessary to ensure the safety of all; phase 1 began in June with live streaming from the Sanctuary
• A Wednesday evening Bible study is being offered via Zoom
Bal Harbour – Church by the Sea
Virtual worship on Sunday is at 10:30am on Facebook and the church website
• E-blast messages are in English and Spanish
• Prayerful meditation and music is offered on Tuesday evenings on the church website
Boca Raton – Church on the Hill Congregational UCC
The Sunday service is on Facebook Live at 10am and the bulletin (with the full text of the sermon) provided online on Saturday
A peek behind the scenes at their creative tripod
Boynton Beach – Boynton Beach Congregational UCC
No virtual or in-person Sunday worship at this time
• Rev. Jack Copas posts a weekly sermonette message on YouTube
Brandon – Faith Family UCC
Sunday services are being livestreamed at 10:30am via Facebook
• Two two-hour all-Church retreats – both in person observing safety rules and via Zoom – were offered on Saturday, June 20, and Saturday, June 27, the purpose being to develop a Parish Profile: Who Are We? Who Do We Want to Be? and Who Do We Want to be to Our Community? as the church searches for a settled pastor
Coral Gables – Coral Gables Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 11am and posted on YouTube
• The church has decided to remain closed for worship and programming through the month of August
• The church’s popular Community Arts Program (CAP) Summer Concert Series (in its 35th consecutive year) has gone virtual with six free one-hour jazz and classical performances during July and August
Deltona – Deltona UCC
Sunday worship is at 10:30am on Facebook
Dunedin – Faith UCC
Sunday services continue to be streamed on YouTube and Facebook Live
• The Life is Life support group for those living with mental health challenges and/or experiencing difficulties in life meets via Zoom once a week; the church is a WISE congregation
Fort Lauderdale – UCC/Fort Lauderdale
Sunday worship is posted on YouTube
• On June 20 at its monthly leadership meeting it was decided that in all likelihood in-person Sunday worship in the Sanctuary will not take place before September
• The church has a weekly drop-in on Zoom on Wednesdays from 7-8pm
Fort Myers – Fort Myers Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on YouTube
• On June 11 the church scheduled a Zoom meeting to discuss how corporate worship takes place and what long-term changes might be made to worship services
• The Reopening Task Force met on June 23 and decided to recommend the building remain closed until October 4 at the very earliest; Rev. David Bucey’s sermon title for July 19 was “Let’s Not Be in a Hurry to Get Back in the Building”
Fort Walton Beach – Eternal Hope UCC
Sunday morning worship began in-person on June 21 (limiting attendance to 10) while continuing to livestream at 10am on Facebook
Gainesville – United Church of Gainesville
Sunday “virtch” church worship is pre-recorded and available for viewing on YouTube Sunday morning
• Alzheimer’s caregivers support group meets via Google Meeting
Mental health first aid class will be live on Zoom on August 22.

Jacksonville – Arlington Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10am via Facebook and posted on website

Lake Helen – First Congregational UCC
The church is currently without a pastor and no Sunday services are being offered.

• Church Council has appointed a Task Force to look at all issues to be dealt with regarding returning safely to in-person worship.
• The church is providing a weekly Scripture & Prayer on ZOOM Friday evenings as well as a monthly book discussion.
• A weekly newsletter, The Bulletin Board, is distributed to members.
• Members are invited to stop by Asa Gray Park on Tuesday evening at 7pm and/or the Parish House porch on Friday afternoon at 4pm to visit with friends (wearing a mask and practicing physical distancing).

Melbourne – CrossRoads UCC
Sunday worship at 10am live on Facebook

• The congregation gathered several times in June for in-person worship in the Sanctuary as well as broadcasting live on Facebook but decided beginning July 5 to cease in-person worship.
• The church distributes a weekly Bible study.

Miami – Christ Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 10:30am on Facebook

• Sunday services are pre-recorded and available on Facebook Sunday morning along with text and audios of the reading and sermons via e-blast attachments.
• Thursday evening Bible study began in person on Thursday, June 18.
• The church offers a diverse and wide variety of virtual gatherings via Zoom including: adult coloring, letter writing, book discussion, theme park visits, reading one book of the Bible weekly, decorating a quilt block and playing Trivia.

Naples – Mayflower Congregational UCC
In-person worship resumed on July 5 requiring an extensive list of procedures and safeguards to be followed.

• Plans are to livestream the service on Facebook Live.

Naples – Naples UCC
Sunday service is livestreamed at 10am

• The church has decided to postpone in-person Sunday worship until September 27.
• A patriotic hymn sing was led by the Chamber Choir on Sunday afternoon, July 5, which was livestreamed and on Facebook Live.
• The Bargain Box thrift store re-opened on June but was closed in mid-July due to rising concerns about coronavirus.

New Smyrna Beach – UCC/New Smyrna Beach
Sunday services are at 10am on Zoom

• In-person Sunday worship in the Sanctuary began on June 14 (with restrictions) but were canceled beginning July 5 for the remainder of the month until August 2 with decisions to be made on a weekly basis when to return to the Sanctuary; services are available for viewing on podcasts, posted on the previous Saturday.

Pinellas Park – Good Samaritan Church
Sunday worship at 10am is on Facebook Live or viewed on YouTube

• The Leadership Team met on July 14 and a decision was made to keep the church closed indefinitely; the decision will be reviewed every month to assess current trends.

Orange City – First Congregational Church
In-person Sunday worship at 10:30am began July 5

• For the in-person worship, CDC guidelines are employed; there is no singing, no passing of the collection plate, no shaking hands and no coffee hour (the Sanctuary is sanitized following the service).

Orlando – First UCC
In-person worship began Sunday, June 14, in Crimson Hall (not the Sanctuary)

• Sunday services are pre-recorded and available on Facebook.

• Thursday evening Bible study began in person on Thursday, June 18.

• The church offers a diverse and wide variety of virtual gatherings via Zoom including: adult coloring, letter writing, book discussion, theme park visits, reading one book of the Bible weekly, decorating a quilt block and playing Trivia.

Pensacola Beach – Pensacola Beach Community UCC
Sunday worship podcast posted on Saturday

• In-person Sunday worship in the Sanctuary began on June 14 (with restrictions) but were canceled beginning July 5 for the remainder of the month until August 2 with decisions to be made on a weekly basis when to return to the Sanctuary; services are available for viewing on podcasts, posted on the previous Saturday.

Port Orange – Port Orange UCC
Recordings of the Sunday service are available via calling into a phone site or on the church website.

Punta Gorda – Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10am is on Facebook Live or viewed on YouTube

• The church offers a diverse and wide variety of virtual gatherings via Zoom including: adult coloring, letter writing, book discussion, theme park visits, reading one book of the Bible weekly, decorating a quilt block and playing Trivia.

Port Orange – Port Orange UCC
Recordings of the Sunday service are available via calling into a phone site or on the church website.

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Sunday worship at 10am is on Facebook Live or viewed on YouTube

• The church offers a diverse and wide variety of virtual gatherings via Zoom including: adult coloring, letter writing, book discussion, theme park visits, reading one book of the Bible weekly, decorating a quilt block and playing Trivia.
Rockledge – Hope UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on Zoom

- The church schedules a Coffee Hour on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and Theology on Tap on Wednesday evenings, both via Zoom
- Red was the color of the day celebrating Pentecost Sunday on Zoom

Sanibel – Sanibel Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 10am

- The church began Zoom coffee hours after worship beginning June 28
- The Sunday morning Seminar Series is offered via Zoom at 9am
- Pastor Rev. Dr. John Danner provides the daily “A Poem and a Prayer” on Facebook Live most mornings
- The church has instituted a pen pal program for members to be in contact with other members who are residing in assisted living and nursing care centers

Sarasota – First Congregational UCC
Sunday services continue to be livestreamed at 11am on Facebook (the bulletin is e-blasted in advance) with later posting on the church website

- For the month of August, the church will remain online on Facebook Live
- The Sanctuary needs to be configured a bit differently in order to livestream the Sunday worship; improvements also had to be made to improve lighting and audio

Sarasota – St. Andrew UCC
Sunday worship is live at 10:30am having switched on June from an online app to Facebook Live

- The church is considering re-opening the Sanctuary for Sunday worship, limiting attendance to 12 persons following safety protocols
- A Zoom Fellowship time began after worship on July 19

Sebring – Emmanuel UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on Facebook Live

- Bible study is on Tuesday afternoon in the Sanctuary

Spring Hill – Spring Hill UCC
A reflection/sermon is recorded for YouTube (in lieu of a service on Zoom, which was the platform before April 19) by 5pm every Saturday

- A request from the Regathering Committee was e-mailed to members on July 15 asking them what they miss about not being able to gather in-person

St. Augustine – United Church UCC-DoC
Virtual Sunday worship takes place via Zoom at 10am

- On June 6 church members had a drive-by celebration of Dick and Sandy Glessner’s 65th wedding anniversary

St. Augustine – United Church UCC-DoC
Virtual Sunday worship takes place via Zoom at 10am on Zoom

- The church is partnering with two area residential nursing facilities to connect church members with isolated seniors who would welcome pen pals
- Film fans were able to join a Zoom critique on June 26 of a romantic trilogy “Before Sunrise,” “Before Sunset” and “Before Midnight”
- On the second and third Thursdays of the month during the summer, interested church members can be part of “The Z Files: Profiles in Faith” to watch pre-recorded and one-on-one interviews of members

St. Petersburg – Lakewood UCC
Sunday worship is at 10:30am through Zoom

- The theme for the Corona Sabbath posts this summer is “Grounded” and is using the feeling of being grounded as a time to lean on our faith to help us feel grounded with each week’s presentation exploring a different dimension of our faith which helps us to feel grounded in these uncertain times
- The church used Father’s Day as an opportunity via Zoom to share stories of fathers, grandfathers and those who have been father-figures in our lives; Christmas Eve in July was celebrated on Friday, July 24, complete with carols and cookies

Tallahassee – United Church in Tallahassee
Sunday worship is live at 10:30am having switched on June from an online app to Facebook Live

- Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson sets aside an hour on Tuesday afternoons for Zoom appointments with the Pastor for a “spirit check”
- There was a virtual lasagna night church supper on Saturday, June 27

The Villages – UCC at The Villages
Weekly sermon posted on YouTube

- Members send to the church office photos of what they have been doing for inclusion in a PowerPoint presentation that is posted on the Sunday worship video to help keep everyone connected
- Three Bible studies meet on-line at GoToMeeting as well as Women’s Spirituality and WISE

Windermere – Windermere Union Church
Sunday virtual worship on YouTube is at 10am with La Igle¬sia del Pueblo services at 11:30am

- Lessons on how to make origami peace cranes was offered on a Zoom meeting
- Fit to Dance 2 offers a free group fitness workout designed for adult seniors
“Where is the Gold in This Experience?”

Years ago when my mother-in-law experienced worship at the Windermere Union Church for the first time, her observation was, “Wow, your congregation really does like each other!” In reality we do! I minister to an incredible congregation who is always serving and supporting each other. As I was video recording my sermon for our first virtual worship service on March 22, I was struck by a harsh reality. “Here is the church, here is the steeple, Oh, my God I am preaching to no people!” Preaching to an empty Sanctuary was a very strange experience. I also felt so deeply the absence of all those lovely people who attend worship each week. I miss them and we miss each other.

However, not holding person-to-person worship is the healthiest and most responsible thing for us to do. I recalled our official Board meeting March 2, when we discussed healthy strategies for serving Communion on the first Sunday in April. Well, as it happened, we did not hold person-to-person worship on the first Sunday in April and did not celebrate Easter together as well. Rather than panic we planned. We will celebrate worship via video. It is not ideal but, it is something. On Communion Sundays we are going to encourage families and individuals to have the Communion bread and wine at their tables. As I institute the elements on video, they can serve Communion to each other or individually. Below are some more of the Windermere Union Church’s plans for continuing to be a church community during self-quarantine.

• We are recording the weekly music, children’s message and sermons in English and Spanish on Thursdays.
• Our Tech Team will do post production of the video to create a virtual worship service. The virtual worship service will be posted on our YouTube account.
• On Sunday morning our Office Manager will send the YouTube Worship link to our congregation through an e-mail blast at our normal worship hour.
• We are asking our church members to send our Office Manager their Celebrations and Concerns. Our Office Manager will then send the prayer requests and celebrations to our parish through e-mail. This way we stay informed about each other.
• Our staff and Stephen Ministers will make consistent contact to our membership and friends through phone calls, texts, e-mails and cards.
• Our Official Board meetings will be held through Skype and e-mails.
• We are sending our congregation weekly updates about the church.
• Our Finance Team is mailing our congregation instructions on how to make their contributions online or simply by mailing them to our church office.

When it is healthy for us to gather together again, we are going to have a Return of the Prodigal Son celebration!

I read a book years ago that was very meaningful, The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho. My biggest take-away from the book was how to use spiritual alchemy to change harsh life experiences into gold. Since reading that book when I find myself in a hard situation, I ask myself, “Where is the gold in this experience?”

As I ask myself that question now, this is what I have discovered thus far. My gold is the fact I miss the people I teach and serve. They are a gathering of the most beautiful humans I have ever known. I celebrate my excellent leaders. They love our church and work well together making sure we have the healthiest church possible. I love my staff who are using their imagination and skills to continue to minister to our faith community. I celebrate our Stephen Ministers who went through 50 hours of training on how to minister to our church members. They are contacting our membership weekly while assessing their needs and reporting back to me and our leadership. I am experiencing the gift of extra time. I have time to read, reflect, write, journal, meditate, create art and rest.

There is one more nugget of gold that my soul is strengthened by: I know from past life experience, I have within me all the resources I need to deal with anything life gives me.

1 John 4:4 — Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

When I start to get stressed and anxious, I remember this powerful reality. We are not alone even if we are quarantined. We have our faith, our church and our love for each other to deal with this harsh reality we find ourselves in. I would love to read your stories of how your faith communities are dealing with the coronavirus along with spiritual gold you have discovered for yourselves.

Peace and health to you all.

Reflection from the Conference Moderator

BY REV. BARTON BUCHANAN
PASTOR, WINDERMERE UNION CHURCH

Being Church During a Pandemic

LIVE STREAM CHURCH SERVICES

13
In the Face of Changing Ways...

BY REV. DR. RAYMOND HARGROVE
EASTERN REGIONAL MINISTER
FLORIDA CONFERENCE

In the last edition of Celebrate Florida I shared some reflections on the creativity I’m witnessing among our congregations as they find new and creative ways of being and doing church during these challenging times in which we find ourselves. I am grateful that that creative energy continues among all of our congregations as churches continue to worship, hold committee meetings, create “virtual fellowship” opportunities and reach out beyond themselves. Over the past several months, I have had three new “virtual” experiences that stand out to me.

I participated in the service of installation for a pastor that was done virtually. There were — in addition to church members — clergy, family and friends who were able to be present virtually. Even the “guest preacher” delivered the sermon from several states away. None of this is really that unusual given the current climate. What struck me was when the pastor later shared with me how deeply moving it was that there were friends and family who were able to share in this virtual experience virtually who could not have been physically present.

The following Sunday I participated in a virtual service for a pastor who was retiring. Usually following such a service people would gather in the church’s Fellowship Hall for a time of sharing expressions of gratitude, gifts, food and farewells. Since that was not an option at this time, members organized a “drive by.” A large basket was placed on the front porch of the pastor’s home. People came by and left cards and other expressions of their love and gratitude for the pastor and family.

I am currently sharing the journey with five congregations that are at various stages of the search and call process which, unlike pre-pandemic, is exclusively virtual. There have been a few “miscues” along the way as one might expect with any new experience. But each of the committees has demonstrated exceptional adaptability and commitment to this significant transition in the life of their respective congregations. At this point, one of the five churches has called a pastor, one is in the process of negotiating the terms of call with a candidate and the other three continue to review candidates’ profiles. The new resources developed by Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization in our national offices have been extremely helpful.

As I conclude this brief reflection, the words from Julian Rush’s hymn came to mind: “In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways ... We your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and ever more.”

Panels on How Local Churches are Adapting, Innovating

Whether they are responding to COVID-19 or taking action against racism, this is a year of innovation for people across the United Church of Christ. Now the leaders of the UCC’s 36 Conferences are piloting a series of webinars to share what congregations are learning in this time of change.

Promoted via Conference websites and e-newsletters, the webinars are designed to help churches and members discover, together, “new ways of being God’s presence in the world,” said the Rev. Don Remick, a bridge Conference Minister in the Southern New England Conference. He belongs to a task group of the Council of Conference Ministers working on the webinars.

Diverse Viewpoints, Approaches

The hour-long opening webinar on “Phasing Forward” on July 1 featured lay leaders and pastors of some churches that have not yet returned to in-person worship, some that have, some that soon will and one that won’t till next year. Discussing their decision-making processes and such factors as singing, communion, Bible study and children’s programs were people from Lakewood (OH) Congregational UCC; Rev. George Miller, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring; Quentin (PA) United Congregational Church, UCC, Middletown, RI; and Evangelical Reformed UCC, Frederick, MD [It was recorded and can be viewed at this Zoom link or by clicking on the image.]

Grants for Churches Added to UCC COVID-19 Relief Response

The United Church of Christ national setting is offering financial assistance to local churches whose ministries have been challenged by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

As one, the national officers have collectively identified $2.6 million in COVID-19 relief, $1.5 million in loans that will be administered through the Cornerstone Fund and another $1.1 million in micro grants. The grant application process opened June 1. Grant money will be available through the process detailed here.

From e-Celebrate, June 10
Stewardship in the Age of Covid-19
BY REV. SHAWN GARVEY
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC/WINTER PARK

Scripture
“Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.” Deuteronomy 15:10

Reflect
Over the summer months, the Trustees and I have been discussing what Stewardship will look like this year. Like everything else, we’ll be doing it virtually. It will be, also like everything else, a way of doing things that we’ve never done before in this age of COVID.

In conversation about this process with someone outside the life of our church, they commented that giving would probably be down and the process difficult because we haven’t been in our building. That made me pause.

When we offer our gifts to the church, what are we sustaining and supporting? I think this is a remarkable time to reconsider exactly what our gifts of Stewardship are all about.

Our gifts, in essence, support the work of the Spirit as it manifests itself within our family of faith. That work has never stopped these past months and has, in fact, grown. The majority of our programming, meetings, and worship have continued as usual. We’ve then added new daily programming offerings that we never did when we were in the building. We still did Art Camp, and we had a very successful virtual VBS. Our church is benefiting many who have never been to our building as more and more people share in the worship stream and daily meditations. Tomorrow demanded new things of us as a church, and we responded.

I believe we’re poised to have a very positive Stewardship Season, for God has indeed blessed us in our work and all we’ve undertaken — buildings or not.

Prayer
God of Abundance, thank you for the gift of our churches in these days and the ministries they continue to provide under very challenging circumstances. Amen.

Peace, Shawn
FROM “DAILY MEDITATION,” SATURDAY, JULY 11, FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC/WINTER PARK

Panels … from page 14

Panelists shared their stories about:

- What information or guidance did they consider in making their decision?
- Who did they include in the decision making process?
- What perspectives did they seek from the congregation?
- What engagement did they have with local health agents or board of health?
- How did they communicate their decision to the congregation?

Future webinars, like the first, will feature three to five panelists from around the UCC. The schedule was as follows, with these members of the Council of Conference Ministers as hosts:


People interested in tuning in can visit each host’s Conference website or Facebook page. All Conferences are also being encouraged to promote the entire series via their social media and e-newsletters. Each webinar will be recorded and eventually made available online, and more may be added as the Conference ministers assess the series.

Adapted from an article in UCC News, July 8, by Hans Holznagel
Being Church

Waves of Generosity
by Rev. Donna Cooney
United Church UCC-DOC/St. Augustine

This week, in the midst of social distancing, I was able to spend a few glorious moments with my friend, Susannah. I was checking the mail at The Turning Table, just as Susannah was leaving the middle school, which is directly across the street. Susannah honked and waved as she pulled over and rolled down her window so we could chat. With a big smile, she told me she was on her way to deliver school supplies to a couple of students who were struggling with the on-line learning process. The students had fallen behind in their schoolwork, and as the school guidance counselor, it was Susannah’s job not only to stay in touch with them, but to help them as well. The students told her that the online learning process would be easier for them, if they had some paper, pens and pencils. Susannah was off to deliver.

So, you might be wondering, what does this have to do with us? Remember, late last summer, when we began collecting school supplies? Perhaps you even donated some of those supplies? Our original idea was to fill Kaden and Eli’s backpacks, and perhaps a couple of their classmates as well. That is exactly what happened, but we didn’t stop there.

Kaden and Eli went to school well equipped, with plenty to share, and wave after wave of supplies kept pouring in. The United Church wasn’t done giving yet. Before long we had another large box filled to the top with school supplies. It was this second wave of supplies which was bundled up and delivered to the school where Susannah works.

Now, here is the God-Thing: Susannah didn’t know anything about our donation. I had simply taken the supplies to the front desk and left them with the receptionist. When the pandemic hit, and the students began expressing their need for pens and paper, Susannah began rummaging around the school’s front office. That is when she found the box filled with pens, pencils, notebooks, crayons, markers, hand sanitizers and a card from the United Church. As if that wasn’t enough, imagine her delight, and mine as well, as she gets in her car filled with supplies that the students were asking for, and sees me checking the mail at The Turning Table! Only God can orchestrate a moment like that!

Friends, thank you for your abundant giving. Thank you for creating waves of generosity. Thank you for being a community of peace and justice. Thank you for being a movement for whole-ness in a fragmented world. Thank you for being The United Church, a church which makes a difference in the world.

From Connections, the newsletter of the United Church UCC-DOC/St. Augustine

“Won’t You be My Neighbor?”

During this time of physical distancing, members at the United Church in Gainesville decided it could be a good time to revive UCG Networks — an organizational strategy that was instituted in 1977 (when UCG had 131 members). The Networks were formed geographically and functioned quite well for several decades, providing connection and support to folks – ala Mr. Rogers and “Won’t you be my neighbor?”

When UCG grew to over 500 members, participation in Networks began to decline – and in the larger congregation, Kairos and Adult Small Groups took on some of the original functions of Networks. By 1999, Networks were let go. So an effort got underway to see if there is an interest in identifying neighborhoods where church members can reach out to one another on an as-needed basis — for social contact, support, share a good story, whatever.

As a result, early efforts identified some 20 neighborhoods where UCG members would like to network with each other. Developing neighborhood networks is being seen as an open opportunity to be creative.

During this time apart, it might be helpful to give a call, arrange a Zoom meeting, drive/walk by to say hello, meet in a local park for a walk/social distanced conversation, offer to pick up something at the grocery store, watch church online and discuss afterwards.

Opportunities

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 4</td>
<td>Florida Conference Clergy Lectionary Hour begins with Neal Watkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 4</td>
<td>Our Faith, Our Vote webinar</td>
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<td>Wednesday, August 5</td>
<td>UCC webinar: The Green New Deal and Reparations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 5</td>
<td>ScreenSide Chats begin with Neal Watkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 12</td>
<td>UCC Zoom seminar on “Digital Social Justice and Missions”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, October 10</td>
<td>Florida Conference annual business meeting (virtual)</td>
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Links to anti-racism resources p 3
Sacred Conversations to End Racism (SC2ER) website p 24
UCC loans and grants to assist local churches respond to COVID-10 p 14
I’ve been thinking about names since the death of George Floyd. His name, and the names of other victims of violence such as Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile and Breonna Taylor. #SayTheirNames is a movement encouraging people and publications to focus on the humanity of black Americans being injured or killed in encounters with police or targeted with violence because of the color of their skin.

I have the privilege of directing a program called The Jeremiah Project. The Jeremiah Project is an after school and summer ceramic arts program for middle school students in under-served communities. This arts ministry operates out of the second story of the First Congregational Church/Winter Park. Seventeen years ago when we launched our project, we hoped art could serve as a bridge crossing the economic and racial divide of Park Avenue to the west side of Winter Park. We don’t preach our theology to the students we serve; choosing instead to live our theology of empathy, compassion and social justice.

The program name was inspired by a verse from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah…

_I went down to the potter’s house and there he was working at his wheel….The vessel he was making was spoiled in the potter’s hand and he reworked it into another vessel that seemed good to him…then the Lord said, “just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand.”_

“When you come to The Jeremiah Project, you express themselves is through art. I love that each kid is inspired to be an individual. When you come to The Jeremiah Project, you expect art but what you get is craftsmanship as kids behold their sculptures or cereal bowls fresh from the kiln.

The Jeremiah Project is fortunate to partner with the Central Florida Boys & Girls Clubs. Tasha Robinson Banks, the director of the Levy-Hughes branch in downtown Orlando, honored our program by saying:

“What I love about The Jeremiah Project is the connection the staff have with our kids. Some of our kids face challenges. The only way they have been able to express themselves is through art. I love that each kid is inspired to be an individual. When you come to The Jeremiah Project, you expect art but what you get is compassion.”

Austin Long, director of the East Altamonte Springs branch said:

“I witnessed firsthand how The Jeremiah Project eliminates the perception of barriers that stop many talented urban youth from realizing their full potential as productive, well rounded, successful, caring citizens.”

And Marquette Carmichael, programming director at the downtown Orlando Club, shared this:

“I can’t begin to explain how wonderful this program is and how it has changed the lives of many of our children. These kids would not have these opportunities otherwise.”

Teaching pottery techniques has never been the ultimate goal of The Jeremiah Project, and we are humbled and honored our partners recognize that fact. I confess to feeling a sense of dread whenever I read the names of victims of violence in my community, fearing I might recognize one of those precious names. Lately, I’ve replaced that fear with the hope I might recognize the name or face of one or more of those young men and women marching on the front line for peace and justice.

Liz Kitchens is a Commissioned Minister of the Arts in the United Church of Christ and the director of the Jeremiah Project, an arts ministry of the First Congregational Church of Winter Park.
The Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) is one giant step further along in the process. Since the Florida Conference annual meeting last October when the challenge went out to the churches of the Conference to match $100,000 given by the Conference as approved by the Board of Directors, people and churches stepped up and donated a little over $100,000 to complete the match. The total amount of $200,000 allowed the IFHA to go ahead with the purchase of the property.

All was going along well until the novel coronavirus took hold of our lives. That postponed the process for awhile but now the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance, Inc. is happy to announce a resounding “YES” vote from the Collier County Planning and Zoning Commission at its July meeting to build 128 decent, safe and hurricane-resistant rental units for low-income farmworker families in Immokalee. The final step in the purchase and sale process will be approval by the Collier County Commissioners at their meeting on September 8. Once approved, the IFHA board expects to close on the property within ten days and begin the infrastructure work.

Short term, IFHA is dedicated to solving the problems of families living in unsafe and unhealthy conditions such as mold, rats, snakes, poor or no electrical connections, poor or no bathing and toilet facilities, families forced to live with strangers in the house, broken appliances and other fixtures, lack of play and study areas and rents consuming 50-60% of the family’s income per month. Especially in these times of the coronavirus, the population has experienced mass contagion due to overcrowded living conditions.

Long term, the IFHA hopes for a community with pre- and after-school care, playgrounds, computer access, homework assistance, adult education, religious services and affordable rents. Children will do better in school. Families will be safer and healthier.

Housing has been the missing link for many years in assisting farmworker families to escape poverty and exploitation. Lower rents will free up needed money to buy food, clothing, medicines and other necessities. The ripple effect will be economic growth and stability for Immokalee. The IFHA goal is to build affordable, low-maintenance, well-managed housing with this neighborhood-model and have the dilapidated trailers some now call home condemned by the county.

IFHA, Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization, and this project will be entirely funded by foundation grants, individual and organization donations. There will be no mortgage and IFHA will be exempt from paying real estate tax. Take a look at their website www.IFHA.info. If you wish to get involved in the IFHA, please be in contact with me at revalcoe@gmail.com or through IFHA’s website.

When Smaller is Even Better

More than four years ago, Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach requested the church’s Piecemakers quilting group to create a patriotic quilt to which the congregation could affix their prayers for the presidential election and the first 100 days in office for the newly-elected President.

It was done and a huge quilt hung for several months in the Sanctuary where members and guests wrote their prayers and attached them to the quilt. When it was taken down, the church could not find an organization that wanted some-
The UCC Ministry for Racial Justice presented “An Evening of Music: Restoring Beauty” on Thursday evening, June 25. The 90-minute live performance was by the Cleveland Orchestra and gifted musicians and vocalists.

“Redeemer,” by Heather Sorenson and the Naples UCC Virtual Choir featured the church’s chamber choir, members of the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra and singers from across the country. It appeared on YouTube on May 31. On Sunday, July 5, the church had a hymn sing at 4pm that was livestreamed and on Facebook Live with the chamber choir leading in familiar hymns and patriotic music (lyrics provided!). The church has released its first Virtual Choir Music Video, viewable on YouTube www.youtube.com/NaplesUCC.

For the July 19 service on Facebook Live at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton, Josiah led a hymn sing with Nick on the organ/piano. Church members were alerted a couple weeks prior to send in their favorite hymns and as many as possible were included.

Addie, Kansas, Quentin and Andy at the United Church in Tallahassee sang a wonderful version of “Be Thou My Vision” on Pentecost Sunday.

Every Thursday evening from July 9 through August 13 at 7:30pm Coral Gables Congregational UCC offered its Community Arts Program (CAP) 2020 VIRTUAL Summer Concert Series (35th consecutive year; first virtual). It began opening night with jazz pianist Shelly Berg in a program titled “My Favorite Things!” and concludes with “A Jazz Shout-Out Finale” for a Dave Brubeck 100th closing night. These one-hour jazz and classical concerts are free with donations accepted to help support the South Florida musicians and technicians making it possible.

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg celebrated Christmas in July via Zoom on the evening of July 24 having provided a playlist of pipe organ pieces of familiar Christmas carols posted on the church website beginning July 20. The music was arranged by the church’s music director, Hilton Kean Jones.

The Sunday Seminar after worship on July 5 at the United Church of Gainesville was an Independence Day concert on Zoom that showcased a variety of recorded pieces performed by numerous UCG musicians.

Film Critics Friday at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach viewed a romantic trilogy, “Before Sunrise,” “Before Sunset” and “Before Midnight” on June 26 and “The Banker” on July 17.

Pastor Rev. Guillermo Marquez-Sterling assigned viewers to a small group of new and familiar friends to converse, laugh and critique the movies in Zoom critics’ parties.
Recycling is Good, Reusing is Better, Reducing is Best

What are some ways to reduce energy use?

- Turn off lights or install motion-detector switches
- Install ceiling fans or install a white or green roof
- Clean coils on refrigerator every six months and take up unused space with jugs of water
- Wash clothes in cold water, dry on line or rack
- Upgrade appliances, especially refrigerator and clothes dryer
- Insulate water heater or upgrade to tankless or solar water heater
- Plug air leaks or get an energy audit
- Use programmable thermostat
- Air dry dishes or run dishwasher and clothes washer at night
- Unplug electronics that suck energy even when off or plug them into a power strip
- What are some ways to reduce water?
  - Don’t run water while brushing your teeth or soaping up in shower
  - Capture shower water while waiting for it to warm up and use it for watering plants or rinsing something
  - Plant native plants and don’t overwater them
- Water outdoor plants in early morning when cooler temperatures mean less evaporation
- Fix leaking faucets or toilets and replace worn hoses
- Instead of washing your car at home, go to car wash where the water gets recycled
- Don’t run the dishwasher or clothes washer until it is full

What are ways to save on gasoline?

- Walk or bike
- Carpool or take public transportation
- Don’t idle your car
- Shop for cars with good fuel economy or electric cars
- For airplane flights, buy carbon offsets [https://carbonfund.org/](https://carbonfund.org/)
- Buy local

What are ways to save paper and use less plastic?

- Buy things without packaging
- Bring own water bottles, shopping bags, leftover containers
- Buy e-books or get books from library
- Get magazine and newspaper subscriptions digitally
- Pay bills online
- Use newspapers or brown bags and bits of yarn for wrapping gifts
- Use blank backs of paper for scratch paper
- Install a bidet in your toilet
- Instead of plastic cling wrap or plastic bags or paper towels, use cloth tea towels to wrap food in or a wrap that is washable, reusable and compostable from Bee’s Wrap
- Don’t use straws or bring your own reusable metal, glass or bamboo ones
- Use plates and utensils and toothbrushes from bamboo

(10 Easiest Ways to Cut Your Energy Use in Half by Green America)

From the June issue of the Sanibel Light, the newsletter of Sanibel Congregational UCC

Please send your 3 Great Loves story to Lynn and Sheila.
UCC Webinar: The Green New Deal and Reparations

When it comes to justice-oriented policy proposals that seek to fundamentally transform our society, the Green New Deal and reparations currently rise to the top. Yet, often they are discussed separately, despite clear and compelling connections.

The Green New Deal Resolution proposed in Congress sought “to promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historic oppression.” At the same time, the demand for reparations compels our society to address the historic injustices of systemic racism, including environmental racism.

To explore such connections and how faith communities can work to advance just policies, this webinar at 1pm Eastern Time on August 5 will feature three panelists: Congresswoman Barbara Lee, 350.org’s North America Director Tamara Toles O’Laughlin, and the UCC’s Economic Justice Minister Sekinah Hamlin. Register now!

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg made its members aware of the free online viewing of the film The Human Element, previously only available on Earth Day, followed by a webinar with renowned filmmaker James Balog. The film was viewable between June 8 and June 17; an Interfaith Power and Light 45-minute webinar with Balog was viewable on June 17.

The Green Team at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota has offered self-guided exploration of local preserves and parks, which could be done at one’s convenience. One took place in early June with a Zoom meeting on June 12 to discuss it, sharing insights and asking questions and another was scheduled in July.

“Experiencing God in Nature” was a Zoom seminar on Sunday, July 26, at the United Church of Gainesville. When asked when one feels the presence of God, many people report it is most often when they are in nature. A major way God’s loving presence nourishes our souls is through the beauty and power of nature. This seminar considered Biblical passages about God communicating through nature and focused on the importance of nature in Celtic spirituality and how we might view God in nature.

UCC Women Across the State

Women at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park enjoyed a Netflix movie party in July. They watched the same movie at the same time and then gathered on Zoom afterward to discuss and socialize. On Saturday, August 1 they will hear about pet fostering from guest speaker Anita Sheinblum about the Pet Alliance Service Project. There will be an optional opportunity to donate needed items to the wish list for this organization.

CCC Women at Christ Congregational UCC met on June 20 via Zoom to discuss Where the Crawdads Sing. In mid-August as part of the church’s social justice initiative on tackling racism they will share thoughts on Born a Crime by Trevor Noah, host of “The Daily Show.”

SOS — Sisters on Sojourn — at Coral Gables Congregational UCC (R) have been meeting on Zoom once a month on Saturday mornings for a time of relaxed, easy-going conversation, support and lots of laughter and fun.

Dining for Women, part of the Faith UCC/Dunedin’s Anam Cara Women’s Circle has begun meeting again on Zoom at lunchtime the first Saturday of the month. The group’s mission, through donations, is to support women and children in developing countries through grants to help women help themselves. On August 18 they are planning to Zoom with “Party with a Purpose” to celebrate the ratification of the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote. The group is also planning to have a regular column in the church’s “Keeping Us Connected” newsletter. The summer theme is “Legacy,” and they are inviting members to share “herstories” of who inspired them, made them who they are and what legacy they would like to share.
In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality. We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.

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

**Faith UCC/Dunedin** has embarked upon a six-week journey into the UCC’s program, *White Privilege: Let’s Talk*. It’s been stressed that this is not a book group but rather is an intense and challenging journey of dialogue, reflection, journaling and introspection.

The Thursday Spiritual Study Group will resume on Thursday, August 6, by reading and discussing the book *White Fragility: Why it’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo.

As Michael Eric Dyson says on the back cover, this is “a vital, necessary and beautiful book, a bracing call for white folk everywhere to see their whiteness for what it is and to seize the opportunity to make things better now.”

**UCC Juneteenth 2020 ... And Still We Rise**

Juneteenth marks the official end of slavery in the U.S. June 19, 1865, and the recognition of African-American history and heritage. In recognition of this date in history, the United Church of Christ provided an opportunity for moments of remembrance, education, celebration and calls to action. In this moment we are witnessing public lynchings and state sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Together we must stop the murders of African descendant people! Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are the latest victims of state sanctioned militarism, and white racists invoking the “Stand Your Ground” law in order to justify lethal gun violence against African Americans.

“We Are Not OK”

These are more than words. We are not OK is a deeply felt response to the ongoing racism and injustices impacting communities of African descent. There is an urgency to dismantle systems and institutions perpetuating and supporting racism and racism.

The United Church of Christ presented a live webinar, “Juneteenth 2020: And Still We Rise,” on Friday, June 19, to kick off a four-year campaign within the United Church of Christ Racial Justice Ministries. For more information contact, Rev. Dr. Velda Love at Lovev@ucc.org.

**The Leadership Team at Congregational UCC/ Punta Gorda** sent a letter to members on June 23:

Your Leadership Team would like to share with you our stance on addressing racism in this moment of our nation’s history. We believe, together with the leadership of the national United Church of Christ, that this is the moment to stand up, speak up and show up for justice.

Genesis 1:26 teaches, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.’” We are all children of God’s beautifully diverse family, and all deserve equal human rights and justice. Families help each other. We need to be partners with our brothers and sisters of color against the injustices they continue to endure. Therefore, your Leadership Team has voted to condemn systemic racism in our culture and to promote an anti-racism platform for use in our congregation and community. Anti-racism includes beliefs, actions, movements and policies adopted or developed to oppose racism. It means not merely being non-racist but standing in opposition to and working to change structures that promote racism.

**Stand up!** We need to stand up and be noticeable in our attempt to change systemic racism in our culture. **Speak up!** We need to speak up against racism in all its forms: as violence against people of color and as perpetuated through white privilege. **Show up!** As allies, we need to show up at non-violent demonstrations, vigils, policy meetings, and in the voting booth.

At the end of every service, we all sing the beloved hymn, “Let There Be Peace on Earth.” Consider the words of the second verse: “To love with kindness and work for justice that all may be set free. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Now is the time. **Stand up! Speak up! Show up!**
The Cross and the Lynching Tree: A Requiem for Ahmaud Arbery

On Sunday, May 31, the UCC provided a live viewing of Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.’s cinematic sermon preached at Trinity UCC/Chicago Sunday, May 17, entitled, The Cross and the Lynching Tree: A Requiem for Ahmaud Arbery.

On February 23, Ahmaud Arbery, 25, left home and went for a jog. During his run, two white men follow Ahmaud, confront him with a loaded shot gun, assume he’s a suspected criminal, and within minutes of their encounter, according to the recorded video three shots are fired. Amhaud falls to the ground and dies.

Immediately following the live video a panel discussion with four respected thought leaders, racial justice advocates and UCC pastors discussed the impact of historical and present day acts of racism and violence towards African Americans and how the Christian Church can be actively involved in dismantling racism.

As Dr. Moss has said, “Racism is a virus. It infects the spirit.”

During its once-a-week “Sacred Conversations on Race and Privilege” discussion at Naples UCC that included reading How to be an Anti-Racist by Ibram Kendi, time was taken for a special tribute to the life and legacy of civil rights legend John Lewis by watching his iconic March on Washington speech.

Participants also heard from three local community leaders about what is currently happening in SWFL related to race and privilege and what antiracists can do to work for change.

Members of the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine have been encouraged to contact local authorities to commit police departments and law enforcement agencies to use body cameras. In its Independence weekend newsletter, links were provided to commentaries on the 4th of July and Black Americans.

The pastor at Mt. Zion AME Church in Hastings sent a heartfelt thank you to the church for its Sunday morning Peaceful Protests on the highway in front of the church.

Protesting During a Pandemic

The UCC, along with Interfaith Power & Light and The People’s Justice Council, sponsored a free webinar entitled “Protest During a Pandemic: Lessons from the Struggle for Justice” on June 24.
My journey into “Sacred Conversations to End Racism” (SC2ER) began January 2019 under the tutelage of Rev. Dr. Velda Love, UCC Minister for Racial Justice. I quickly learned SC2ER was not only untraditional and cutting edge but life-challenging, life-changing and seriously engaging.

One of my first learnings was the variety of definitions for the words racist and racism. As we explored these definitions, it became evident that we were not talking about people, we were not talking about individuals, we were not talking about who was right and who was wrong, who was good and who was bad. Instead we were focused on institutions and systems, power structures, organizations, socialization and cultures.

The next set of learnings came from a deep dive into history, with a resource which went all the way back to the beginning, “Africa’s Greatest Civilizations.” This six-part PBS documentary featuring Henry Louis Gates, Jr. offered the first of many paradigms shifts for me, as it explored the birth of the first human beings through recent archeological discoveries. https://www.pbs.org/show/africas-greatest-civilizations/

The more I engage in SC2ER with others — and I do want to stress “with others” — the more I recognize their power and importance for this particular moment of history. Learning with and from others adds to the richness of the conversations and creates space for new ways to engage the ongoing movement toward social justice. A great place to begin is to find a partner and explore the SC2ER website https://www.ucc.org/sacred_conversations_to_end_racism. To fully engage the SC2ER process, center your conversations around the following questions: What did you learn? And how do you feel about what you learned?

Echoing the words of our Conference Minister, Rev. John Vertigan, “Now is the time for us to act.” For this reason, opportunities and invitations are being extended to you with the hope that you will become part of the conversation and part of the actions which create a just world for all. For the next few months, a series of reflections which include resources will be part of e-Celebrate. In the near future interactive learning experiences will be available.

In addition, a small working group is forming to explore the possibility of an action-based resolution focused on restorative justice to be presented to the Florida Conference. If you would like to be part of this working group, or if you have questions or want more information, you may contact either me at DCooney236@gmail.com, or John Vertigan at jvertigan@uccfla.org.

From e-Celebrate, July 22
Repeating the word “now,” scores of low-income people took to computer and TV screens June 20-21 instead of marching in Washington, D.C. They called on America to take up the economic vision of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and “invest in the welfare of all.”

The United Church of Christ was among dozens of religious bodies and other organizations sponsoring the Poor People’s Campaign’s “digital justice gathering.” The webcast replaced the campaign’s “mass moral assembly and march on Washington,” long scheduled for June 20 before the COVID-19 pandemic forced it online. [The entire article can be found here: Click here]
The Pinellas Community Foundation has awarded a Senior Citizens Services grant to Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park that will enable the church to provide additional food assistance to the 55+ visitors to its food pantry.

Instead of its usual “Peanut Butter Sunday” appeals for the South Fort Myers Food Pantry, it is now “Pastas and Sauces” at Fort Myers Congregational UCC. The Pantry is now serving a record number of families.

The United Church of Gainesville, in support of Family Promise of Gainesville, recently received almost $3,400 and more than $200 in Publix and gas gift cards as part of its commitment to provide meals and groceries for four families experiencing homelessness in early June. Instead of being assisted onsite at the church during COVID-19, the families were residing in extended hotels and rental properties. In another outreach for children during four weeks of virtual summer school at a local school, church members packed bags for 55 families that were picked up by the parents.

A virtual lasagna night virtual supper was held on Saturday, June 27, at First United Church of Tampa from 6-7:30pm. Diners were invited to enjoy their favorite lasagna recipe, grab a glass of wine or iced tea and pull up to their computer or iPad to Zoom.

The United Church in Tallahassee is encouraging its members to contribute to its Community Action Committee, which donates $300 a month to the Kearney Center and Grace Mission for preparation of meals for those in need.

On Friday, June 5, Naples UCC held its first Cans for Communion Drive-Up/Drop-Off Food Drive. The drive continues on the Friday before the first Sunday of each month, from 9am-Noon. The church also raised $22,510 which has been donated to the food pantry at Grace Place, an agency that puts faith into action by providing pathways out of poverty through educating children and families.

At the beginning of its awareness of the pandemic, Coral Gables Congregational UCC established a “Compassion Fund” to help church family and friends in need through these challenging days. Elaine Cottle, the volunteer church social worker, reported that during this time the church has: provided over 108 families with food from the food pantry; given 15 food vouchers for fresh food; helped 19 families with rent; nine families with utility payments; and provided assistance to 17 other families with special needs such as medicine, baby formula, diapers, inhalers, etc.

Church members are invited to contribute to this fund knowing that such gifts will assist those struggling to make ends meet.

Communion Sundays at Port Orange UCC are designated as “Fill the Food Basket” Sunday. In May more than 25 bags of food were collected for Halifax Urban Ministries.

The Missions Board at First Congregational UCC/Ocala uses donations through its Bread Basket program to support a number of community organizations and causes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the church is not meeting in person, and donations have “dried up.” Right now, the only such organization the church is supporting is Interfaith Emergency Services (IES), which provides extensive emergency services to people in Marion County including a shelter, which has 12 rooms with 36 beds to temporarily house homeless families and single parents with children or pregnant women. Together with many other faith organizations in the area, First Congregational has promised to provide one dinner each month to the residents of the shelter. For the last 10 years, Diane Donohue has helped coordinate monthly dinners, recruiting volunteers to help prepare a meal and serve it in the dining room, after which church volunteers would eat together with the residents. But with the pandemic, that’s not possible so the church has been dropping prepared meals off for the staff to serve and is inviting church members to help cook the monthly dinners or donate to the Bread Basket program.

For the last 10 years, Diane Donohue has helped coordinate monthly dinners, recruiting volunteers to help prepare a meal and serve it in the dining room, after which church volunteers would eat together with the residents. But with the pandemic, that’s not possible so the church has been dropping prepared meals off for the staff to serve and is inviting church members to help cook the monthly dinners or donate to the Bread Basket program.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton has been receiving food donations for Boca Helping Hands in the food cart located outside the church entrance. Prior to COVID-19, collecting about 20lbs of food was pretty standard. A recent two-week appeal brought in 481lbs!

The Missions Board at First Congregational UCC/Ocala uses donations through its Bread Basket program to support a number of community organizations and causes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the church is not meeting in person, and donations have “dried up.” Right now, the only such organization the church is supporting is Interfaith Emergency Services (IES), which provides extensive emergency services to people in Marion County including a shelter, which has 12 rooms with 36 beds to temporarily house homeless families and single parents with children or pregnant women. Together with many other faith organizations in the area, First Congregational has promised to provide one dinner each month to the residents of the shelter. For the last 10 years, Diane Donohue has helped coordinate monthly dinners, recruiting volunteers to help prepare a meal and serve it in the dining room, after which church volunteers would eat together with the residents. But with the pandemic, that’s not possible so the church has been dropping prepared meals off for the staff to serve and is inviting church members to help cook the monthly dinners or donate to the Bread Basket program.

From 4-6pm on Sunday, June 7, UCC/New Smyrna Beach held a drive through BBQ Rib Dinner to raise funds for its ministries. Notice went out that bug spray do-
nation for the Colors of Hunger program would be welcomed.

First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen holds monthly drop-bys at its Parish House porch so members can drop off non-perishable food items for Outside the Gates Food Pantry, the local food bank.

The “Drive-up No-Contact Food Drive” on May 21 at Sanibel Congregational UCC (a joint effort with Bat Yam Temple) collected over 80 bags of food for F.I.S.H. and the Gladiolus Food Pantry to help feed local families while protecting the health of those donating the food. It was so successful they are collecting food on the first Thursday of the month starting June 4 from 11am-1pm. The process is simple. Fill your vehicle’s trunk or rear compartment with your bagged food donations. Drive to the church and pull up under the church portico. Pop open the trunk or rear hatch of your vehicle, while you remain seated inside. Masked and gloved volunteers will unload your donations, close your trunk or hatch, then wave a cheerful thank you as you drive away. All prepackaged food and paper products items are welcome.

The Imperial Sun Court of All Florida donated 100 brown bag lunches to Ruth’s Ministry at UCC/Fort Lauderdale. Each lunch consisted of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, chips, bottle of water and cookies. The ministry provides outreach to those in the community who are hungry and in need.

On June 28 Sanibel Congregational UCC had “A Virtual Visit with Missionaries Danielle Murray Knowles & Mark Knowles from Lesotho,” and on July 5 a Zoom opportunity was offered to meet Global Ministries Partner Kaitlin Thompson, who had been serving in the Dominican Republic before being evacuated due to the COVID-19.

The church continues to support Bashar Abdel Moktader Zokreet from The Dar El Awlad Boys Home in Lebanon through Kids Alive International.

Bashar is nine years old. Bashar enjoys eating chicken, likes to watch TV and paint, loves dogs and playing soccer.

UCC at The Villages has sent over $2,000 to support the Wildwood Food Pantry.

The Community Meals program at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota is continuing — take-out style — during these days of limited contact and social distancing. The leaders at St. Paul Lutheran Church have devised a system for continuing the meals, and as the situation with the pandemic changes the format will be evaluated and changed as appropriate. First Congregational’s turn to serve the meal each month is the fourth Tuesday evening. Sandy Smith prepares the food in her home kitchen and transports the food to St. Paul. First Congregational volunteers (usually five or six), donning masks and gloves, work in the St. Paul kitchen to prepare the takeaway boxes, accompanied by cheese and crackers in a sandwich bag and homemade cookies (made by several other church volunteers) that also can be served in sandwich bags. A blessing is taped to the top of each takeaway box. The boxes and beverages are placed on tables outside the Fellowship Hall, and guests receive the food. Those coming for the meals line up outside Fellowship Hall spacing themselves appropriately. They receive meals in take-out containers, plastic utensils and beverages. Many folks eat on the grounds at St. Paul, but others take the meals away.

The Mission and Community Outreach Team at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton has announced the arrival of a new sponsored child through Angels of Hope: Dina Maria Trinidad Chacon Morales.

Dina is seven years old and is from Guatemala. She enjoys drawing, sports, cooking and reading, and her favorite subjects in school are math, Spanish, music and English. Dina would like to become a teacher when she grows up!

The church continues to support Bashar Abdel Moktader Zokreet from The Dar El Awlad Boys Home in Lebanon through Kids Alive International.
**UCC “Our Faith, Our Vote” Goes Digital**

BY HANS HOLZNAGEL  
UCC NEWS, JUNE 29

The COVID-19 pandemic is preventing the usual in-person voter registration, mobilization and education work that many churches do in a general election year. So the United Church of Christ’s Our Faith, Our Vote program is offering new ways to help people do that work online.

Among them:

- **Summer webinars** featuring prominent voting advocates, including Stacey Abrams and U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren.
- A **Civic Action Center**, where people can click to check their registration status, get registered to vote, find their polling place or get help with early voting.
- A **2020 issue-education page** with videos and written “one pagers” on 10 key issues.

“Although we often quote the First Amendment to caution against government imposing any undue influence over individual freedom of religion, personal politics are one way we live out or faith in the world,” said the Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC Associate General Minister for Justice and Local Church Ministries. “Politics, derived from the Greek word politiká, is a multi-faceted word that encompasses how we will interact with one another in the world. Our actions are informed by our faith.

“In our voter education webinar series we seek to make this connection. Whether in the pulpit, in the public square, or in the polling booth, we are accountable to our faith through our actions regarding the public welfare.”

**Summer Webinars**

Check ucc.org homepage and through social media channels as the dates approach

**Already Took Place**

Tuesday, June 30: Interfaith civil rights activist Valarie Kaur on her book, “See No Stranger.” Host: Traci Blackmon

Sunday, July 5: Screening and panel discussion of the documentary, “Suppressed: The Fight to Vote.” Host: Sandy Sorensen

Thursday, July 9: Sen. Elizabeth Warren on faith and politics. Host: Traci Blackmon, with a debrief by Sandy Sorensen


**Upcoming**


**Our Faith, Our Vote: Issue Webinars and One-Pagers**

To prepare for the 2020 elections, the United Church of Christ D.C. Office, with the help of ecumenical friends and partners, has been busy working on issue specific resources for you to use and to share with your congregations and communities! We are in the midst of a critical election year, and it is important that we consider some of these major topics and how our faith informs our vote.

We hope these videos and resources help you learn about these topics vital to the upcoming elections, allow you to view the topic through the lens of your faith, and to guide you to action. (Check www.ucc.org homepage for those indicated “coming soon”)

**Topic 1: Climate/Environmental Justice**

- One-Pager about Climate/Environment
- UCC Environmental Ministries
- Creation Care Voter Pledge
- A Church’s Story of Dedicating Creation Care Voter Pledges

**Topic 2: Economic Justice**

- One-Pager about Economic Justice - Coming soon!
- Economic Justice UCC Website

**Topic 3: Reproductive Justice**

- One-Pager about Reproductive Justice
- Reproductive Justice UCC Website

**Topic 4: Health Care**

- One-Pager about Health Care
- Health Care UCC Website

**Topic 5: Racial Justice**

- One-Pager about Racial Justice
- Letter from UCC Officers: Lynching Justice in America
- Racial Justice UCC Website
Like everything else, disaster response ministry and work trips across all denominations has stopped due to the novel coronavirus. The UCC is publishing guidelines for those who still may be planning a work trip in the future when it is safe to do so. At this time, a work trip is not recommended at all. A couple of denominations were using local volunteers to go and finish some smaller projects that did not require many people on site and no overnight stays.

Special attention needs to be paid this hurricane season to evacuation procedures and your own planning. Unless there is a mandatory evacuation for your area, you may wish to shelter in place and plan accordingly. Your local emergency management department should be informing residents of changes in plans due to the coronavirus. If you are a person with special needs or know of someone who has special needs, register with your county emergency management department. By the time you are reading this, it will be close to peak hurricane season so do not be complacent in planning.

Go to the State of Florida’s “The Essential Guide to Hurricane Preparedness” for basic guidance, which includes info on hurricane kits, securing your home and power outages. Click here.

Naples UCC alerted its members that the American Red Cross is now offering free virtual hurricane preparedness programs that are presented by trained preparedness volunteers via Microsoft Teams. They were informed about a one-hour event, “Be Red Cross Ready,” on June 3.

The United Church of Gainesville provided members with links to assist them in preparation for hurricane season. The links were to The 2020 Florida Department of Elder Affairs Disaster Resource Guide (an excellent source of information for anyone, no matter what your age!), the local Alachua County Alert Notification System and the state's website for disaster preparedness with a very complete checklist of important items.
On May 31 (Pentecost Sunday) Naples UCC announced a $20,000 donation to Grace Place (an agency that puts faith into action, providing pathways out of poverty by educating children and families). This gift was the result of a $5,000 grant from the Board of Mission and Outreach along with a $15,000 gift from two families in the congregation. The church invited members to join in this effort in supporting Grace Place and their work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen continues to collect school supplies, especially hand sanitizer and tissues for Volusia Pines Elementary School.

The church sign at Mayflower UCC/Naples was vandalized on Monday evening, June 1. A criminal mischief (vandalism) report was filed with the Collier County Sheriff and a case number assigned. Church leaders were upset that this happened and do not know the reason why it happened. They hypothesized a number of possible reasons — it could be random or related to the civil unrest across the nation (the name “Mayflower” could trigger a person to think of paternalistic racism). It could be that the sign is lit and near the road so it would be seen. The bottom line is that it is only paint and was cleaned up. While one’s first reaction may be to be upset, it can also be seen as a commentary on the emotional state and anxiety of our community and country today.

The Bat Yam Temple of the Islands 2020 Speaker Series (in conjunction with Sanibel Congregational UCC on whose campus it worships) had a Zoom presentation on Wednesday, July 15, titled “On Life and Living, and Death and Dying.” It was led by Ken Ross, son of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, and moderated by Tanya Hochschild, a local author and poet and Bat Yam member.

COVID-19 Care Packages, a pop-up ministry led by Maureen Wygant at Emmanuel UCC/Sebring are delivered to members and friends of the church. They were created with love to comfort the church community during the pandemic.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has reached out to faith communities for help in providing facemasks and other COVID essentials as the pandemic spreads. To that end, the Social Justice Ministry Team at Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda voted to send CIW a check for $500.

On a late Sunday May afternoon, the care team at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg set out on another caravan to bring greetings, joy and love to LUCC members. This time the team, along with Ed Kasper, drove their cars to the homes of Olivia and Amayia where they greeted the families, from the sidewalk, with personalized cheers of celebration and thanksgiving. Amayia was celebrated for completing 8th grade and now preparing to attend Lakewood High School. Olivia was thanked for her tireless work, devotion and care as a nurse on the COVID-19 unit at Tampa General Hospital. The rain did not dampen the spirits or the personally designed posters presented to both Olivia and Amayia. It was a joyous experience for all, including a few neighbors standing by!

The United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine has reported over $4,000 donated to the Fern-Belt Relief Fund (for the area consisting of south Putnam and west Volusia counties). The fund is being facilitated at The Turning Table to provide financial relief to farmworkers who have been identified as “essential workers” yet did not qualify for pandemic stimulus checks. The funds have been divided among 12 families, with a total of 49 family members. Not only did these farmworkers not receive a stimulus check, but the majority of these families had at least one family member who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

In “Across Florida” our intent is to share with you what is happening at our 90+ churches throughout the state. It is obvious from these entries that there is an exciting vibrancy evident within our congregations. This energy is making a decisive difference in the lives of congregation members and the communities in which they are located while also touching the lives of strangers in far away places.

Through this sharing, you can learn about innovative ideas, creative outreach and stimulating ministry, some of which might be 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.
Many Florida congregations celebrated LGBTQ PRIDE during June and worship on June 28. Included were: UCC/Fort Lauderdale (the sermon’s title was “The Festal Shout”), Coral Gables Congregational UCC (with a video of church members demonstrating their pride), First United Church of Tampa (rededicating itself to equal rights for all), Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour (special music by the Gay Men’s Chorus of South Florida), Christ Congregational Church/Miami (reaffirming its ONA statement), Faith Family UCC/Brandon (celebrating ONA Sunday) and Hope UCC/Rockledge (celebrating its ten year anniversary of being ONA).

The Monthly Mission project for July at St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota was ALSO – Advocacy Leadership Support Outreach – an organization that empowers LGBTQ+ youth 13-21 in the Sarasota area. It provides scholarships, supports Gender Sexuality Alliance clubs at schools, community training, a prom and youth center. Church members were encouraged to send offerings to the church in support of ALSO.

Faith UCC/Dunedin

ONA Coalition Announces Webinar Series

By popular demand, the Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC will be repeating its ONA webinar series this summer.

Beginning with “ONA 101” with Coalition Executive Director Andy Lang on June 25, the webinars are the perfect stay-at-home activity for ONA and not-yet ONA churches alike! Learn how to lead your church through an ONA process in ways that build consensus and reduce the risk of conflict. And existing ONA churches can learn new ways to strengthen their ONA covenant.

During the pandemic, the Coalition is offering a special “season pass” that allows any number of members to participate from their homes. All webinars begin at 8pm EDT. Learn more here.

From e-Celebrate, June 24

BOOKS WE’RE READING AND DISCUSSING TOGETHER...

via Zoom, or other livestreaming

The Giver of Stars by Jojo Moyes, The Book of Longings by Sue Monk Kidd and Educated by Tara Westover (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption by Bryan Stevenson and God Can’t by Thomas Jay Oord (Spring Hill UCC)

On Vanishing: Mortality, Dementia and What It Means to Disappear by Lynn Castell Harper (Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park)

Writers and Lovers by Lily King (Naples UCC)

How to be An Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi, The Vanishing Half: A Novel by Brit Bennett and An Altar in the World by Barbara Brown Taylor (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles (First United Church of Tampa)

Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do? by Michael J. Sandel (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

Talking To Strangers by Malcolm Gladwell and The Fire Is Upon Us: James Baldwin and William F. Buckley and the Debate Over Race in America by Nicholas Buccola (UCC/New Smyrna Beach)

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water and Loving the Bible Again by Rachel Held Evans and Ayesha at Last by Uzma Jalaluddin (Hope UCC/Rockledge)

Born a Crime by Trevor Noah (Christ Congregational UCC/Miami)

Seabiscuit by Laura Hillenbrand being discussed by members of First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen
Across Florida

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

via Zoom, or other livestreaming

“Presentation by Our Missionaries in Lesotho,” “Counting to Ten: An Overview of the Ten Commandments” and “God in the White House” (Sanibel Congregational UCC)

“What is Required of Us Spiritually at a Time Like This,” “Reflect on Thread(s) You’ve Followed in Your Personal Life,” “The Best Laid Plans,” “Lynching of Six Black People at Newberry in 1916,” “Fighting Gentrification of Historically Black Neighborhoods,” “Contemplative Prayer” and School Board candidates forum (United Church of Gainesville)

“Migrant Workers,” “John Lewis: Good Trouble,” “Michael Moore: Podcast episode 98: Ladies and Gentlemen, This Is The Plague, featuring Laurie Garrett” and “The Search For Racial Equity: the 1619 Project” (UCC/New Smyrna Beach)

Oceanography class (Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park)

“The Challenge of Paul” (using John Dominic Crossan resources) (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

“Using Listening Skills” and “Inspiration” (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)

“Dr. Bart Ehrman on Issues of Translation and Contradiction within the Bible,” “Parker Palmer: Are We in Apocalyptic Times?” and “Dr. Daniel Wallace Discussing the Reliability of the New Testament Text” (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

The Book of Amos (First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen)

The Sanctuary at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach may be empty on Sunday mornings now, but when congregants return some might notice that the “snake” that once crossed the new flooring of the Chancel has been buried. There is a multitude of speaker wires which connect the console to the two banks of speakers located in the recesses high on both sides of the Chancel. The organ technician was able to disconnect the wires from the back of the organ, run them under the flooring and reconnect them through a newly-drilled hole, thus eliminating a trip hazard for the ministers and choir members. It took several techies to figure out how to make this happen – yes, it does take a village!

After a year of fits and starts, including the interference caused by the pandemic, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg and reps from the Neighborly Care Network recently signed a lease to accommodate an adult day care. The next steps include some adaptations to the Fellowship Hall building including the construction of three accessible restrooms. Once the building is ready, the program will begin offering day care to seniors in the community. In June the church’s labyrinth was restored and refurbished with some trimming, raking and new hay. This spiritual path is open for use any time, and there is a guided walk on Wednesday mornings at 9am involving scripture, reflection and sharing for those who would like to (physical distancing is maintained and all are welcome).

Christ Congregational UCC/Miami is currently investigating options for upgrading its sound system and increasing livestreaming capabilities. It has become clear to church leaders that continuing to livestream worship in the future — even after returning to in-person worship — is important. The church has received a $2,500 technology grant from the Florida Conference toward this end. North Port Community UCC is also receiving a $2,500 grant from the Conference in order to upgrade its cameras and other technology to provide higher quality videos. The church has ordered a new video camera for the Pastor and will also be ordering a new digital camera and system for the Sanctuary to improve the quality of its video telecasting. The costs of these upgrades exceed the amount being received from the Conference so the church is welcoming contributions from its members to address the balance needed. Meanwhile, a new fence behind the kitchen has replaced the old stockade fence.

Frances Baker, the manager of the thrift store at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach, has been working to give the shop a “facelift” as everyone awaits the reopening of the store. Debby Hughes, store volunteer and church Vice-Moderator, has added an artfully painted stone mosaic ramp from the store...
to the Community Hall. Other volunteers practiced social distancing joining to help Frances build new displays and reorganize the store as well as clean, wax and polish the floors. Church council has approved a limited re-opening of the Thrift Store on June 15 with policies and requirements posted on the exterior doors of the store, at the cash register and on the doorway to Community Hall.

While the church has been closed, First UCC/Orlando has used the time to attend to several needed repairs. The two rooms that were former restrooms for the preschool have been re-purposed as storage space for the thrift store. All water shut-offs to those classrooms have been identified and dug out. All doors to the secretary’s office have been caulked and painted along with the lower cabinet doors. Three doors in the Pastor’s office have also been re-painted along with both north exit doors in the Sanctuary. The a/c drain in the east mechanical closet in Crimson Hall has been reconstructed so water no longer drips onto the floor. New Astroturf has been donated and installed at the entryway.

A matching grant from the Florida Conference has allowed Congregational UCC/ Punta Gorda to upgrade its sound board, which solved the “sound” issues that were experienced during the first few virtual broadcasts of Sunday services. The church is in the process of remodeling the front entrance to the Sanctuary, consisting of a new ramp and stairs leading to a revised portico.

Toward the end of June, the re-roofing project at UCC/ Fort Lauderdale was progressing with Elliott Hall almost done, the administration building approaching 50% completion and the Sanctuary prepped for the reconstructive work that needs to be done is the replacement of about 50 timbers on the north and south ends of the roof. These timbers have been subjected to dry rot and termites over the years so are critical to the re-roofing project. No further re-roofing on the Sanctuary can happen until the timber replacement project is completed, which could be three to four weeks before this part of the project is done given the steepness and construction of the roof.

Our church buildings and campuses may not be being used much these days but that doesn’t mean they don’t need attention. The Garden Warriors at Coral Gables Congregational UCC gathered on a recent Saturday to tend to the church’s beautiful landscaping.

The recent renovation of the Sanctuary at the United Church UCC-DOC/St. Augustine is complete. Thanks to the hard work of many volunteers led by Myra and Ron Smith, the ceiling was repaired, all the walls were repainted (that’s Karen Heiser on the ladder), the room was de-cluttered, vacuumed and scrubbed top to bottom and, finally, everything was put back together in a very pleasing way.
The youth group for middle and high schoolers at Fort Myers Congregational UCC has weekly Zoom sessions on Thursdays at 6pm.

High school youth from Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami and Coral Gables Congregational UCC have been meeting together virtually to share and process what is going on in their lives and in the community. Most recently these youth have been able to participate in an anti-racist book club; the hour-long sessions ran on Sundays at 1pm on Zoom from July 12-August 9. It began with a parent orientation on Zoom on Tuesday evening, July 7, so they could learn about what would be covered and how parents can have conversations with their youth about anti-racism and identity. This five-session class read the first section of This Book is Anti-Racist by Tiffany Jewell and engaged in activities and reflection on how we dismantle racism in our lives and world. The class was facilitated by leaders from both congregations.

Sunday, June 7, was a bittersweet day at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach as it was Graduation Sunday and Scholarship Sunday. It was typically the Sunday when the church commissions the youth heading off on summer work camps, which also means youth receive their “quillows.” Receiving a quillow is a highlight of a senior high youth going on their first WAVE trip. This year nine youth received them — with social distancing and a toss instead of a hug. They were still reminded that these were stitched with love by the church’s Piecemakers and will be used on future trips.

WAVE youth haven’t met in person since mid-March, but they couldn’t let that stop them from signing yearbooks and having the chance to say goodbye, even if from a distance. They met in small groups to sign books wearing masks and distancing, and then ended the year “physically together” in the church parking lot.
Sunday School at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park meets via Zoom on Sunday mornings at 11am.

The children at Coral Gables Congregational UCC collected 59 pairs of children’s flip flops during the month of May for the children at Lotus House.

Child care aides at the United Church of Gainesville have been conducting summer activity Zoom meetings on Fridays from 5:30-6:30pm and Sundays from 10-11am. The Friday, June 26, activity was story time and a dance party. On Saturday, August 1, Rev. Talia Raymond will hold a Zoom conversation with parents of elementary school children.

There was a Zoom “Summer Show and Tell” with the kids at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach on Thursday, July 9. It was an opportunity for them to see their church friends and share what they’ve been up to. A back-to-school blessing is scheduled for August 9.

Beginning in early July, college student Alexa and pre-K teacher Barbara Artega hosted Toddler Tuesdays at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour, a special time geared to tikes each week with a song, story time and prayer. Check it out at facebook.com/churchbytheseabayharbor.

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour offered a virtual pre-K camp and 1st-6th grade church camp the week of June 22. The camps consisted of two sessions (10am and 2pm) in order to allow children to have lunch (and take a nap!). The daily “show and tell” time allowed participants to interact with one another, practice socialization skills and make new friends. The camp for K-6th graders was repeated at the end of July.

On Sunday mornings from June 21-July 19, Coral Gables Congregational UCC hosted a five week virtual Children’s Compassion Camp. It included activities such as Biblical stories, videos, new music, coloring activities, crafts (with items easily found at home), yoga, breathing exercises, social time with Sunday School friends and 30 minutes with Rev. Megan Smith via Zoom. Families also received a Compassion Camp Family Pack so they could continue to explore “compassion” as a family throughout the week.

The VBS at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park supported the Ward Chapel Food Pantry this year, following the yearly tradition of outreach each year. Participants were asked to drop off items on Friday, June 19 at the preschool car loop, and three SUVs full of food was collected to help stock the pantry which had to shut down during COVID-19. 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 was the scripture focus for VBS, loving our community and how we can give. “Home Is Where the Heart Is” was a huge success with 61 children participating. Families joined a daily live Zoom kick off meeting and then were off for the day, connecting with its YouTube channel to follow along with science projects, crafts, story times, outreach and cooking.

Director of Children’s Ministry Merrill Noble at Naples UCC offers tips and activities on Wednesdays entitled “Around the Dinner Table: Steeplelights Stories”) on Facebook and a Saturday kid’s e-mail blast for activities and at-home worship for the family.

Sunday School children at North Port Community UCC had an “at home” project to create windsocks in celebration of Pentecost Sunday. As the birthday of the church, it illustrates that when the wind blew there were tongues of fire and a dove descended — all of which represents the Holy Spirit.
Ahhhhhh ... Retirement
BY DEBBIE SPEARMAN, MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR UPLANDS VILLAGE

There’s a place to retire that embodies the same values as the United Church of Christ – in fact, its roots and history go back to the American Missionary Association days of the UCC. It’s called Uplands Village located in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. Uplands Village is very proud of its AMA heritage and prides itself on helping residents maintain a high level of health, fitness (mental and physical) and independence.

It may be why so many former Florida UCC members have decided to establish their new home here. Perhaps you remember a few of them [see photo]: Rev. Dr. Doug and Rev. Sharon Borko, Rev. Clarice and Tom Mitchell, Rev. Dick and Eloise Disseler, Rev. Bill and Janeen Carrell, Virginia Thrall, Judith and Ed Olson, Jim and Margaret Mason, Beth Knight and Gerri Mize.

Uplands, a 55+ Life Plan community, is ONA and SAGE Care certified. Residents believe in life-long learning, social justice and ecology. And it’s affordable. Not only are home prices in the $100,000-$300,000 range (with acreage), but Tennessee taxes are some of the lowest in the country.

Because it is a Life Plan community, the village is comprised of assisted living, skilled nursing, rehabilitation center, assisted memory and long term nursing when and if it’s needed. But most stay in their independent homes forever.

Uplands Village is a located on 500 acres on the Cumberland Plateau situated between Nashville and Knoxville. Its campus consists of woodlands, meadows, wetlands, creeks, streams and is home to a wide diversity and abundance of native wildlife, birds and aquatic life.

When the threat of the spread of COVID-19 first became apparent, Uplands Executive staff took quick and decisive action immediately. Here’s what some of the newest residents had to say about moving here: “I’m so grateful to Uplands for being so proactive!” “We’ve never felt as cared for and connected as we do here at Uplands, even during these isolating and unsettling times. We made a wonderful choice – there’s no place we’d rather be”.

For more info, go to: www.uplandsvillage.com, info@uplandsvillage.com

Share The Good News
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 newsletters, Facebook posts and e-blasts to CelebrateFlorida@uccfla.org.