At last year’s annual Gathering we announced a site and a theme for the 2020 annual Gathering of the Florida Conference, and we began the behind-the-scenes work of putting together an event with a theme pulled from scriptures, “Fanning the Flames of Faith.”

We couldn’t have predicted then that we would change directions mid-year to offer a virtual Gathering or that the west coast of the United States would be engulfed in wildfires that have brought unimaginable destruction and countless millions of dollars of damage in California, Oregon, Washington and other western states.

The move to a virtual Gathering was an easy decision based on the science of the COVID-19 pandemic. A move, just a week or two ago, to change the theme of the meeting came from a heightened awareness of the current state of affairs nationally and a desire to be good covenantal partners with our neighbors living far away. To celebrate “Fanning the Flames of Faith” – as scriptural as that is – while so many pictures of fire and smoke fill the airwaves, seemed insensitive at best and provocatively uncaring at worst. So, that theme is gone. Welcome, instead, to the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Ours will be an abbreviated gathering that focuses mostly on the business at hand and takes place on the Zoom platform so many people have become familiar with in the last... continued on page 2

Our Faith Our Vote 2020
Your Vote is Your Voice – Don’t Give It Up!

We created a page with videos and resources dedicated to making the issues crucial in the 2020 elections feel a bit more manageable. Hear what UCC and ecumenical faith leaders specializing in these issues have to say, find links to important sources, and check out our issue one-pagers for candidate questions and more! Check it out!

Check Out Our New Civic Action Center!
Check your registration status, find important dates for elections in your area, learn about candidates, and find the polling location nearest you, all from our Civic Action Center! Check it out here.

Join the Our Faith, Our Vote email list for updates!
Sign up here.

Make Your Action Plan to Vote
Check this Graphic
Lift Every Voice — An Invitation from Rev. Traci Blackmon
In Hebrew Scripture the word most often translated “voice” is “qol.” This is also the word translated as noise, or sound, or vote. In a broader sense, I would say the Hebrew word, qol, simply means letting oneself be heard. As people of faith, what is the noise we want to make in this election cycle? Read more.

About
The problems in our world often seem too big to confront. We see injustice every day and feel that change can’t or won’t happen. But our faith is infused with hope and built on a foundation of action. By serving the vulnerable, feeding the hungry, and standing in solidarity with the oppressed, we serve as God’s hands.

Voting is a natural extension of faithful action. The decisions made by our representatives have a wide reaching impact. We have enormous potential to make positive change. We must engage our legislators, vote, and encourage everyone in our communities to do the same.

Our faithful voice is needed. It is tempting to disengage from the political process. As people dedicated to creating a just world for all, we know we must be involved.

Join the Our Faith, Our Vote campaign. Discover how your congregation can participate in the electoral process through faithful, nonpartisan... continued on page 2

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg..............................p6
Back to School Days................................pp8-9
Being Church During a Pandemic...............pp10-17
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Hurricane Sally.....................................pp28-29
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engagement. The United Church of Christ can help with resources on civic engagement, voter registration information, issue education, and voter mobilization.

This election season it is essential that people raise their voices and vote. Will you join us?

*Learn more about how your congregation can legally engage in the elections*

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### Voting Deadlines You Need to Know!

- **October 5**
  - Deadline to register to vote in November election
  - Deadline to request a mail ballot

- **November 3**
  - ELECTION DAY
  - Mail ballots must be received by 7pm

**Tips & Resources**

- Find out Your Registration Status
- Get Active in the Elections
- Get Out the Vote
- College Resources
- Youth and Young Adults in Action
- Worship Resources
- Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times
- Ballot Initiative
- Election Protection
- Helpful Links
- About
- Download Advocacy Toolkit

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### Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) Update

**By Rev. Alan Coe
Mayflower UCC/Naples**

O
n September 8 the Collier County Board of Commissioners approved the zoning change to the land the IFHA has been seeking to purchase. The sale of the land to IFHA took place within ten days of the reasoning approval. Now the IFHA can proceed with fundraising to begin the infrastructure work and construction. An estimate of cost of the project is around $18 million. The project can be done in phases as funds are available.

This is a wonderful project that will have a tremendous impact on families and the community of Immokalee as the IFHA builds safe, secure affordable rental properties for farm worker families and other lower income residents. The national UCC and Florida Conference have long had a presence in Immokalee working with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Alliance for Fair Food. Another UCC presence in Immokalee is Cypress Run, a low-income apartment complex for residents over 62. It is part of the United Church Homes network of housing ministry.

It is the hope of the IFHA Board of Directors that the UCC, Florida Conference churches and individuals will continue to support and become more involved with the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance. For more information and ways to become involved and support IFHA, please go to www.ifha.info or on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/immokaleefairhousingalliance
Reflections on Sacred Conversations to End Racism (SC2ER)

BY NEAL WATKINS
MINISTER FOR FAITH FORMATION

It has become my habit and my self-enabled mechanism to have something to say to address things, explain things or even (in my mind) make things better. Over the last several weeks, through the Sacred Conversations to End Racism, I have been led and encouraged to embrace time in discernment, acknowledging the need to listen to the wisdom of others and the Still Speaking God. I wonder if it is hard for many of us to face guilt, hurt, anger confusion and more without seeking to speak to it first — almost as if there is no time left to listen. It is for me, anyway.

This week, during our Lectionary Hour Sermon Prep, hearing so many others discuss the story of Peter walking out on the water towards Jesus, it occurred to me how many ways I have retold that Bible story, incorrectly. Theacia Version) took several liberties as to who spoke to whom, what happened when, and who did what — even with such a “familiar” story! It doesn’t matter how many times I heard the story before, I was profoundly impacted when I was actually able to LISTEN to the story.

And I suppose that is one of the ways that I have been impacted as of late in many of our sacred conversations. I have certainly had my share of time to look at things before, but I feel that with partners willing to share in honesty, work and vulnerability, there is a lot that I have missed or ignored that is to be seen. I give thanks to and for all of those who have been willing to stand out on the rocky waters and hold out a Christ-like hand.

If you enjoyed Neal’s column and would like to receive more material like this from the Florida Conference Faith Formation team, consider going to http://nevalneemail@gmail.com to subscribe to Faith Formation in Floridas for similar columns and content at least monthly and occasionally more often. From e-Celebrate, August 5

First Congregational UCC/Orlando — Job Opportunity for Office Admin Assistant

The Office Administrative Assistant is a part-time position requiring approximately 10 hour per week. Proficiency in Adobe, Microsoft Office applications (PowerPoint, Word, Excel, etc.) are required. Duties include:

• Create Sunday Worship bulletin
• Create PowerPoint presentations for worship and announcements
• E-mail newsletter “Monday Musings” to be distributed to the congregation; mail hard copies to members without e-mail access or as directed by Pastor or Church Council
• Track worship attendance on spreadsheet
• Check e-mails to church and voice mail; handle as appropriate

Interested candidates should email a resume to nevalneemail@gmail.com or call Candy Thomas at 407-964-9537. Resumes will be submitted to the First UCC Church Council for review.

First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen Seeks Input on FirstCongregationalUCCFL@gmail.com

If you are interested in such a group read, exploring models of staffing that will lead the most of an opportunity that facilitates a higher level of lay engagement, responsibility, playfulness and creativity. Perhaps these conversations will be helpful to those churches utilizing/exploring models of staffing that involve part-time clergy. If you are interested in such a group read, please fill out the linked survey (it’s literally two questions): www.surveymonkey.com/r/MI575LJ and submit ASAP.

New Community of Practice for Ministers Preparing for Retirement

A clergy community of practice (“COP”) is a small group of ministers intentionally focused on meeting together to focus on self-care, to provide support and wisdom to one another, and in this group, on how to navigate this next chapter beyond full-time ministry.

COPs are convened by trained facilitators who empower the groups to run smoothly. Each COP develops a covenant to guide the group members in creating a community of trust. Confidential information is held within the group so that members feel safe to share freely, because mutual trust is at the heart of healthy communities of practice.

If you are preparing for retirement in the coming three years, or have recently retired, we invite you to consider joining this community of practice. For more information, please contact Rev. Leslie Etheredge at leinhisland@gmail.com.

From e-Celebrate, September 2

Opportunities

Boundary Training

The Conference offered a Zoom workshop on boundary training requirements through 2022, which was hosted by the Northern California Nevada Conference and conducted by the recently retired Richard Hargrove, director of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. It was held on September 12.

From e-Celebrate, August 19

Tomorrow’s Faith Leaders

Faith UCC/Dunedin said “goodbye” to Teda Nock-Hope September 13 as her time of supervised ministry at the church came to an end and she continues her journey in the Pathways Program in another capacity as a minister. As noted in the church newsletter, “Teda has been with us for about a year now, and has been engaged in so many aspects of the life of the congregation and she has made a strong impact on this church in so many ways.” Tena is a member of First United Church of Tampa and a Member in Discernment for ordination. Brian Craig, a member of FCC/Dunedin who is currently pursuing ordination with the UCC, has begun a new year-long ministry position as a Resident Chaplain at Tampa General Hospital. He will be at the hospital full-time, which is where he did his Clinical Pastoral Education internship.

Jeremy Wallace, currently a student at Chicago Theological Seminary, will be a field education student at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park, effective September 2020-May 2021 as part of his training for ministry. He was commissioned Sunday, September 6, during the church’s virtual worship.

We are celebrating the life and legacy of Rev. Avery D. Post, president of the UCC from 1977-1989. He passed away Monday, September 7, at age 96.

We are remembering Evan Golder, founding editor of United Church News. He passed away at age 82.

Candy Thomas, INT, Christ Congregational UCC/Miami, called as DES to August 25

Lisa LeSueur, ORD, Coral Gables Congregational UCC, December 6

Opportunities

We are looking for persons interested in the office of Congregational Administrator (also called an Executive Director). This is a full-time position that requires you to have a vision, passion, and understanding of the church’s Five Goals and its current emphasis on preparing for retirement. This person will work closely with the Pastor to carry out the church’s mission and to facilitate the day-to-day operations of the church. This is an ideal position for someone who is interested in moving into church leadership. The position begins immediately.

Key: P: Pastor; SM: Supply Minister; EM: Executive Minister; INT: Interim Pastor; DES: Designated Pastor; AP: Assistant/Associate Pastor; ORD: Ordination

Frieda J. Landrum, INT, First United Church/Tampa, called as INTERIM PASTOR. From e-Celebrate, September 2

Consider Part-Time Clergy

Beginning in mid-October, Rev. John Vertigan will lead a six-week small group called "Part Time is Plenty: Thriving Without Full-Time Clergy" by G. Jeffrey MacDonald, where readers are introduced to making the most of an opportunity that facilitates a higher level of lay engagement, responsibility, playfulness and creativity. Perhaps these conversations will be helpful to those churches utilizing/exploring models of staffing that involve part-time clergy. If you are interested in such a group read, please fill out the linked survey (it’s literally two questions): www.surveymonkey.com/r/MI575LJ and submit ASAP.

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From e-Celebrate, August 19
The national staff of the United Church of Christ has issued a statement mourning the loss of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The second woman to serve on the high court and a warrior for gender equality died September 18 at her home in Washington, D.C. from complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer. She was 87.

- We speak with one voice on the passing of a woman of courage, of integrity, and of the highest order of jurisprudence.
- We mourn the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.
- Her commitment to ensuring that the voices of the vulnerable would be heard in the highest courts of this land will long be remembered by the citizens of America, if not the world.
- She was a champion for women, for the poor, for the uninsured, for the LGBTQI+ community, for communities of color, for the environment in a world where the monied interests of the more powerful were silent to their suffering.
- She was the voice of resistance on a court that sought to undo so much of what justice advocates spent decades of blood and toil to advance.
- She was both brilliant and humble, resilient and vulnerable, strong-willed and empathetic.
- She was, as a lawyer, judge and Supreme Court Justice, an ally aligned with the core values of a United Church of Christ whose purpose is to love all, welcome all, and seek justice for all; and whose vision is a just world for all.
- Not all who find their seat placed among the most powerful agents in our democracy are able to maintain their integrity, their sensitivity to the sufferings of the common people, and their steadfast commitment to eschew the trap of power and wealth to fight for the weak, the poor and the vulnerable. She never wavered from that.
- We celebrate her life and career.
- We mourn her passing.
- We hope for one to rise up to fill the void she has left.
- We pray for eternal rest in the peace of her Creator.

The National Setting of the United Church of Christ

**United Church Funds Awards More Than $100K for Clergy Support**

United Church Funds (UCF) announced that Brown Endowment grants of over $100,000 have been awarded so far this year to 13 United Church of Christ (UCC) Conferences. These grants will allow these conferences to implement support programs and leadership development for authorized ministers who are addressing and responding to the crisis and trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and protests for racial justice.

"From the grant proposals we have received, it's clear that churches and pastors are not excluded from the disruption and stress caused by the pandemic and recent racial upheaval," UCF President & CEO Charles Buck said. "They need long-term support to continue leading their congregations in a healthy and sustainable way.

United Church Funds is pleased that the Brown Endowment Fund that we administer is helping churches and faith leaders recover from the impact of COVID-19, and elevating churches' role in addressing systemic racism."

The UCC Conferences receiving grants are Central Atlantic, Florida, Illinois South, Indiana-Kentucky, Kansas-Oklahoma, Missouri Mid-South, Northern California Nevada, New York, Penn Northeast, Penn West, South Central, Southern and Southwest.

Nearly all of the proposals cited the significant toll on parish clergy and institutional chaplains as they have had to set up an operational remote worship and pastoral care in a short time, deal with the increased workload and(minister to grieving families and church members. In addition, several Conferences have witnessed increased racial tension in their communities, and they see a heightened need to support pastors as they navigate the stresses of lifting up a prophetic voice while receiving threats for speaking out against racism. Read more!

UCF also announced that 28 Members in Discernment have been awarded Helen and Richard Brown Endowment Scholarships totaling $125,000. They created an infographic to present the diversity of this year’s scholars and future ministers, which you can find here.

From e-Celebrate, September 2

**United Church UCC-DOC/S: Augustine (Summer)**

**Imagining the People of God & Creation Spirituality**

By engaging in the African practice of Sankofa (which means “Go back and get it”), congregants will look back at their history — as a church and as individuals — to find what is of value and bring it forward with them into their future.

United Church in Gainesville

(First Congregational UCC/SA) (September)

**Love – Equality – Justice – Peace/Shalom**

"Knowing What We Know: Religious Liberty and Its Impact" (with guest speaker)

September 2

A deeper understanding into those places and spaces in our lives where we find our spiritual strength and nurture (Fall)

Getting Into Good & Necessary Trouble with Jesus

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there is a tradition at Hope UCC/Rockledge to help its families with school supplies, and this year they are also planning to help out two church members who work in classrooms. Members Larney Garcia and Denise Cotton are both returning to classrooms where they will be working face-to-face with children. The basic items that are needed right now are things that are often hard to find — like large containers of Lysol or Clorox wipes, hand sanitizer, Zip Lock bags and boxes of tissues are requested for several of the classrooms. A list of some of the other supplies that children and the teachers have requested was provided to church members, and they were invited to purchase the items or provide monetary donations.

The Mission Committee at Church by The Sea/Bal Harbour organized a school supply drive, but this year is different in so many ways that the support is being done differently. Rather than collecting supplies for weeks and distributing them, they are asking church members to consider purchasing an Office Max, Staples or similar gift card to aid students in acquiring school supplies.

The United Church of Gainesville held its “Back to School Blessing” on Sunday morning, August 30. Rev. Talia Raymond and Kerri Tripper facilitated a drive-through blessing in the church’s east parking lot before the start of the school year. In lieu of backpacks and school supplies which Fort Myers Congregational UCC used to acquire for its Back to School Drive, the church instead collected monetary donations to assist The Harlem Heights Foundation as it is in a better position to purchase in bulk what items would be best suited for the children. The financial strains of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the difficulty many parents already have purchasing supplies on Thursday, July 30. These supplies were given to F.I.S.H. (located on the island) and to the Gladiolus Food Pantry for distribution to families. A list of some of the other supplies that children and the teachers have requested was provided to church members, and they were invited to purchase the items or provide monetary donations.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota held its “Alta Vista Back to School” mission moment for its next door neighbor, and the generosity of church members resulted in raising over $7,000 — or more than $12 per student.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach offered its “Back to School Blessing” during worship on Sunday, August 23. The Fellowship and Outreach Team at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park has hosted a Back2School Festival at Good Sam for the past three years. Because of the pandemic, the on-site festival did not happen this year. Instead there was a simple “drive-through” distribution of supplies on August 1 in the church’s parking lot. Fliers were distributed through the church’s food pantry and info posted on Facebook. The original budget of $500 (much lower than what has been spent in previous years) was increased to over $900 thanks to donations. Expenses were reduced so that left more money for school supplies making it possible to give a good-sized bag full of items to 100 appreciative children.

The financial strains of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the difficulty many parents already have purchasing the list of required back-school supplies. So to help defray the costs, Sanibel Congregational UCC collected donations of supplies on Thursday, July 30. These supplies were given to F.I.S.H. (located on the island) and to the Gladiolus Food Pantry for distribution to families. A complete list of school supplies by grade was posted online, and the supplies were retrieved from the trunks and rear of vehicles when they pulled up under the church portico.

Targeted Outreach During a Pandemic

Back to School Days

Eric Johnson and Carolyn Woodard organize the supplies in the Sanctuary for bagging.

The August 1 distribution team included (L-R) Ferris Van Dier, Suzie Steger, Bud Glacken and Eric Johnson

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Member of First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen collected school supplies for Volusia Pines Elementary School. The school’s principal had seen the church sign and asked one of the teachers to come by, and she spent the morning on the church porch and filled her trunk with generous donations.

At all church Zoom gatherings on Sunday, August 23, Lake-wood UCC/St. Petersburg’s theme was “Back to School.” It was a celebration of learning and a time to share memories of teachers who have made a difference in our lives. In addition, prayers were said for teachers and students in these difficult times.

The next Sunday and the following Tuesday members organized drive-by celebrations for church member teachers and students, distributing cards and gift bags packed with school supplies and goodies.

Naples UCC collected school supplies for its mission partners and those families in need who are part of its Precious Cargo Academy that serves infants, toddlers, pre-K and K-5 children. The Back to School Blessing took place on August 30 highlighting the children’s ministry as well as the PCA.

The United Church in Tallahassee organized drive-by celebrations for church member teachers and students, distributing cards and gift bags packed with school supplies and goodies.

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Thanks to the members of First Congregational Church/Orange City, donated items and Suzie Alvey enabled the church to deliver school supplies to a local elementary school.
Being Church During a Pandemic

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 August/September issue, we shared what we had heard from our congregations on ways in which they were conducting Sunday worship and other church activities. In this issue we updated what we have learned — including that a growing number of congregations have opened to in-person worship or are planning to do so soon.

More church activities can be found in the Time for Conversations, Food, Music & Arts and other featured sections in this issue [on pages 18-24 and 26-27].

There is also a reflection from Regional Minister Rev. Leslie Etheredge on how she is experiencing the virtual church. Conference Moderator Rev. Barton Buchaman shares how his congregation, Windermere Union Church, is adapting to "being church" — "doing church" — during COVID-19.

The listing which follows updates some of that information and includes churches which hadn’t contacted us in time for the last issue. 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-September.

Altamonte Springs — Altamonte Chapel Congregational UCC
9:30am in-person Sunday worship (taped for YouTube)
Boca Raton — Church on the Hill
Virtual worship on Sunday is at 10:30am and posted on Facebook and the church website
• Every Tuesday evening a virtual service is offered with prayerful meditation and music
• Virtual worship on July 26 was Christmas in July — singing of Christmas carols, with special music by the Chancel Choir, guest soloists and instrumentalists and enjoying the beauty, the hope, the joy, the peace that is the Christmas season
• The church will be offering a virtual re-employment workshop in October
• Seniors were celebrated during worship on Sunday, September 13, including after worship Caravans of Love that drove to visit several seniors to show the church’s love.

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.
• Pastor Rev. Tom Lacey began in early September a Bible Study via Zoom on Wednesday mornings that is based on the book, 30-Day Journey With Martin Luther UCC

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; a virtual hospitality time via Zoom following worship has begun

Coral Gables — Coral Gables Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 11am and posted on YouTube
• An eight-page plan for re-entry for public worship has been created composed of three stages with instructions and directions for a well-organized, safe return
• For one week beginning, Monday, August 10, the church was "officially" closed to provide staff a week break to regroup and recharge
• Each Tuesday evening, Lisa LeSueur, Minister of Congregational and Staff Care, leads a Zoom opportunity to connect members of the church community with one another as they share stories — as well as survival strategies — for getting through these challenging times.

Associate Pastor Rev. Aaron Lauer coordinates a weekly Sunday afternoon Zoom check-in for the young adults of the church at which each week a new leader facilitates a conversation
• Sunday, September 13, was "Spirit Sunday" for the church’s first-ever drive-in worship where participants could park in the lot/green space, tune their FM radio to 87.9 to hear the service or find the service online in the usual ways through Facebook or website; bulletins and sealed Communion elements were provided
• An All-Church Family Church Trivia Game Night was held on Zoom on Saturday evening, September 12

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

Dublin — Faith UCC
Sunday services continue to be streamed on YouTube and Facebook Live
• "Life is Life" is a support group for those living with mental health challenges and/or experiencing difficulties in life, which meets via Zoom on Monday; there is also a Friday morning meditation group of 10 that meets once a week for an hour in the church butterfly garden

Witness Wednesdays have resumed in front of the church with positive messages of love, hope, inclusion and justice.

Fort Lauderdale — UCC/Fort Lauderdale
Sunday worship is posted on YouTube
• The congregation has a Zoom "check-in" every Wednesday from 7-8pm for members to drop in and say "Hello!"

Fort Myers — St. John’s Episcopal Church in Fort Myers
Sunday services are being offered; considering engaging a Supply Pastor; first virtual service available on YouTube beginning September 20
• In early September the church issued a member survey offering ten basic questions and a few selected preferences for possible regathering protocols and scenarios

Good Men Drinking Beer happened on Friday, September 18, an informal gathering of UCG men sharing their drink of choice and, more importantly, sharing good humor and fellowship.

Jacksonville — Arlington Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10am via Facebook and posted on website; in-person worship began on September 20 (Facebook viewing continues)
• The church has adjusted its reopening for worship due to no earlier than Sunday, January 17

Lake Worth — First Congregational UCC
The church is currently without a pastor and no Sunday services are being offered, considering engaging a Supply Pastor; first virtual service available on YouTube beginning September 20.
 • Church Council has responded to a survey and comments and has formed a Worship Team to begin recording worship videos and posting them online; results indicate that a Zoom service led by the Deacons would definitely or sometimes be attended by 80%, and 67% do not feel it will be safe to worship in the Sanctuary before next year.

Lake Worth — First Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10:30am via Facebook Live and YouTube; Zoom Fellowship following service at 11:30am
• Members are invited to join the Lake Worth Interfaith Network on Wednesday evenings for Rainbow Interfaith Meditation when each week a teacher from a spiritual tradition offers a teaching and leads in meditation via Zoom

Fort Worth 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
Pastor Rev. Booth Iburg e-blasts a weekly message to church members. Volunteers from the church continue helping feed the homeless and hungry populations in Fort Walton Beach and Pensacola.

Gainesville — United Church of Gainesville
Sunday "vitch" church worship is pre-recorded and available for viewing on YouTube Sunday morning
• "Gathering of Waters" has been a meaningful annual worship service every August in which members were invited to bring their water to the church courtyard on designated dates and times when the pouring of water by each individual/couple/family was recorded with sharing from where the water came and then the finished product was used during the virtual service on Sunday, August 30

More church activities can be found in the Time for Conversations, Food, Music & Arts and other featured sections in this issue [on pages 18-24 and 26-27].
Miami — Christ Congregational UCC
Sunday worship resumed on July 5 requiring an extensive list of procedures and safeguards to be followed.

The church e-blasts a print version of its weekly Bible study including notes of Supply Minister Rev. Frank Lamson.

Some 20 or so members of the church surprised member Frank Trib on his 90th birthday with a parade of cars that pulled up to his home, honking horns and displaying balloons and signs with good wishes.

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

Naples — Naples UCC
Sunday service is livestreamed at 10am.

Church council has voted to remain closed until the end of the year’s re-opening will be determined by meeting metrics of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

On August 28 Rev. Dr. Dawson shared an update via YouTube on what is happening at the church; he frequently holds a “Dialogue with Dawson” on Zoom for a Q&A discussion about the life of the church and upcoming plans.

The Bargain Box thrift store is now open on a limited basis.

Proceeds from the church’s Mighty Mask Ministry benefit the Harry Chapin Food Bank.

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

Pastor Rev. Terry Hood offered a prayer at the close of her final service at the church.

Sanibel — Sanibel Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 10am; Sunday, November 1, has been determined as the tentative date for returning to in-person worship with the church’s Executive Committee reconvening in mid-October to reassess the situation.

The annual Christmas Eve beach service will not be held this year.

The church’s preschool opened for the semester on August 31.

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; on-site worship with limitations resumed in August in the Sanctuary and services were available for viewing on podcasts, posted on the previous Saturday; on-site worship was suspended beginning September 20.

Recording the service in the Sanctuary.

Church members were invited to participate in a virtual 5k “you pick the route” walk/run/skip event between September 18-20 to benefit Street Grace, a faith-based anti-sex trafficking organization focusing on exploited children.

Pinellas Park — Good Samaritan Church
Zoom worship on Sunday begins at 10:30am.

A brief survey was sent to church members in mid-August to solicit their thoughts on in-person worship and related spiritual needs.

During the pandemic, the church regularly offers a wide variety of Zoom “pop-up events” for its members with selections like “The Enneagram Under Pressure: Who Do We Become When We Are Stressed?,” guided mediation, a food fast challenge and Bible trivia.

A challenge to members was to organize drive-by visits to friends and members to let them know how much they are missed.

Held special suicide awareness worship service on September 27 that featured former Florida Conference staffer Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, now UCC Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice and author of “Blessed Are the Crazy.”

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

Sunday worship is at 10am on Zoom.

Member Rev. Donna Papenhausen led an Artful Prayer Zoom exercise in which participants drew their hands on pieces of paper — saturating their fingerprints and DNA on the paper while praying daily over a week — and then returning the papers to the church so that they could be placed on news stands leading worship to see.

Thursday Prayer Services continue on Facebook Live at 1pm, gathering in September around the theme “Story People.”

Sarasota — St. Andrew UCC
Sunday worship is live at 10:30am having switched on June from an online app to Facebook Live; up to 10 people can now RSVP to attend in-person worship in the Sanctuary.

Because the pandemic has made it more difficult for church members to meet the new Interim Pastor, Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan, several people mentioned the possibility of having a glass of wine with her some afternoon — so she has set up a Zoom time and invites members to get a glass of wine (or sparkling grape juice) and join her.

A new outreach program is planned — a virtual Bedtime Story Hour — in which once a week a church member will read a children’s book, which will be filmed live for streaming and posting on the church’s Facebook page and promoted in the wider community.

Being Church During a Pandemic

Melbourne — CrossRoads UCC
Sunday worship at 10am live on Facebook.

The church e-blasts a print version of its weekly Bible study including notes of Supply Minister Rev. Frank Lamson.

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

The church threw another drive-through dinner fundraiser, this time an August spaghetti version that also requested donations of men’s tank tops, shorts and shoes for those in need.

A “Call Tree” has been established in order to be able to contact church members in times of need, utilizing a core group of “callers.”

North Port — North Port Community UCC
In-person Sunday worship at 10am began on July 19; viewing online will be available by noon.

Beginning in October Tuesday Bible study will meet outside on the church lawn.

In October Zoom prayer gatherings, a new program, began on Thursday mornings.

The church joined with the Salvation Army for a successful food drive in July.

Orange City — First Congregational Church
Zoom Sunday worship is at 10:30am on Facebook and YouTube.

Beginning in mid-September beginning in mid-September

A midweek message/prayer is issued along with some music from a variety of Scottsdale’s First Congregational Church/Grace, a faith-based anti-sex trafficking organization focusing on exploited children.

Pinellas Park — Good Samaritan Church
Zoom worship on Sunday begins at 10:30am.

A brief survey was sent to church members in mid-August to solicit their thoughts on in-person worship and related spiritual needs.

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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 is at 10am on Zoom.

Church members demonstrated to protest postal cuts on August 15 in front of the Cape Canaveral Post Office.

Sanibel — Sanibel Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 10am; Sunday, November 1, has been determined as the tentative date for returning to in-person worship with the church’s Executive Committee reconvening in mid-October to reassess the situation.

The annual Christmas Eve beach service will not be held this year.

The church’s preschool opened for the semester on August 31.

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 and livestreaming will continue after the pandemic; a simulcast on the website was created beginning September 20; beginning October 18 there will be a half-hour outdoor worship at 9am.

At the end of August the church sent a survey to members asking for their feelings about in-person worship.

Member Rev. Donna Papenhausen led an Artful Prayer Zoom exercise in which participants drew their hands on pieces of paper — saturating their fingerprints and DNA on the paper while praying daily over a week — and then returning the papers to the church so that they could be placed on news stands leading worship to see.

Thursday Prayer Services continue on Facebook Live at 1pm, gathering in September around the theme “Story People.”

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Sunday worship is live at 10:30am having switched on June from an online app to Facebook Live; up to 10 people can now RSVP to attend in-person worship in the Sanctuary.

Because the pandemic has made it more difficult for church members to meet the new Interim Pastor, Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan, several people mentioned the possibility of having a glass of wine with her some afternoon — so she has set up a Zoom time and invites members to get a glass of wine (or sparkling grape juice) and join her.

A new outreach program is planned — a virtual Bedtime Story Hour — in which once a week a church member will read a children’s book, which will be filmed live for streaming and posting on the church’s Facebook page and promoted in the wider community.

Being Church During a Pandemic
In-person Sunday worship began on June 7 at 10am; also appears on Facebook at 10am and posted on church website and YouTube

- Congregants celebrated Women's Equality Day and the Ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 30 by wearing a color that was highlighted with yellows and purple

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 8); in-door worship began on September 6 (reservations required so as to not exceed seating limits); listening to the 19th Amendment on Facebook Live and posted on church website

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

- A group of time from the church visited member Elinor Ross, who is now under Hospice care and living with her daughter

Tallahassee — United Church in Tallahassee
Zoom worship services are every Sunday at 10am

- The Communications and Technology Committee launched its “Spotlight” series on Facebook and Insta gram in mid-July as a way to get to know one another better especially during this time when we aren’t able to gather in person
- Saturday, September 5, was UCT’s first ever Breakfast-on-the-Go in which members donated cooked casseroles, biscuits, sausage, etc. and dropped the items off that Friday evening for drive-by pickup Saturday morning with care packages delivered to shut-ins.
- Children enjoy a virtual “Time for Kids”

St. Pete Beach — Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC
Pre-recorded Sunday worship is livestreamed at 8:45 and 10am on the church website where it is posted for later viewing; in-person worship on the pavilion (with limitations) will begin on October 4 at 8:30 and 9:30am

- A brief survey was e-blasted to church members in early September to gauge comfort levels in in-person worship in the Sanctuary and outside on the labyrinth/pavilion
- A beachside Scripture and Prayer service will begin on Sunday, October 4, at 6:30pm to pray as a community while enjoying the beautiful shoreline and sunset
- Virtual Zoom study groups include Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmans’s “Coffee with Keith” on Wednesday mornings that utilize videos by prominent scholars as the focus of discussion and Rev. Dr. Guillermo Marquez-Sterling’s Thursdays-in-September “Thy Kingdom Come,” a look at the teachings of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God

Tampa — First United Church of Tampa
Sunday morning worship is at 10:30am on Zoom

- The congregation has a new spiritual support group designed to be a loving, supportive and confidential gathering in which participants can share dealing with their own mental health challenges or their family members’; this group will initially meet monthly for one hour
- A Zoom gathering is set for Thursday, October 8, on “All Are Welcome Here: Becoming an Anti-Racist Church” led by Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach)

- For several Thursdays in late October-early November Association of Pan-African Woman’s Rev. Esther Robles will lead “Sac red Rhythms: Spiritual Practices for Living in These Times” via Zoom

Tavernier — Coral Isles UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on Facebook; a virtual social hour follows

- The Villages — UCC at The Villages
Weekly sermon posted on YouTube

Vero Beach — The Community Church of Vero Beach
In-person (space limited) in Sanctuary and livestreaming on Facebook at 10:15am; Zoom coffee at 11:30am

- Sacred Pause is offered Monday mornings at 8:30am for 15-20 minutes to start one’s week with music, prayer and reflection together with others on a

FOCUS!

BY REV. LESLIE ETHEREDGE
WESTERN REGIONAL MINISTER
FLORIDA CONFERENCE

When my little granddaughter was 16 months old, my daughter — her mother was quite ready for her to begin walking. My granddaughter chose to take her own sweet time. One day she began to take a few steps and the rest is history. When she took several steps in succession, my daughter sent me the video she’d made of that big event. After about three steps walking toward her mother, my granddaughter looked away and in the video I heard my daughter say “Focus!” I have laughed about that so much — as if the 16-month-old baby knew what in the world “focus” meant.

“Focus” is the key word that I want to bring to you today in this message: Focus! Since the days of COVID-19 began and changed our lives in so many ways, it has been difficult to maintain our focus regarding many things. Unfortunately, our focus has been obscured with fear, challenges and uncertainties. Perhaps our lives were not a piece of cake pre-COVID, but things sure do seem more complicated now. Our churches and their incredible commitment to stay service, the fact that so much is going on in our lives and in our world.

Focus is the key word that I want to bring to you today in this message: Focus! Since the days of COVID-19 began and changed our lives in numerous ways, it has been difficult to maintain our focus regarding many things. Unfortunately, our focus has been obscured with fear, challenges and uncertainties. Perhaps our lives were not a piece of cake pre-COVID, but things sure do seem more complicated now. Our churches and their incredible commitment to stay service, the fact that so much is going on in our lives and in our world. But, as always, we are finding ways to serve our members, hurtful or angry exchanges between church members, hurtful or angry interactions between members and their pastors — words or actions that are not characteristic of us. It is obvious that these are challenging times for us all. We need to be reminded to just “Focus!”

As followers of the Jesus way, our focus remains the same. Our focus is to be on the good news that the Gospel brings and the Biblical directive of Micah when he wrote: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” We are all going through unprecedented times and we all need understanding and grace. Focus, my friends. Focus on the Jesus way. That path has been a certain one for centuries. That has not and will not change. I implore you to be ever mindful of when and how you were called to walk that path in the first place. Reason and rationale obviously tend to be much more difficult in the midst of a pandemic, but I remember, though, God is a God of mystery and wonder, this we know, God walks with us on every step of that path and is present with us in every breath that we take. “Focus” on that and be blessed.
We started the new year I never in my wildest imagination imagined the last time I would see my congregation would be March 15. Six months later I find that I am missing my community of faith more and more. I am still in contact with the members of Windermere Union Church. We are staying connected via e-mail, text, Instant Messenger, phone, Facebook and Zoom. In spite of the fact we miss each other terribly, we continue to totally committed doing our part in being the cure for COVID-19 and not the spread of this horrible virus.

Over the last six months we had to learn quickly how to engage with each other without seeing each other. Here is what we have been doing:

- We restructured our weekly worship services to share in online virtual experience
- We included the same Order of Worship so the virtual experience will be familiar
- We updated our website to accommodate virtual worship in an easy to follow format
- We subscribed and created a Windermere Union Church Zoom account
- Our Official Board meets monthly via Zoom
- One of our members is a certified facilitator for seminars and workshops provided a workshop for our leaders on how to make the best use of Zoom as a teaching and meeting tool
- We launched our Windermere University via Zoom; our church offers virtual workshops that take place over four to six weeks with the workshops facilitated by church staff and members
- We contracted with a webexpert to assist us on making our website more engaging and user friendly
- We are in process of launching our first virtual Stewardship Drive in October and have the great fortune to have Jennifer Brewer Harris to lead our campaign
- We are updating our camera and recording equipment so our virtual services will be in HD
- We currently have 15 Stephen Ministers; they divided the church contact list among themselves and make contact with our membership and friends monthly
- Pastor Rev. LaTrell Harrison teaches our youth and meets with our young adults via Zoom
- Childcare Coordinator Chris Stumpf is providing a virtual “Story Time with Miss Chris” weekly and also provides a Children’s Moment for our virtual worship service
- Music Director Troy Dolendo is creating weekly a traditional hymn and a contemporary music video and is also exploring how we can create a virtual choir with Zoom—choir—choir members at home, Troy will provide them the music and a sound track to assist them with their parts and will later assemble the individual videos into one large choir video
- Office Manager Sarah Larens has perfected being the communication hub for our entire ministry
- We continue with our homeless ministry, Peace Meals; in the past our volunteers gathered on the third Saturday of each month to create 120 meals while Team Leaders Ted and Dawn Eckbreth delivered the meals to homeless people in Orlando and now our members deliver the food to the church and Ted and Dawn create the meals and deliver 60 meals twice a month.
- We are still collecting money through virtual worship to support our Shepherds Fund, The West Orange Christian Service Center, NAMI of Greater Orlando and Dave’s House

Our giving is down. However, our expenses are down, too, and we currently have a budget surplus. We applied continued on page 17

continued from page 16

for the Federal PPP loan in order to keep all of our staff and preschool employed. Because we have used the funds per the Federal Guidelines, we expect the loan will be forgiven.

Now that we are feeling confident with our online worship, our next adventure will be creating an outdoor Christmas Eve Service using all social distancing and mask wearing guidelines. We are also exploring doing an outdoor worship service once a month when the weather is cooler and drier.

Yes, we miss each other. We all desire to be worshiping together again. We are tired of the “Shelter in Place.” However, we know one day we can gather together again to celebrate our faith. In the meantime, we are learning new skills and acquiring new tools that we will continue to employ when the COVID-19 scare is over. We are discovering that our audience is expanding and geography is no longer a barrier. We have new friends, those who are tuning in from outside our community and state. We are making new local connections who have tuned in to our worship services and workshops. We look forward to meeting them in person one fine day.

In other words we are doing our ministry as usual — just in a different way. In many ways we are serving God better in that we have more tools to reach out to and serve more people. I hate that COVID-19 has disconnected the world and the suffering it has caused. As the old cliche goes, “When a door closes, God opens a window.” The cliche as a reality now. Using our imaginations and wits, we are finding new and innovative ways of serving our community and world.

We are in this “wilderness experience” together. One day we will emerge from it as stronger, more resourceful. The wilderness of COVID-19 is teaching us how to be more effective servants while fulfilling God’s purposes in the world.

Peace and health to you all.

Words of a 12-year-old, emphasis on Voting Impress UCC Participants in DC Rally

BY HANS ROLZNAGEL
EXCERPT FROM UCC NEWS, SEPTEMBER 1

mid the dozens of distinguished speakers who addressed a march and rally in the nation’s capital Friday, Aug. 28, it was a 12-year-old who caught the ear of two United Church of Christ ministers who were participating — one in person, the other online.

That speaker was Yolanda Renee King, granddaughter of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. She spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during “Commitment March: Get Your Knee Off Our Necks,” organized by the Rev. Al Sharpton and his National Action Network.

Sharpton had issued a call to the event during the funeral for George Floyd, killed by Minneapolis police officers May 25.

“Setting the Stage for the Future”

Taking hope in King’s speech, from her viewpoint near the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, was the Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume, who flew from Florida especially for the march. “The diversity of the crowd was great to see, so many ages and races of people from all over,” Guillaume said. “I think Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s granddaughter was really touching, setting the stage for the future and calling us to be the beloved community.”

Guillaume said she had strong support for her trip from the Just Peace Church congregation she pastors, Union Congregational UCC West Palm Beach — and once arriving in Washington, was glad to see she was not alone in taking pandemic precautions. All the people she saw at the event “were trying to be careful to socially distance,” she said.

“Masks were required. People were honoring the precautions.”

“I felt like I was there on behalf of so many people who could not come because of the pandemic,” she said. The event was an important way to show “that our quest for justice for all people remains a priority — it’s not something we’re ignoring. We’re saying that we still believe in this dream that Dr. King had years ago, that one day we will all be able to live together in justice, peace and equality.

“Even though it’s heartbreaking to continue to see that police officers are shooting Black people, these marches give us hope that one day this type of policy will end and that we will have a just system that is for all of the people.”

“Impassioned Call in These Troubling Days”

Guillaume was back in Florida in time to weave a mention of young Yolanda King’s speech into her sermon during Union’s August 30 Facebook Live worship service.
Music and the Arts

Faith Family UCC/Brandon recently had a sing-along worship service but has decided it can use a bunch more. Members have been encouraged to send in their list of top 10 favorite worship songs — old hymns, contemporary Christian music, traditional Gospel.

As part of Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg’s summer “Corona Sabbath” series of weekly meditations on the theme “Grounded,” the “Doors Open to All” installation on church grounds by member artist William Owen III was posted with a special music video from Music Director Hilton Keen Jones.

There was a small group Zoom celebration at the United Church of Gainesville of the late poet Mary Oliver’s birthday on Thursday, September 10. A Pop Up Zoom Frame Drum class took place Thursday evening, September 17. Leigh Baker and the UCG drum circle gave an introductory Frame drum class, learning the strokes in the lap style on a Tar Frame Drum, history, resources and self-care. Participants could use a frame drum, or a native American drum, a pizza box, a book — whatever.


The concert was livestreamed and on Facebook Live on Sunday, September 13. The concert was live-streamed and on Facebook Live on Sunday, September 13.

There were interviews with poets and local musicians and more. An example was on Wednesday, September 9, at which Andrew Galuska (Director of Music and Fine Arts) led a studio tour with local artist Travis Blanton. “Musical Moments” are weekly recitals and concerts on Thursday mornings at 11:00am, live-streamed-only concerts that feature local musicians, music staff and special guests and may be viewed by visiting the church’s Facebook page or church website. On Thursday, September 10, pianist Rochelle Sallee presented a concert of “Waltzes Without Dance” from Tchaikovsky’s “Waltzes Without Dance” which was inspired by his studies of Renaissance paintings of Christ being crucified.

He has always been drawn to watercolor and so Gary Hill wants to be surrounded by watercolor. He began learning about painting in 1977. Here is a favorite scene from southern Florida that he took on a fall day and painted a couple of years later.

Legal Injunction Filed on Behalf of PAG Beach Church

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach has engaged a religious property and land use attorney at Michigan-based law firm Dalon & Tomich in filing a preliminary injunction against the City of St. Pete Beach. The filing came in late August in response to the City’s efforts to stop the church’s youth group from evangelizing, praying and seeking donations from members of the public who park on the church lot.

As part of its ministry, the church has always allowed community members to use the parking lot for free when church is not in session in order to access the public beach. In 2016, the church began accepting a free-will donation for non-patron parking, with the money collected used to fund the church’s youth ministry global mission trips. Church youth also hand out spiritual leaflets and share their faith with those interested in learning more.

As part of its ministry, the church has always allowed community members to use the parking lot for free when church is not in session in order to access the public beach. In 2016, the church began accepting a free-will donation for non-patron parking, with the money collected used to fund the church’s youth ministry global mission trips. Church youth also hand out spiritual leaflets and share their faith with those interested in learning more.

A court reviewed the City’s objection in 2016 and rejected it, citing that seeking donations by a church youth group to help pay for mission trips is protected activity and consistent with the Church’s religious beliefs to “welcome the stranger and show hospitality.”

The City has persisted in overruling the decision by assessing code violations and insisting that parking on the church lot can only occur for the “intended purpose” of the church – as defined by the City. As a result, parking on the property to go to the beach is prohibited.

In speaking against the recent fine and growing pressure from the City, Pastor Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann expressed his frustration at attempts to restrict the church’s mission. “The City does not consider the many youth whose lives have been changed because of the donations that people freely give to support our mission endeavors. The church is not the church if ministry and discipleship are directed by entering a church building, then leaving, because the church will be penalized if you visit a friend, walk the beach, or break bread with a neighbor,” Rev. Keith said.

“The church is not a commercial operation, no matter what codes a municipality adopts. Our calling as followers of Christ is to build the Kingdom of God on earth, not a fiefdom on the beach. Without the ability to reach a workable solution with the City to continue using our parking lot as we have for many years, the only viable option was to ask the court to confirm our rights under federal law.”

Here is a link to this story: https://www.dalton.com/story/news/local/st-pete-beach/2019/09/29/384-property-to-go-to-the-beach-is-prohibited/4202217002/
Time for Conversations...

Coral Gables Congregational UCC hosted a recent PACT (People Acting for Community Together) Drive-In Rally at the end of July in the church parking lot in support of affordable housing. Attendees were able to drive up and park (with no need to leave their cars) and listen to the presenters broadcast over FM radio. Congregations from across the county were invited to join the rally. Over 85 cars showed up along with over 600 views on Facebook to hear testimonies and stories of those in need of affordable housing in the community.

Because everyone has concerns and worries about our lives and our community, PACT provides an opportunity to gather and share with each other what matters most in these difficult times. In September, the church’s PACT Team hosted five Zoom “Listening Sessions” as a chance for church members to come together, voice concerns and begin the work of changing the community for the better.

In its continuing Sacred Conversation on Race, interested church members heard from St. Gallaher via Zoom on Tuesday, September 15. She has done extensive research on racial bias and leads workshops on the local history of racism and resistance. A White educator, she piloted a Reparations Pilgrimage for Christians last year.

The Board of Justice and Witness is inviting congregations to take part in its Social Action Challenge. Even during this time of social distance we can still remain socially active as we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. Participants downloaded a link to the guide and then completed as many actions as they could over two months, sending photos and reflections to Associate Pastor Rev. Aaron Lauer by November 6. Prizes to winners!
BE THE CHURCH
Protect the environment, Care for the poor, Forgive often, Reject racism, Fight for the powerless.
Share earthly and spiritual resources.
Embrace diversity, Love God, Enjoy life.

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

All Are Welcome
Here: Becoming an Anti-Racist Church
A Zoom gathering led by Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/ West Palm Beach)

This is an opportunity to learn what it means to be an anti-racism church. Contact Rev. Sheila for info on how to schedule a presentation (Sheila@unionucc.net)

Christian Education at UCC/ Fort Lauderdale prepared a course dealing with the issues surrounding racism, the Black Lives Matter movement, police and community/White privilege among other related issues.

These sessions began in mid-August on Tuesday evenings on Zoom and met every Tuesday for six weeks, concluding September 15.

Guests from the community were part of the dialogue.

First Congregational UCC/ Sarasota has continued its sacred conversations dialogue through September.

Its SURE Team—one from among 23 churches in the area—has maintained contact through phone calls, Zoom meetings, emails and all other ways to communicate that technology allows.

Subjects being addressed include issuance of civil citations instead of arrests and the need for affordable workforce housing in the county.

Members of UCC/New Smyrna Beach were encouraged to wear yellow tee shirts on Sunday afternoon, August 16, at a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest to stand in solidarity with the “Wall of Moms” group protecting protestors in Portland, Oregon.

On almost every recent Sunday afternoon, from 4-5 pm, some church members stand at a busy intersection with Black Lives Matter signs and others with justice messages.

Across the street are Trump demonstrators.

Opportunity
Let Black People— and Others— Breathe, Say UCC Youth
Saying the names of Black people slain by police and vigilantes, more than 100 United Church of Christ youth, young adults and youth ministers began a conversation online July 25 about how to dismantle racism.

“This is a first step in determining what we individually and collectively can do to heal the brokenness of our community and call out the ideology and belief of white supremacy, so that our black and brown children can grow up and live out their God-given purposes and potential,” said Rev. Truyen Potter, UCC Minister for Youth and Young Adult Engagement, at the start of “No Justice No Peace”—the first of a two-part UCC virtual youth rally.

Offered live on Zoom and simulcast via YouTube, the event was a special edition of the UCC’s “Tuesdays for Nurture” webinar series. It was recorded and can be viewed on the UCC YouTube channel here.

Read more
From e-Celebrate, August 5

Youth & Young Adult
Racial Justice Rally

Opportunity
“Tuesdays for Nurture” and More
“Tuesdays for Nurture” is a Tuesday webinar series on Zoom in which the United Church of Christ faithfully focuses on education for the people of God. Topics from faith-filled politics, to interviews of key leaders, to “how to’s” in congregational life, to the impacts of current realities on the life of the church will be featured. Each webinar will include clear suggestions on what YOU can do to change the church, and the world, towards the world God imagines for us.

“Tuesdays for Nurture” and “Thursdays for the Soul” are offered by Faith Education, Innovation, and Formation and Justice and Local Church Ministries of the National Setting of the UCC. This, and all webinars, are available to replay on the UCC YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6VgfHt6zEy7yDgdSE-fLLYEVaNBM2943

One of the recent “Tuesdays for Nurture” was “Building Bridges of Faith Across Political Divides” offered on August 18. It asked “In a time when our nation is becoming increasingly more socially, politically, and spiritually divided, what does our faith require of us?” Other recent topics were titled: “Supporting Your Pastor so They Can Support You,” “No Justice, No Peace,” “Congregational Lay Leadership During Time of Crisis” and “Pastoring in a Pandemic.”

The Community Church of Vero Beach began “Tackling Tough Questions Through the Eyes of Faith,” a small group conversation in mid-September that will run for eight weeks on Monday afternoons on Zoom. The dialogue looks at “racism” in the light of our Christian faith. Participants are asked to read and respond to different articles and to watch some on-line videos, plus interact with folks of different ethnic backgrounds who will be joined on Zoom.

The church also offered “Race Matters: A Compassionate Conversation” with Dr. David Anderson Hooker (University of Notre Dame) and Dr. Allen Hilton (Executive Director of House United). These were offered via Zoom on September 30 and October 7.

With race as a freighted topic among us, now after a long history of slavery and racism in the U.S. the time has come to get better at it. But what does better look like?

Opportunity
“Tackling Bridges of Faith Across Political Divides”
BE THE CHURCH

Conference Call: How Long?
by Rev. John Vertigan

I went to a concert at the Dr. Phillips Center in Orlando on March 11, 2020. We shared a wonderful evening there together and were overwhelmed in the privilege of listening to live music in a fine venue. Two days later, the Phillips Center cancelled their calendar of bookings as Florida went into lockdown over concerns with the Coronavirus.

That blissful evening seems so long ago given all we’ve experienced together these last five months, and it’s both fair and predictable that we might lament with cries of “How long?” We humans are not built for the isolation we’ve been living in, and our desire to gather is stronger than ever as summer turns to fall and a season we all likely thought would be post-COVID-19. But here we are; we continue to endure, to count new cases, to socially distance, and to worship and be church in new and creative ways.

That particular question of “how long?” has no immediate answer and clearly will not lead to what we’d like to do, which is to travel to the fullest now in being the people of God in a strange land. The better question for these days might be: “How shall I live faithfully in the meantime?” I’ll be working with that in the weeks to come.

But there’s another “How long?” being asked in the land, and it surrounds questions of racism, justice for communities of color, and rampant white supremacy that is holding our nation back from being who once we declared ourselves to be: a bastion of hope for all people. We’ve never achieved that aspiration; just ask any group of immigrant people from the last centuries, or the African-American community who didn’t immigrate but were stolen from their homeland for the sake of economic largesse.

The same question applies here, church. “How shall I live faithfully in the meantime?” I pray that our churches will be a place where we can openly and honestly enter into self-examination around issues of race, justice and white supremacy. To that end, I invite you to listen and use resources offered at https://3greatloves.org and continue a journey toward answering that lingering question of “How long?” As our isolation continues, may we nevertheless be about the business of building a more just world for all, beginning with the places where we live, work and worship, in Jesus’ name.

Be at peace, and be in touch, won’t you.
From e-Celebrate, September 2

It is the “Listening Process” time for HOPE—the Hillesborough Organization for Progress and Equality—and the gathering of small “house” groups to discuss community concerns. It was done virtually this year at First United Church of Tampa in Zoom or Google Hangouts that were hosted by church members over the course of several days in September.

The virtual HOPE convention will be held on October 26 to vote on what problems to tackle this year. The church is also encouraging its members to contact Governor Ron DeSantis to take action to protect Immokalee farm-workers from COVID-19 ahead of the harvest.

The GROW committee at Fort Myers Congregational UCC hosted a three-part book study during August on Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The discussion took place over Zoom.

On Friday evening, September 4, there was a Zoom presentation with Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson (First United Church of Tampa) and special guest Rev. Dr. Becky Asdorian (founder/ pastor of Followers of Christ Fellowship Ministries). They led a discussion on criminal justice organizing among people of faith as law enforcement agencies come under greater scrutiny following more documented instances of police misconduct and abuse.

The Endowment Team at Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda has recommended and the Leadership Team approved a distribution of $1,000 to the Peace River Center for the Environment.

First United Church of Tampa had a socially-distanced garden work day on Saturday, August 22, to help weed, mulch and compost and generally get the Seeds of Peace Community Garden ready for fall planting.

At the United Church in Tallahassee Peter Easton will be leading a Zoom study on climate change and creation care that is being sponsored by the church’s Climate Change Task Force. Topics will include: sources of global warming, climate change and environmental degradation; their likely course in upcoming years, with and without effective counter-measures; promising strategies to reverse course or at least to mitigate these threats and avoid disaster; policy targets to promote change here in Florida; our religious vocation of creation care. Coming up will be a Bill Philani-led Zoom study on birds, nature and the Bible — exploring what Scripture’s bird imagery reveals about God and about the people of God along with an inquiry into what nature reveals through birds.

The Green Team at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota invited church members to hike on their own at a specified local preserve between September 10-17. Then on that Thursday afternoon at 3pm they could join a Zoom discussion to share what they noticed, what they learned about God and themselves and what responses might be appropriate.

Reversing Climate Change Urgent “But Not Beyond Us,”
UCC Leaders Say
by Hans Holznagel
EXCERPTED FROM UCC NEWS, AUGUST 14

Emphasizing the burden that climate breakdown places on poor people and people of color, and calling for action now, two United Church of Christ speakers took prominent roles in early sessions of this year’s online American Climate Leader Summit, which took place every Thursday in August.

“We refuse to believe there is no hope, no pathway to God’s love and expressing God’s love and expressing the power to inspire tens of millions of Americans on this year. The summit gathers faith, health, higher education, business and community leaders, who, as ecoAmerica’s website puts it, “have the power to inspire tens of millions of Americans on climate change.”

Please send your 3 Great Loves story to Lynn and Sheila.
During the months of July and August, Hope UCC Rockledge conducted a drop-off food drive to benefit the Central Brevard Sharing Center. By mid-August, almost 500 non-perishable food items and $378 in monetary donations had been collected. On Sunday, August 16, several members from the church participated in the Tailgate 2 Mile Walk/Run fundraiser to benefit the Sharing Center. While this was a virtual event for most, a small representation of Hope participants gathered at the Larry Schultz Park across from the church.

The monthly “Fill the Food Basket” Sunday at Port Orange UCC in August collected more than 12 bags of food for the Halifax Urban Ministry. Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville was able to contribute food, gift cards, personal hygiene items and more to Arlington Community Services that helped enable the agency to feed 257 and help 48 financially in August.

The weekly Thursday Ruth Ministry Outreach on-site meal service at UCC/Pot Lauderdale has been on-hold while the church roof was replaced and during the pandemic, as well. Thanks to two whole turkeys donated to the program, they were restocked to make homemade turkey sandwiches and along with P&J sandwiches were distributed downtown through the ministry’s food sharing outreach program in partnership with Hope Outreach. During the pandemic, Ruth Ministries prepares sandwiches and “to go” bags of nutritious goodies and delivers them to the homeless.

Church member Rev. Joel Slotnick was one of 10 recipients to receive a proclamation from the City of Wilton Manors in recognition for his contributions to providing free meals to those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Joel and other honorees were noted to have helped provide more than 1,600 free meals to residents in the city over the past few months.

2020 to support food distribution to the homeless. These donations replace the church’s volunteers and food donations for the Kearney Center because of social distancing concerns. The Church Family Life Committee hosted its first ever Breakfast-on-the-Go on Saturday, September 5. Members got to pull up in their cars, see some smiling faces, laugh about how the new normal really isn’t so normal and take off with a yummy breakfast box — filled with croissants, quiches, sausage, bacon, muffins, croissants, fruit, yogurt and baked goods. Breakfast boxes were delivered to members who were unable to attend in person, and 20 extra boxes were handed out to hungry folks at the Greyhound bus station and around Lake Ella.

Sanibel Congregational UCC scheduled a no-contact drop-off food drive on August 6 in conjunction with Temple Beth Yam and were able to donate over 80 bags to benefit F.I.S.H. and the Gladiolus Food Pantry. In September over 70 bags were collected. The Leavens and Fines Food Pantry at Spring Hill UCC was featured in an article in the September 5 Hernando Sun newspaper. Church member Chance Martinez-Colon is quoted: “We started the pantry in April to help families and individuals who struggle with food insecurity. We knew COVID would cause added stress and we see people every week who are asking for help that have never had to seek help before. We do not require any proof of need, income, or residency. We just want to help as many people as possible.” Each family benefiting from the Pantry receives a $10 Publix gift card and purchase needed perishable items. Chance noted, “We average helping 10-20 families a week but we have capacity to help many more.” The Social Justice & Community Engagement Ministry at the church began a partnership in February with Spring Hill Elementary to provide healthy snacks for teachers to distribute to children to give them a much needed boost to focus on learning. This “Food for Thought” program is being re-scheduled with the school with single-serving snack items such as apple sauce, fruit snacks, goldfish pretzels, cereal etc. being dropped off at the church.

Emmanuel UCC/Seminole challenged the community to raise awareness of the church’s Shepherd’s Pantry and how important it has been, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community has answered the call and it has been truly heartwarming. The Pantry has received many online donations including one from out of state. Boxes of peanut butter have been purchased from donors and directly shipped to the church and donations received from partners in mission. The Pantry continues to feed its neighbors by drive-thru service to keep volunteers and guests safe. This ministry continues to grow as the needs of the community continue to rise.

North Port Community UCC along with the Salvation Army held a food drive and delivery on July 20-21.

The Community Action Committee at the United Church in Tallahassee has authorized donations to the Kearney Center from its Food Ministry at $300 per month from April through October.

There is always something to be done at the food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park from greeting donors and sorting donations to packing bags for clients and keeping the pantry clean. In June the pantry was open for 14 days for 291 client visits, serving 598 adults and 173 children. Through June the pantry had served 3,124 individuals. The pantry has a community from outside the church that has stepped up to donate food including peanut butter, jelly, dry cereal, spaghetti and pasta. There is always something to be done at the food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park. In September over 70 bags were collected.

As part of its Food Ministry at $300 per month from April through October.

Food, Glorious Food

There is always something to be done at the food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park. In September over 70 bags were collected.

Food, Glorious Food

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There is always some-thing to be done at the food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park.
Loving God and Helping Neighbor

Hurricane season is well underway, and the storms are working their way through the alphabetical names at a record pace. We must monitor the weather forecasts to see the latest developments of potential storms and where they may head. For those of us who have lived in hurricane-prone areas, we know what to do and are well-prepared, right?

One of the things each of us can do in this pandemic time with proper precautions is to reach out to newer residents in our areas and offer them some advice and lessons learned from our own experience with disaster preparedness and planning. The new folks that move here are not used to the Florida weather patterns or the intensity and frequency of our afternoon thunderstorms, let alone a hurricane. If they have never experienced a hurricane before or mandatory evacuation, we can be good neighbors and share our knowledge with them.

It was a big learning curve for my wife and I when we moved to south Texas 20 years ago. The weather was just one of the things we had to adjust to in our move from New England. The intensity of thunderstorms and rain there was more intense than it is here. One afternoon, a storm rolled through and we had over 11 inches of rain in a couple of hours.

Our nearest neighbor in Florida moved here from New Jersey shortly before Hurricane Irma. In the days prior to Irma, they were always asking me questions and even today they are still adjusting to weather and life in Florida. Be a good neighbor and friend and share your storm stories and planning expertise with those who recently moved to the Sunshine State.

Disaster Ministry Update

The United Church of Christ Disaster Response Ministry always works ecumenically nationally and regionally. The denomination is part of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), Florida has the state equivalent: FLVOAD. I represent the denomination by serving with both organizations.

NVOAD began in 1970 after Hurricane Camille. Volunteer organizations came together to better serve an affected population by sharing knowledge and resources. NVOAD continues to grow and change as society and disasters change. NVOAD now has over 100 organizations under its umbrella and FLVOAD about 60 participating organizations.

One of the ways the UCC in Florida assists others is by having tool trailers available for use following a disaster to aid in reconstruction efforts. The tool trailer pictured was loaned to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) for their hurricane recovery work after Hurricanes Hermine and Irma north of Tampa. It was returned to Mayflower UCC/Naples on August 26. This trailer was purchased with funds from Naples UCC. The Florida Conference has three other tool trailers. One is in use in Bay County for recovery work after Hurricane Michael; it is housed at Messiah Lutheran Church in Panama City. The other two are in Holly Hill in Volusia County and being used by the Volusia Interfaith Networking in Disaster (VIND) working on recovery efforts from Hurricanes Matthew and Irma. These trailers are housed at Union Congregational UCC/Holly Hill.

I received this note from the people who were using the trailer when the trailer was returned to Mayflower:

“On behalf of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church Disaster Recovery Team, let me express our gratitude for your giving spirit and the use of your disaster trailer. I believe we have used this trailer for over four years, and it has been put to great use. With the use of it we have been able to help over 150 families recover from the tornadoes of Hurricane Hermine and Hurricane Irma.”

As this is written Hurricane Sally made landfall in Alabama and the Panhandle of Florida (see page 29). It will be one more disaster to recover and rebuild from. The United Church of Christ Disaster Ministry is the place to send donations; here is the link to the donation page greenchurches.unitedmethodist.org/hurricane-2020/

The UCC always works in long term recovery efforts helping people rebuild their homes alongside other denominations and non-profit organizations.

Aftermath of Hurricane Sally in Pensacola Beach

Hurricane Sally made landfall on September 16. Since that time, life around here has mostly been about cleanup, repair and reorientation. Our damaged possessions line the streets awaiting pickup by sanitation workers, sand is being removed from roadways and buildings, electrical service has been restored to most of the community and water is flowing from our taps. All of this recovery effort began even before the winds diminished and the rain stopped falling. Folks around here are pretty good at this sort of thing.

Among these talented people, I lift up our friends at Upper Room Church. Several months ago we entered into an agreement and welcomed this new and growing faith community onto our campus. From the time of their arrival they’ve blessed us with their faithfulness, energy and their ability to get things done. Through their partnership with Convoy of Hope they have made drinking water, food, cleaning supplies and personal care items available to anyone in the community who has need. They’ve sent volunteers into the neighborhood to help clear debris, shovel mud and generally assist in the work that needs to be done. On campus they have led the effort to dry out the buildings and secure the services of contractors where they are needed. We are blessed to call them friends.

The year 2020 has proven how beautiful life is when we love each other and how brutal it can be when we don’t. Our future as a species and indeed the future of the world depends on our unwavering commitment to love as Christ loves. The Beach Church is changing in many ways, but we will always aspire to be a place where heaven and earth meet, and where the community encounters God’s generosity and healing presence. Peace be with you!

Editor’s Note: In a September 17 e-message, Rev. Jim wrote: “Upon first inspection the church building and grounds are fully intact, with evidence of a roof leak in Randle Hall and some minor water intrusion at the Sanctuary doors.”

West Coast Fire Evacuations Take Toll on UCC Churches, Camps

A wind-whipped wildfires continue to take lives and destroy forests, homes and businesses on the West Coast of the United States. United Church of Christ congregations are in stages ranging from evacuation to recovery to post-traumatic stress syndrome.

In the two hardest-hit UCC Conferences — Central Pacific and Northern California-Nevada — several congregations and church camps awaited word on the fate of their buildings. Others, evacuated days or weeks ago, are ministering to families and communities that escaped damage or are returning to inspect it. Daytime skies range from smoky gray to eerie orange to black as night.

“It feels like the whole coast’s on fire,” said Pastor Kimberly Williams of Grace Community UCC in North Fork, CA, which got evacuation orders on Sept. 6, her first official Sunday as pastor. In affected areas, “it’s terrifying,” she said. “Everybody is looking out their windows with this look of horror, but then realizing, OK, this is the reality, we’ve got to keep on going.”

From e-Celebrate, September 16

Have Your Church “Be the Church” At All Times With This Yard Sign

10 bold statements that describe what it means to “Be the Church”:

- Be the Church
- Protect the environment
- Care for the poor
- Forgive Often
- Reject Racism
- Fight for the powerless
- Share earthly and spiritual resources
- Embrace diversity
- Love God
- Enjoy this life

Click here for all Be the Church merchandise.

Disaster Response & Recovery

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

28
Across Florida

Sally Cash – member of Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach and member of the Conference Board – is one proud parent. Son Scott appeared in the bright lights of Broadway on Saturday, September 12, as part of the National Down Syndrome Society’s annual Times Square Video presentation. The featured photographs highlight children, teens and adults with Down syndrome, reminding the world in a very big way about the contributions and milestones of people with Down syndrome.

The photo of Scott was selected as one of 500 photographs that has appeared in the video, streamed on NDSN social media from the heart of Times Square. The presentation kicks off Down Syndrome Awareness Month in October.

On Saturday, October 17, Hope UCC/Rockledge will be hosting a community blood drive with One Blood with The Big Red Bus parked in the circle in front of the church.

Christ Congregational UCC/Miami served as a polling place for two precincts on Tuesday, August 18. Said Interim Pastor Rev. Candy Thomas, “I think it’s great that CCC is a polling place, for more than one reason. It’s nice, of course, to be financially compensated for the use of the building, but, perhaps more important is a way for our church to be seen as part of the community. It’s also a way for poll workers and voters alike to get a glimpse of what we value as people of faith, through our posters and signs.”

What do you do if your Pastor is stuck at home, learning to master a knee scooter as she recovers from foot surgery? If she is Rev. Kim Wells, members of Lakewood UCC, St. Petersburg surprised her with a Sunday afternoon drive-by to bring her some gifts and good cheer. On her September 19 birthday a surprise Zoom birthday party was held.

Because of the pandemic, the annual Artisan Market at the church campus in Lakewood has been moved to a Zoom in 500 photographs that has appeared in the video, streamed on NDSN social media. The fea-

The United Church of Gainesville received a $112,900 loan from the Payroll Protection Program to help keep staff on the payroll and cover other approved expenses. It does not need to be repaid if it has been used appropriately, but as some members have suggested reasons it be repaid the matter was discussed at a Sunday Seminar on September 6.

A congregational meeting on October 4 will make a decision. Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg was approved to receive a PPP loan for $5,000 that will need to be paid back beginning in one year. The church also received an “advance” of $6,000 that does not need to be paid back.

This is intended primarily for payroll and utilities, and it will allow the church to keep paying all of its employees, even if they are not able to perform all of their normal duties because of the shutdown.

The UCC/Fort Lauderdale is involved in the Adopt-a-Street program and on Saturday morning, September 26, cleaned three blocks on a local street. The clean-up is done quarterly with all supplies provided.

The Justice and Community Engagement Ministry at Spring Hill UCC spent the morning of Saturday, August 29, picking up litter on its adopted road and doing some cleanup around the church campus.

Happy Mood (with cooking demo), “Just Be 101: Mindfulness (meditation to center, focus and restore the body)” and “Deliciously Healthy Desserts (with cooking demo)” are on the schedule.

The United Church of Gainesville has a Young Adults Sunday Lunch Group, which had its fall kickoff on Sunday, September 20. To “qualify” one is older than high school and younger than 30ish. Discussions were on various topics including spiritual practices that can help with stress.

The new meditation group is now under-way at Faith UCC/Dunedin. Limited to no more than 10 and following safety guidelines, it meets once-a-week on Friday mornings in the church Butterfly Garden. It is led by church member Diane Feldman, an experienced meditation practitioner and teacher.

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The Democratic and Republican Conventions,” “Ladies and Gentlemen This Is The Plague, featuring Laurie Garrett,” “The Search For Racial Equity: The 1619 Project featuring Nikola Hamah Jones and Dr. Kamau Bobb” and “Tree Canopy in St. Johns County: Death by a Thousand Cuts” (UCC/New Smyrna Beach)

“Media in the Age of Misinformation with Frank Bruni,” “The Meaning and Impact of Spirituals with Andre Thomas,” “Thy Kingdom Come: A Look at the Teachings of Jesus Regarding the Kingdom of God.” “Hackers, Terrorists, Russians and Fake News with Clint Watts” and “David Brooks, Author of The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life” (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

“Artful Prayer, Part 1,” “Artful Prayer, Part 2,” “Foundations of Faith” and “Racial Theory” (First Congregational UCC/ Sarasota)

“The UCG Three-Year Plan,” “Getting to the Roots of Climate Change,” “Our Paths to the Ministry,” “Emergency Hurricane Preparation,” “Climate Change and Health: Understanding and Action,” “Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention,” and “Back-to-School in an Age of COVID” (United Church of Gainesville)

“A Rosh Hashanah Lesson,” “Three Influential Black Figures You Should Know” and “The Other Big Six Leaders of the 1963 March on Washington plus One”. (Sanibel Congregational UCC)


“The Enneagram Under Pressure: Who Do We Become When We are Stressed?” and “Unique Approaches to Leadership” and “Clergy Sexual Misconduct” (United Church in Tallahassee)

“Parenting Small Groups: Listen and Growing Compassionate Kids” (The Community Church of Vero Beach)

“Sacred Rhythms: Spiritual Practices for Living in These Times” (First United Church of Tampa)

There’s a new air conditioning unit to cool Randle Hall at Naples UCC. In preparation for the return to the Naples UCC campus, all toilets and sinks will become touchless to better protect against COVID-19 transmission.

The steeple atop St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota had to be removed to prevent further leaks and water damage to the roof and Sanctuary. Because the steeple was not in good shape due to rotted wood, rust and its heavy weight, it could not be salvaged to be re-used. The steeple – its beloved oculus, spire, cross and crown – came down on Tuesday, August 11. That morning a time of remembrance was held led by Interim Pastor Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan with prayers and thanksgiving for the years the steeple had graced the building.

Women Engage! at Naples UCC was addressing the upcoming election with a session on “Our Faith, Our Vote 2020” on Thursday morning, September 17. It was led by Assistant Minister Rev. Dr. Sharon Harris-Ewing.

The Anam Cara Women’s Circle at Faith UCC/Dunedin has its “Dining for Women” October Zoom event a focus on programs lifting up women and their children living in poverty in Uganda and Kenya through the donations it has collected. This includes programs for widows facing exploitation and treating antepartum/postpartum depression.

The Fall Clergy Roundtable at Naples UCC will be exploring (via Livestream and Facebook Live) Forgive to Live: How Forgiveness Can Save Your Life by Dr. Dick Tibbets and Steve Halliday, Ph.D.

It will be discussed on Wednesday evenings between October 14-November 4.
Becoming the two youth groups (R) at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach are unable to go on their annual summer mission trips, the youth began a mask-making ministry. They have been making masks for All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg and local public schools. While undertaking this project, they can only have five at a time in the youth room while they wear masks and practice physical distancing.

Youth United and Middle School Together at the United Church of Gainesville kicked off their year together with a virtual Team Trivia Night hosted by GNV Entertainment on Sunday afternoon, September 13.

Four Zoom sessions of high school Sunday School at Coral Gables Congregational UCC in late September and early October explored the lives of several Biblical women (Eve, Sarah and Hagar, Miriam and Rahab) and reflected upon patriarchal systems that were in place in Biblical times and still today. The “Biblical Voices” series was led by Rev. Megan Smith. A Zoom program for Middle School youth titled “Think. Believe. Do.” on four Sunday afternoons in September and October was led by Rev. Aaron Lauer. The sessions featured video, small group discussion and journaling on how prayer is an important part of our faith to be lived out each day.

The Middle School Youth Adventure Club for grades 6-8 at The Community Church of Vero Beach kicked off on Wednesday, September 16, from 5:30-7pm. They began the year hanging prayers in trees, building temporary labyrinths, baptizing stuffed animals and doing outdoor karaoke. Pizza and snacks were available for purchase.

The Christian Education Committee and the Community Outreach Committee at the United Church in Tallahassee are working together to host a first-ever Drive Through Community Trick or Treat. The event will be on October 31 from 6:30-8pm. It will provide a safe, free way for the kids in the community to celebrate Halloween. Volunteers will be filling bags with candy to distribute, dress in fun costumes to hand them out and direct traffic.

According to Karen Kelly, Sunday School at Fort Myers Congregational UCC has been Zooming since shortly after the pandemic changed “church,” encouraging challenges along the way but learning how to make it work. Beginning in July they created a routine doing a Bible study using The Jesus Storybook Bible. Teachers made sure each child has their own Bible, taking turns to read along having started right from the beginning in the Old Testament. The classes look for similarities and differences that may relate our lives today.

The Beatitudes

Children and Youth Speak: Your Vote Matters – A UCC Webinar

Children and youth (and children at heart) had the chance to join a four-part series “Learn to Knit” offered at Church by the Sea/Rail Harbour. The YouTube videos were available on the church website.

Rev. Dr. Wes Bishby (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): www.graceandgraces.blogspot.com
Rev. Shanna Garvey (First Congregational Church/Winter Park): www.ourchurches.com
Rev. Aaron Lauer (Community Church of Vero Beach): https://www.optionyouth.org/rev-dr-anne-verified-professional-blog
Rev. Dr. Anna Verlee Copeland (Community Church of Vero Beach): http://annewrites.html

Children and their families who are unable to go on annual summer mission trips, the youth began a mask-making ministry. They have been making masks for All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg and local public schools. While undertaking this project, they can only have five at a time in the youth room while they wear masks and practice physical distancing.

Youth United and Middle School Together at the United Church of Gainesville kicked off their year together with a virtual Team Trivia Night hosted by GNV Entertainment on Sunday afternoon, September 13.

Four Zoom sessions of high school Sunday School at Coral Gables Congregational UCC in late September and early October explored the lives of several Biblical women (Eve, Sarah and Hagar, Miriam and Rahab) and reflected upon patriarchal systems that were in place in Biblical times and still today. The “Biblical Voices” series was led by Rev. Megan Smith. A Zoom program for Middle School youth titled “Think. Believe. Do.” on four Sunday afternoons in September and October was led by Rev. Aaron Lauer. The sessions featured video, small group discussion and journaling on how prayer is an important part of our faith to be lived out each day.

The Middle School Youth Adventure Club for grades 6-8 at The Community Church of Vero Beach kicked off on Wednesday, September 16, from 5:30-7pm. They began the year hanging prayers in trees, building temporary labyrinths, baptizing stuffed animals and doing outdoor karaoke. Pizza and snacks were available for purchase.

The Christian Education Committee and the Community Outreach Committee at the United Church in Tallahassee are working together to host a first-ever Drive Through Community Trick or Treat. The event will be on October 31 from 6:30-8pm. It will provide a safe, free way for the kids in the community to celebrate Halloween. Volunteers will be filling bags with candy to distribute, dress in fun costumes to hand them out and direct traffic.

According to Karen Kelly, Sunday School at Fort Myers Congregational UCC has been Zooming since shortly after the pandemic changed “church,” encouraging challenges along the way but learning how to make it work. Beginning in July they created a routine doing a Bible study using The Jesus Storybook Bible. Teachers made sure each child has their own Bible, taking turns to read along having started right from the beginning in the Old Testament. The classes look for similarities and differences that may relate our lives today.

The Beatitudes

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Rally Day was held virtually via Zoom at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami on September 15 with teachers and kids receiving a “Be the Church” tee shirt.

Frolic Preschool with music and Sunday School for pre-K3 and pre-K4 at Coral Gables Congregational UCC runs from September 20-December 6 on Zoom. The activities are based on the New Testament stories of Jesus’ teachings using Frolic Preschool: Little Steps, Big Faith! Beginning Sunday, September 20, Rev. Megan Smith met via Zoom with Sunday School children exploring The Beatitudes using an illustrated curriculum. Trunk or Treat with Learning Center students and families is tentatively being planned by First United Church of Tampa (depending on the coronavirus) for Friday evening, October 30. If it is a “go,” decorated cars will be in the church parking lot where goodies will be distributed.

The Prophet -Abel thanks Joey for coming to Sunday School at First UCC/Orlando

Resources For Children

What’s So Amazing About Polar Bears? (Hammer, Evans & Blokland) is an interactive, ready-to-go resource for teaching creation care to elementary school-aged children. Each of the six lessons includes gathering time, sharing time, and activity time with an ecology theme, verse of the day, fun facts, and activities. $14.00 www.thepilgrimpress.com/products/what-s-so-amazing-about-polar-bears-teaching-kids-to-care-for-creation-hammer-evans-blokland

Randy Hammer and Suzanne Blokland explain important ecological and faith concepts through fun activities in God’s Blue Earth; each lesson is based on Biblical texts. $16.00 www.thepilgrimpress.com/products/gods-blue-earth