Now is the time to gather the church and to celebrate and recommit to our shared covenant as The United Church of Christ in Florida comes together online October 13-16 for the 2021 Annual Gathering of the Florida Conference United Church of Christ.

As the Delta variant of COVID-19 has led to a surge in cases and Florida has been hit particularly hard, we will be meeting virtually again this year via Zoom videoconference. There will be no cost to attend, but registration will be required. You are urged to register now here and attend sessions as you wish.

Join us on Zoom Wednesday, October 13, at 8pm for an opening vespers service entitled “Liberation Through Lament” led by Teña Nock-Hope (First United Church of Tampa). On Thursday, October 14, at 7pm we will say farewell to and celebrate the ministry of Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove among us.

At 7:45pm following the tribute to Dr. Raymond we will hear the keynote address, “Sea-change in the Modern Church: Navigating Rough Waters toward a New Horizon” presented by Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister of the Penn Central Conference of the UCC [see more about her on page 3]. Statistics illustrate the stark worship and membership trends of today’s UCC. Conferences face questions of decline and relevance. Yet there’s more to our story. As a people of promise and hope, how do we approach church status realistically? What adapt in a time of upheaval and change? God is calling us into a new future, and the trip requires our best navigational tools. What strategies might empower us for the journey ahead? Rev. Carrie will help us delve into the current state of the church, consider carefully where the Holy Spirit is at work and emerge better-equipped to move toward a thriving future.

On Friday at 7pm there will be a hearing on the proposed Florida Conference Budget for 2022. Finally, the business session will begin at 9am on Saturday and will include votes on the proposed budget, proposed revisions to the Florida Conference bylaws, and election of members of the Conference Board of Directors and its standing committees. We expect the business session to conclude by 1pm. It is important that the voting membership of the Conference (authorized ministers, members of the Florida Conference Board of Directors and lay delegates) attend the Saturday business session. For details on the voting membership of the Conference and lay delegates from local churches, please see Article III of the Florida Conference bylaws here.

The schedule for Workshop Wednesdays appears on pages 2-3. Zoom connection information for all Gathering sessions will be sent to all who have registered no later than October 11. Those who register after 1pm on October 11 will receive connection information in their registration confirmation e-mail.

Was this the summer of our discontent? Challenges. Opportunities. Time. To. Be. The. Church.
Wise Church Ministry — October 6

The WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged) Congregation for Mental Health Resolution was adopted at the UCC General Synod in 2015. The UCC Mental Health Network then developed the WISE Certification process. Shortly after, at the Annual Gathering of 2017, the Florida Conference became one of the first conferences in the UCC to resolve to become a WISE Conference.

Rev. Lisa LeSueur is the Minister of Congregational and Staff Care at Coral Gables Congregational UCC and a member of the Board of Directors of the UCC Mental Health Network.

This workshop will seek to identify ways in which local churches can become more intentional about incorporating mental health awareness into their ministries, the benefits that have come from increased awareness and more intentional ministries, and recommendations for starting the conversation(s) in your local church exploring what it means to become a WISE church.

Liberation through Lament — October 13

Join us at 8pm as we begin our 2021 Annual Gathering with an evening vespers service entitled, “Liberation through Lament.” It is our hope that in virtual community we will find and claim liberation through acknowledging our grief. Grief must be acknowledged; it is sacred it is connected to God. Grief is connected to God because God is love, and we are rooted in this love. It is the kind of love that endures. We would not be capable of grief if we were not capable of love. It is further proof of our humanity.

Teña Nock-Hope is originally from Washington, DC. She has lived all over the US from the East Coast to the Midwest because of having served in the United States Navy for 8½ years. Teña holds a B.A. in Psychology from USF and currently works at the James Haley VA Medical Center. Teña is a member of First United Church of Tampa where she formerly chaired the Communications Committee and was instrumental in expanding the use of social media to promote the message of God’s Love and extravagant welcome. She is a Member in Discernment and a graduate of PATHWAYS Theological Education Inc.

Anti-Racism Ministry — October 20

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey,” each of us carries a testimony and an opportunity that can be impactful in the work of Anti-Racism. Join members of the Anti-Racism Ministry Team of the Florida Conference to share wisdom and experiences of how the work of Anti-Racism begins with relational commitment and the prophetic willingness to be fully present in the work of restorative justice and a peace that more greatly resembles the Kin-dom.

Justice, Advocacy & Action — October 27

Join us for a conversation about doing justice right here in Florida. We’ve got voting rights concerns, environmental justice concerns, mass incarceration and death penalty concerns, a health care system that does not include nearly a million Floridians in the midst of a global pandemic, farm workers facing harassment and injustice...just to name a few. What can we do to press for expansion of voting rights rather than suppression of them? That might be a good place to start the conversation, but we’re open to other ideas too.

Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson is an activist on behalf...continued on following page
of human and civil rights, women’s rights and has been an advocate for peace with justice and ecumenism around the world, including serving as president of the North American region of the World Council of Churches for nine years. She just finished her term as co-president of HOPE (Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality) and still chairs its Criminal Justice Committee. Serving on the UCC national staff for nearly two decades, Pastor Bernice was the founding Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries and one of five officers of the denomination. She also served as Executive Director of the UCC Commission for Racial Justice. Prior to that, she served as the director of the Bishop Tutu Southern African Refugee Scholarship Fund, where she was also the Archbishop’s U.S. representative. Dr. Bernice is currently Pastor of First United Church of Tampa. She is a graduate of Wilson College and holds Master’s degrees from the Columbia University School of Journalism and Union Theological Seminary.

**Update from Immokalee — November 3**

Join us for our annual update on the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. We’ll include news about the ongoing Wendy’s boycott endorsed by the UCC and up-to-date information about actions we can take as a Conference to partner for farmworker justice.

**Preaching an Earth-Loving Jesus in a Time of Climate Emergency — November 10**

This workshop will explore the Earth-Loving Jesus and his kin-dom of God for preaching during climate change. We will explore the spiritual ecology of Jesus and kin-dom praxis and message in opposition to empire. Jesus represents a Hebrew Creation-centered spirituality that remained in opposition to empire in the Hebrew scriptures and against Roman colonization of the land. There are strong parallels of Jewish peasant relation to the land and indigenous peoples in North America. Both were connected to the land as divine gifts and dispossessed of their lands. Rev. Shore-Goss will provide an ecological paradigm of the Spirit-led Jesus and his kin-dom praxis, implementing the social dynamics of compassion.

**Small Church Is Not Less Church — November 17**

The majority of UCC churches now worship under 50 people on a given Sunday. How do we embrace the blessings of being small churches? This workshop will provide practical ideas to clarify, focus and empower the ministries of small churches. Case studies will enhance our discussions.

**Sacred Conversations to End Racism — December 1**

Come join a panel-led discussion by the members of the Florida Conference ARM Team who have completed or are participating in the UCC’s Sacred Conversation to End Racism Facilitator Training under the direction of Rev. Dr. Velda Love.

In 2018 Sacred Conversations to End Racism (SC2ER) — a Restorative Racial Justice Journey curriculum — was created to address and dismantle racism within the Christian Church and society. The study guide and resources offer lessons to dispel myths of white skin and dominant culture supremacy.

SC2ER includes restorative racial justice resources as a corrective to the historical and contemporary harm, injury and trauma enacted upon non-European descendants. The ongoing impact of racism and xenophobia in contemporary society requires Christians to commit to a journey of restoration and repair among God’s people impacted by individual and systemic oppression and marginalization.
Greetings, church.

As reported in the last issue, we undertook a study of staff size and duties when Dr. Hargrove retired. We learned that we have a big staff compared to many other conferences. We’ve lived in a kind of privilege in that regard.

As a result of our study and in light of the financial realities that call us to careful stewardship not only today but for the future, the Board of Directors has determined not to fill the vacant Regional Minister position at this time. This leads to a reconfiguring of staff duties among the ministerial staff of the Conference. Ministry staff shared two days of retreat during which we talked about how to function going forward and we came away with Venn diagrams, colorful notes and an energized spirit that makes excited about our shared future. We began our time reiterating our agreement that the purpose of the Florida Conference is to engage, equip and empower local congregations to be vital in their communities; thus, healthy relationships across the Conference are a priority.

Going forward, Rev. Leslie Etheredge, newly titled as Associate Conference Minister, will focus on all matters related to authorized ministry, Committee on Ministry functions and search and call activities throughout the Conference. She will also have responsibilities for care of congregations.

Neal Watkins will continue in a re-titled role as Minister for Congregational Life. He will have staffing oversight of several Conference-wide ministry teams as well as offering church retreats focusing on leadership, vision-casting, youth ministry, volunteer recruitment and renewal, rethinking worship in a new day and other such programmatic elements of our common life. He, like every team member, will have responsibilities for care of congregations.

I (John) will continue as Conference Minister and head of staff, liaison to the wider church and ecumenical bodies and lead administrator; I will adjust my portfolio to include a more structurally intentional focus on relationships across the Conference such that the whole staff team will share more visibly in responsibility for the health of our covenant in the Florida Conference.

There will be no adjustment to our support staff model at this time. Dave and Dana and Beth are providing us with great service for which we are grateful.

We are enthusiastic for this model. We are excited about our potential as a staff team and even more excited for what we believe will be a faithful level of service to each of our constituent congregations and pastors. While each church will no longer have “our regional minister,” they will now have “our conference staff team” who will reach out to maintain that vision of local and faithful vitality that is the hallmark of our common life in the Florida Conference.

We know we may encounter bumps in the road along the way. Please be patient with us as we live into a new day. When you have need of Conference services you may call any one of us or the Conference office and we will either help you on the spot or refer your need as appropriate.

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

The Restructured Conference Staff Team

Rev. John Vertigan
Conference Minister

You are invited to participate in the formation/development of several ministry teams that are intended to help develop community and provide resources/support for the local churches of the Florida Conference. These ministry teams embody the values and missions of the Florida Conference as determined at Annual Gatherings over the last few years.

The Creation Justice Ministry started (virtually) with a Zoom conversation gathering on Wednesday, September 22, to discuss how to proceed with the formation of a Florida Conference EcoJustice Ministry. It was led by Rev. Dr. Bob Shore-Goss, a retired UCC clergy/theologian who serves on the UCC Environmental Justice Council.

It is not too late to become a part of the collective effort! If you are interested in receiving sharing materials, learning more about the UCC’s process for a local church wishing to become identified as a “Creation Justice Congregation” or helping to organize throughout the Conference collective actions in response to our call to love creation, please contact me with any questions you may have (772/559-0875; nwatkins@uccfla.org).
In a recent Florida UCC Conference Board meeting, I lamented that in the future some may remember me as the “Virtual Moderator.” Since being elected as the Moderator of the Florida Conference, most of our business has been conducted virtually. All of our Board meetings have been via video conferencing and now our 2021 Annual Gathering will be virtual. For some individuals, having meetings via video conferencing is a good thing: no traveling hours across our large state, no hotel room stays and being away from family, being able to meet while driving and, sometimes, not having to get fully dressed!

For others, this time of a global pandemic, political and social unrest and living in a country where the topic of discussion has often been how divided we are, this virtual world has brought about a lot of fear, anxiety and mental stress. Humans are very used to gathering together, seeing each other in three dimensions and being able to enjoy friends and family. No video conferencing can take the place of that.

Some of our churches are worshipping in or around a Sanctuary. Others are still being cautious and having hybrid services or only using video conferencing. I trust that all of our churches have developed ways to help parishioners with the issues that may have developed through this life in a virtual world.

Peter reminded us in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” We, the Church, have a responsibility to help those we serve understand that faith and fear are not complementary.

Missing Your Clergy Connection?
New Groups Forming Now!

A COP (Communities of Practice) is a great way for clergy to connect and offer support to one another. Just so you know, the COP program was developed as part of the Pastoral Excellence initiative. It is dedicated to strengthening and sustaining excellent pastoral leaders for a lifetime of creative, effective service. Being a minister in any setting is often a lonely job, and the COPs encourage lifetime friendship, support and nurture as well as spiritual growth among the other four or five participants in each group. I have been a member of a COP for five years now, and the experience has been invaluable. I have learned and grown with other Associate Conference Ministers that have become very dear friends.

I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity for self-care and enrichment. Groups meet once a month virtually and commit to one year. We take this commitment seriously as the group is just not complete without all of its members.

Participation in the group is $250 (to pay the facilitator) and well worth it since you can’t put a price on your self-care. I am encouraging participants to appeal to their churches to pay this fee as part of honoring your self-care and their covenant with you. Currently about 1/3 of our pastors are in COPs. These groups have been a special blessing with the extra challenges the pandemic has brought on and lasting relationships have been formed. COPs have been so successful that search committees are advocating for their pastors to participate, even putting it in their call agreements.

When asked to be in a COP, one pastor said, “I’m hesitant to add yet one more thing to this crazy schedule we are living. It is exactly for that reason I say ‘I’m in!’ Not doing a great job of self-care these days.” (Rev. Mike Ford, Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda) Think on that one. Please let me know soon if you are interested in being a part. I’d love to hear from you (letheredge@uccfla.org).
Adapting to New Responsibilities

REV. LESLIE ETHEREDGE
ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER

Post-sabbatical — I think I still remember sabbatical! I do and am forever grateful to the Florida Conference for the gift of my time to relax and rejuvenate — has been filled with Committee on Ministry (COM) work, boundary training, many long awaited face-to-face visits and much Search and Call work.

Solo staffing my first statewide COM meeting recently gave me pause as I pondered the significance of the work this committee does toward the oversight and support of all authorized ministers in our Conference. This committee is composed of some of the most dedicated volunteers I’ve ever been associated with, I am honored to work with those that are called to this important ministry.

Tasked with Search and Call for the whole state now (and I LOVE this part of the job!), there are many churches in various stages of the search process. Where I was committed to maintaining boundaries to get the most out of my sabbatical, I chose to maintain contact with these churches even during that time. The work done by these dedicated (about 20) pastors — and of course many virtual church and some “in person” services parishioners — as such devoted search committee participants, can’t be understated and everybody (Conference and laity) knows the importance of working together to get it right.

I look forward to an autumn of much activity, filled with ordinations, installations and some tough goodbyes as there will be services of release for several beloved pastors. Though they will be missed, we celebrate the exciting new chapters that lie ahead for them.

I STILL love my job. God is STILL good. Glad to be back. Hoping to see you all at our Annual Meeting.

Wishing you all God’s peace.

Engagement through Faith Formation

BY NEAL WATKINS
MINISTER FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Perhaps this is the most difficult time in the modern era to plan ahead. As of our May Board meeting, I was planning to “hit the road again” with the gusto of restoring relationship contacts in a face-to-face way. I was planning the details of an Annual Gathering and a Fall Youth Retreat. In all of this, it becomes apparent to me that while we plan for the future, we must also make the most of the opportunities to be fully present with the ways that the Spirit is moving that compel us to connect to one another and to the story of our faith — different than we expected, but powerful and necessary nonetheless.

My engagement in relationships through Faith Formation can be categorized by levels. Here are some highlights:

Local Church Partnerships This involves strategic discernment/Faith Formation/worship objectives (including multiple Zooms/engagements and conversations in process). This opportunity is most difficult to describe because it is always an individualized concept that is tailored to the needs/contexts/creativities of each church. The timing is different. The objective is different. But it is always richly rewarding to have the opportunity to ask together, “What is the unique offering that our church has to provide to our community?”

In addition, I have been doing quite a bit more pulpit supply for local churches throughout the Conference. Though I appreciate opportunities to attend worship as a way of conveying gratitude and an opportunity to develop relationships, when asked “How can the Florida Conference support you and your ministries?”, pulpit supply was one of the needs lifted up by many Conference clergy I have spoken with.

Conference-wide Ministry Teams The below ministries represent both opportunities that I would like you to get involved in (if so inclined) and folks who I am blessed to work with in the fulfilling, designing and formation of several exciting ministries.

Anti-Racism Ministry Team The team is currently meeting twice a month developing models for local church empowerment around the study and training conversations, developing “niche” presentation offerings for local churches and regions and developing the curriculum for the training of Committee on Church & Ministry (COCAM) members and other Conference leadership bodies. It also hosts a weekly “Sacred Conversation to End Racism” (SC2ER) via Zoom open to all members and guests of the Conference. This team has just returned from an in-person retreat designed to develop relationships and discern how to transition the year of discernment and training into tangible resources for the local churches of the Conference. The vulnerable, intense, relational and contextual nature of this ministry makes it difficult to “franchise” and “summarize” curriculum, and yet the urgency is severe. This group is excited to demonstrate its ideas, offerings and connections throughout the Conference at this October’s Annual Gathering.

Youth Ministry Task Force Currently this group is in the discernment phase related to a potential Fall Retreat to be held November 5-7. I am thrilled to report that JupiterFIRST Church is graciously offering their campus and leadership teams for this event. Not only does this build new relationships in a dynamic area of our Conference (regionally), but it also allows us the opportunity to be flexible in terms of registrations because catering and housing will be handled “in-house.” Unfortunately, with the continuation of COVID conditions (as of posting this), the potential remains
that this retreat is postponed until the spring. Please pray for the Faith Formation leaders throughout the Conference and do pass along any contact info for folks who might benefit from this network of youth leaders.

Core leadership individuals have been identified for both a WISE Ministry Committee, an Environmental Justice Committee and also a Conference-wide Justice Action & Advocacy Network. I encourage you to read about “Workshop Wednesdays” that will be presented in conjunction with our Annual Gathering for ways that you can become involved!

There are times when I wonder if we are more isolated than ever as people throughout this world or if we are connecting in ways never known before. Perhaps it is both. I pray that from either side of how you understand the coin that we will be in touch and have conversation about how we can embrace God’s movement among us and do more to join together and see what will happen next!

I hope to see you soon!

Conference Minister’s “Open Office Hour” Via Zoom

I hosted an open office hour Wednesday, August 11, via Zoom to greet church members for a quick hello or a lengthier time of conversation. My agenda item was to be present and available to listen during this time. That’s all. The invitation was for you to stop by for a moment or a while. The Zoom link was open from 11am-noon.

Join me as we battle the renewed sense of isolation that is coming upon us in these more-and-more uncertain times. Maybe you’ll bring a favorite verse from scriptures or another word of hope. These days, I’ve been holding fast in my ministry by remembering 1 Chronicles 28:20, which says, “David also said to Solomon, his son, ‘Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.’”

[Note: Rev. Vertigan is having more “Open Office Hours” with the next two scheduled for Wednesday, October 6, and Wednesday, November 3. Here is the link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83492105197 ]

Adapted from Conference Minister’s e-blast, August 4

Actions Noted by the Conference Minister at the August Board of Directors Meeting

The Board considered a proposed Conference budget for 2022 and took special note of the years-long decline in giving from local churches that has brought us to an inflection point in our common life. Noting that the retirement of Rev. Dr. Hargrove left us with an open position, the Board deemed it timely to not fill that position at this time and sent the budget back to committee for retooling and presentation at the annual meeting. This was a difficult decision and not one made lightly.

Current ministry staff held a two-day retreat the next week to reorganize and redistribute our work in light of this new reality. Our emphasis on relationship and service to local churches and all of our authorized ministers remains, and we are structuring ourselves toward keeping that value at the center of our mission and ministry. Stay tuned for announcements in this regard as we get ourselves reorganized [see Conference Minister’s column on page 3]. In the short term, if you have need or want of Conference resources and don’t know who to call, please phone or e-mail the Conference office, and we’ll direct you accordingly. The Board has assured us we will revisit this topic in the coming year.

Other business included the Conference joining a UCC consortium of Latinx ministries that is organizing on a national level, seeking counsel on the Charles Burns Fund and the restrictions on that fund that significantly limit its use for ministry in the Conference, and approving the formation of a development and philanthropy task force to engage the affinities and passions of potential donors to ministries that lift up our vision of empowering vital faith communities across Florida. Perhaps you are one such donor; I’d be happy to engage with you to meet your needs.

This was an important meeting. Thank you to Board members who provide volunteer leadership to the steering of our organizational life. Your service and ministry is appreciated.

From “Conference Call,” in e-Celebrate, August 18
Special Pastoral Assistants

Fort Myers Congregational UCC welcomed its new Community Minister Brooks Applegate on August 1. Brooks became its second Community Minister since the church designated itself a teaching church in 2018. Brooks will get practical experience in general pastoral ministry from preaching to pastoral care. Additionally, he will work with students at area colleges, oversee the GROW program and facilitate the assimilation of newest members into church life. Brooks, formerly a member of Naples UCC, was a high school English teacher at Bonita Springs High School and will be attending Union Theological Seminary remotely starting this fall.

In early September the Church Council at St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota invited Rev. Joelle Johns, an ordained Interfaith Minister with a Masters in Divinity, to serve as a part-time Minister Intern for 16 weeks. She is currently taking a Clinical Pastoral Education course, which asks ministers to stretch into various settings where they can be of service. She will work under Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan’s supervision to assist in worship, make some visits, represent St. Andrew at community meetings and learn some administrative responsibilities at St. Andrew. Rev. Joelle, her two daughters and son and husband reside in Sarasota.

The summer internship at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park, of Chance Martinez-Colon, a Member in Discernment and member of Spring Hill UCC, came to an end in August. In a message in the church’s August newsletter, he wrote: “You will likely never know the positive impact you have all had on my future ministry... I am thankful for each and every one of you. You have encouraged me, embraced me, welcomed me, and you have allowed me the brave space that I needed to grow. You have been a great example to me of how to ‘be the church’ even when ‘church’ looks very different than it did pre-pandemic.” At SHUCC he is now providing leadership as the church transitions to a new pastor.

Congregational UCC/Sarasota has announced that the congregation has hired Annika Fuller to serve as a part-time Ministry Associate. Annika is a freshman at New College/Sarasota who grew up in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tradition (both her grandfathers were DoC pastors in Florida). A gifted singer/songwriter who plays several instruments, Annika was a worship leader at Palm Lake Christian Church/St. Petersburg. She also has extensive camp ministry experience and presently serves on both regional and national youth and young adult committees for the DoC. As Ministry Associate, Annika’s responsibilities will include: assisting with worship planning and leadership; helping facilitate the Messy Church ministry; exploring the possibility of a contemporary worship service during the week with a particular focus on serving area college students.

Consider Donating to the Conference

There are several ways to give, and your generosity will be greatly appreciated. Please click below to go to our website and make your selection:

- Donate as a Friend to support the current operating expenses of the Florida Conference
- Make an enduring gift to the Church Redevelopment Fund to revitalize and renew programs and innovative projects in our local churches
- Make a Legacy Gift of cash, securities, or property to provide perpetual support of a Florida Conference Mission you embrace.
- I wish to discuss this gift in more detail with Florida Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan

Rev. Dr. Jim Prickett, former pastor of Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg, died at home on September 1 in Indiana. He helped to found Habitat for Humanity International in 1976.

Jewel Horn passed away July 23 after a long bout with Alzheimer’s disease. She was the wife of Rev. Dr. Daniel Horn, previous Pastor of Spring Hill UCC. Rev. Dan now lives in Roswell, GA.
“How Can You Tell a Church Is UCC?” New Web Page Has 8 Ways

BY HANS HOLZNAGEL  
UCC NEWS, AUGUST 9

How can you tell a church is UCC? There are many ways. One of them is by the commitments it makes.”

Those words kicked off a recent video introducing a United Church of Christ “Just World Covenants” web page. The new “online hub of justice resources” is a collection of all the special “covenant” programs that local churches can belong to.

It’s the first time these programs — some of them in existence for decades — have all been listed, with links, in one place.

This section of the new web page lists the eight “Just World Covenants” available to local churches. Committing to even just one of the eight programs can transform a church’s life, according to pastors who spoke in the video. The two-minute spot appeared multiple times during the UCC’s online General Synod in July.

How to Work for “A Just World”

Grouped under the heading “A Portal for Transformational Ministries,” the programs invite congregations to officially become any of these:

- Accessible to All
- Creation Justice Church
- Economic Justice Church
- Global Mission Church
- Immigrant Welcoming Church
- Just Peace Church
- Open and Affirming (to LGBTQ+ people)
- WISE Church (welcoming, inclusive, supportive and engaged in matters of mental health)

The programs all have three things in common, said the Rev. Brooks Berndt, who headed a national staff working group to create the new page:

- They offer specific ways for congregations to live out the UCC vision statement: “United in Christ’s love, a just world for all.”
- Each emerged in response to one or more General Synod actions.
- Each is “covenantal” in nature, requiring a congregation’s study and commitment.

“These programs are about sacred commitments to God, to each other and to the world in which we live,” Berndt said during a pre-Synod workshop. “They are made with prayer and with careful deliberation and discernment.”

The page also offers links to three more “transformational programs for a just world”:
- Our Faith, Our Vote
- Our Whole Lives
- Sacred Conversations to End Racism

“Be Better Christians”

“When churches become transformed, a movement starts,” Berndt said in his role as narrator of the “Just World Covenants” Synod video. Pastors in the video testified to the power of the programs in their congregations. This 2-minute promotional video describes the programs and includes brief testimonials.

“Becoming a Just Peace Church has made a tremendous difference in our congregation,” said the Rev. Sheila Guillaume, senior pastor of Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach, which embraced the designation in 2014.

At Claremont (Calif.) UCC, the “A2A” process has been about more than disability-related issues, said its senior co-pastors. “I think starting the conversation about becoming accessible to all is really an invitation to the entire church to learn how to be better Christians,” said the Rev. Jacob Buchholz. “And one of the things that our denomination is becoming more and more known for is saying, ‘Everybody’s in, everybody’s welcome — and not just saying that, but demonstrating that,’” said the Rev. Jennifer Strickland.

“Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church has meant the world to us here in the desert,” said the Rev. Randy Mayer, senior pastor of The Good Shepherd UCC, Sahuarita, Ariz., active in ministries along the U.S.-Mexico border.

“If You Think of Justice, Think of UCC”

During the pre-Synod workshop, Berndt also spoke of the symbolic importance of grouping the programs online.

“Justice isn’t something that can be compartmentalized into different boxes,” he said. “There’s one box over here for economic justice, another for environmental justice? No, it’s not like that. The many strands, ropes and threads of justice are all intertwined.

“That’s why it’s particularly exciting that we present all eight of these justice programs together, in one online hub of justice resources for local churches.”
We Must Not Turn Our Back on Afghanistan

Excerpt of Statement by UCC Leadership
UCC News, August 17

“As he came near and saw the city, Jesus wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:41-2)

We write with profound grief at the news of the Taliban takeover of Kabul and fall of the Afghan government...

To the resilient people of Afghanistan, we grieve with you and stand by you.... We confess our nation’s failure in not centering Afghan leadership more and finding a way to build a durable peace over these twenty years. We repent our contribution to this cycle of violence, and we will not turn away from your suffering. We commit to actively engage our policymakers to see to it that our nation does not abandon you...

To our active military, veterans, peace-builders, aid workers, and civil servants who have served and worked to aid Afghanistan, we are grateful for your service and sacrifice. Because of your efforts, many benefited from improved security, education, and a more robust civil society that included the leadership of women. We call on our congregations to extend a compassionate welcome to support you in your grief and trauma. We pray the seeds of hope and progress planted over these last 20 years continue to take root.

Training for UCC Churches: Serving Afghan Refugees
Presented September 11, 5-6:30pm

This hour and a half training builds on the new toolkit Welcoming and Advocating for Afghan SIVs and Other Afghan Refugees (Special Immigrant Visa) which is tailored for UCC congregations that want to engage effectively in support for Afghan SIVs and other Afghan refugees being resettled to the United States.

The training included stories and insights from refugees resettled by UCC churches, UCC churches who have built successful refugee ministries, and migration professionals concerning effective ways that churches can make an impact.

Presenters included: Seo Conrad, a former refugee from Laos; Rev. Carolyn Lambert from the Maine Council of Churches; Irene W. Hassan of UCC Refugee and Migration Services; Katie Adams of the UCC Washington, D.C., Domestic Policy Advocacy Office.

They offered tailored resources for UCC congregations to take action and take questions from churches wanting to build responsive ministries. Participants walked away with confidence for action in response to the call to help.

Missed the presentation and need more information? Contact Irene Hassan, UCC Minister for Refugee and Migration Services, at hassani@ucc.org.

As a Just Peace Church, we proclaim with prophetic hope that “peace is possible.” We are not about to stop believing that today. Let us hold on to the hope that peace is possible and commit ourselves not only to keeping our Afghan siblings in prayer, but also to committing: our churches to welcome refugees; our voices to engage in advocacy; our hearts to establish partnerships; and our minds and bodies to support the “things that make for peace.”

Faithfully, The National Officers of the United Church of Christ

The Rev. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President

The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson
Associate General Minister, Wider Church Ministries and Operations

The Rev. Traci Blackmon
Associate General Minister, Justice and Local Church Ministries
Remembering 9/11

As we approach the 20th anniversary, the wounds are still fresh and in need of healing. But we also know that the suffering that came from that day is no longer a suffering we bear alone. The news and images of Afghani families being slaughtered, tortured, and imprisoned in their homeland while waiting for a disappearing America to come to their rescue is heart-breaking. Long after this war began, a war built on American rage and eschewing the global empathy that was there to be exploited for common gain and good, we were asking hard questions about why we were there, what we accomplished, and what we are leaving behind in our wake. Time and history may indeed conspire to reveal that we had other options, ones that bore more hope for better outcomes both at home and abroad.

It is our hope and our prayer that this 20th anniversary will rekindle within us all a desire less to retaliate than to heal, less to avenge than to understand. The world is awash with over 82 million refugees, a figure only exacerbated by wars that devastate. Terror is not only something to be grieved and avenged; it is as well something to be understood. Behind every terror attack is a history of someone else’s long-suffering. An emerging fear in the aftermath of the 20-year war in Afghanistan is what it has done to exacerbate both their long-suffering circumstances and our complicity in creating them.

What are our pathways to understanding the root causes of terror? Where is the journey that leads to a new understanding of how we live in peace as a human, global community in which every action produces a reaction? What is a gospel that speaks of forgiveness, kindness to the stranger, love of enemy, and compassion for all calling us to do and be as disciples of the risen Christ?

We, the Elected Officers of the United Church of Christ, call for and invite a turning towards the ways that make for peace between all peoples. Let us unlearn the ways of war. Let us no longer cultivate fear for the purchase of political power. Let us be eager to know both the conditions that make for suffering, and the requisite empathy needed to alleviate it.

We call for continued prayers for those grieving loved ones who died in the attacks on September 11, for whom this anniversary will serve to re-open their healing wounds.

We name our complicity with the ways in which a centered Christianity in America has authorized Islamophobia and marginalized Muslim peoples.

And finally, we embrace the hope that people of faith will unite in a common love for all. That love is the only pathway we see to the vision we have of a just world for all.

Can Fundraising be Ministry?
Can Stewardship be Spiritual?

The CGC Seminar for pastors and leaders offers an opportunity to explore faithful, practical, and tested ways to promote generosity in our congregations. Be sure to recruit at least a team of two for this program. Changing the culture of your congregation requires more than one dedicated leader.

The seminar meetings for the CGC will be held on Tuesdays – Sept. 21, Oct. 5 & 19, and Nov. 2, 16, & 30. Seminars are from 6:30pm – 8:00pm Eastern Standard Time. There will be readings, videos and reflections to complete in-between seminar meetings.

The registration fee is $300 per team and due at the time of your online registration. There is a minimum of 2 people per team. The registration fee is $150 per additional participant.

The course will be hosted on the Damascus Project Network, an online educational platform. Information on accessing the online course site and zoom connection information will be provided after your registration.

Learn more and register at: https://cvent.me/VnEgLK
Here are the takeaways from his article, “Tech Anew.” Check it out to see how Rev. Haas came to these conclusions:


† There are still Christians out there who are looking for meaningful community. It’s up to your church to find innovative ways to reach them!

† Your church needs to make giving as easy as possible. Offering online giving is a great way to help boost tithing and gain financial stability for your church.

† The need for communication and conversation across a variety of divides is an essential part of the church’s future.

† A crisis can be an opportunity to deepen faith and religious practices for some.

† Your church might see more visitor traffic when offering online worship options.

† Even when folks can attend in-person worship, you’re still able to reach far more people with online worship options, which can lead to growth offline and increased giving.

† Your members don’t actually have to be in your church to be a part of your church. They can participate and donate in many of the same ways as your in-person members, helping your church grow globally.

† Your pastor may not be the best person to “run the tech.” Dedicating a person to the ministry of making church accessible has emerged as a new best practice.

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

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

Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC): www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com/


Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): www.gracetraces.blogspot.com/

Rev. Shawn Garvey (First Congregational Church/Winter Park): www.fccwp.org/blog/


Rev. Jim Coyl (Pensacola Beach Community UCC): www.jamescoyl.com

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

Rev. Dr. Anna Verlee Copeland (Community Church of Vero Beach) https://ccovb.org/rev-dr-anna-verlee-copelands-blog/

Rev. George Miller (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring) https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/
Music and the Arts

The movie “Like Arrows” was shown at North Port Community UCC on Saturday afternoon, August 14.

The film “Wild Florida,” first shown on PBS, was offered by Naples UCC on Thursday, August 26, with participants invited to gather afterwards at a local restaurant. On September 23 “Surviving Lunch” was shown, a film about bullying in high school that was written and directed by a local filmmaker.

Summer Music Night at Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami on Saturday evening, August 21, featured Ryan and Cindy Ellis presenting “Walk in the Garden” – a performance of traditional hymns in a jazz/Latin style.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota on Sunday, August 1, welcomed in worship guest musician Marco Jimenez, a pianist/ violinist/organist who was a member of the Sarasota Youth Philharmonic for the last five years as well as its concertmaster. Drumming as a spiritual practice continues at the church as a way participants can explore ways the rhythm of the Holy moves in and through us. A drum circle meets at the United Church of Gainesville twice a month, and the drum circle at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami (pictured) on July 11 demonstrated how we enter God’s rhythm of life through the ministry of music and rhythm.

“Movie Night” returned to Fort Meyers Congregational UCC on Sunday, September 26, with a discussion on Zoom of “Parasite,” the Academy Award winner for Best Picture in 2019. Due to the uptick in COVID, it was not shown in-person and those interested in the film were encouraged to arrange to watch it before joining the Zoom discussion.

“The Chosen,” a 2019 video series, was shown over succeeding Sunday afternoons at Pilgrim Congregational UCC/St. Petersburg.

The Music Ministry at UCC/Fort Lauderdale has as its vision for Christmas 2021 a concert that will include its Choir and a symphony. To help fund it, the church is hosting The Pennington Show’s “Bedtime Stories from the Piano” with multiple performances during September and October. “We Are Family,” a presentation by the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men’s Chorus, was held at the church on Saturday evening, September 18.

The guest soprano soloist in worship at Naples UCC on August 22 was Dr. Jeanie Darnell from Florida Gulf Coast’s Bower School of Music. The next Sunday vocalist/pianist Rebecca Richardson, guitarist/bassist Dan Heck and drummer James Kerwin performed through a gift generously underwritten by the Musical Gift Fund. On September 5 flutist Blair Francis Paponiu, with the Naples Philharmonic, was featured, again courtesy of the gift fund.
Virtual Retreat Preview of 2022 UCC Southern Regional Women’s Retreat

The Planning Committee for the 2021 UCC Southern Regional Women’s Retreat has been hard at work. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee postponed the in-person retreat originally planned for October 2021 to October 2022 and a virtual afternoon retreat was added to the schedule for this October. The virtual retreat, “God of Mystery – Spirit of Hope (Romans 12:12-13)” will be on ZOOM on Saturday, October 2, from 1-4pm. The registration deadline is September 27; if you’ve missed it and would still like to participate, contact Barb Coons at 239/549-8283.

This program will provide an overview of the October 14-16, 2022, “In Person” UCC Southern Regional Women’s Retreat to be held at Camp Weed in Live Oak. There will be a chance to fellowship and worship with old and new friends from all parts of the Southern region (area from Texas to Virginia). Guest speaker/presenter for both retreats will be Rev. Dr. Georgia A. Thompson, UCC Associate General Minister of Wider Church Ministries and Co-Executive for Global Ministries.

Interested UCC women are encouraged to watch at home or any location, by yourself or with a group of fellow UCC Women. The cost is $15 for mailed registration or $16 online registration. The proceeds will be divided between a scholarship for the on-site event in 2022 and the Miracles Outreach Community Development Center in Tampa. For a flyer, mail-in registration form or to register online, click here.

UCC Women Around the State

CCC Women at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami met via Zoom for their monthly meeting in September to have a discussion of New York Times bestseller The Henna Artist by Alka Joshi.

The Anam Cara Women’s Circle at Faith UCC/Dunedin participated in the Autumn Equinox Labyrinth Walk on Wednesday evening, September 22, on the grounds of a nearby Episcopal Church for a time of reflection, gratitude and energy renewal.

All women at Spring Hill UCC were invited to participate in an eight-week spiritual deepening workshop. During this time together, participants had the opportunity to learn and practice time-honored Christian disciplines: prayer, community building, meditative reading and the sharing of reflections. The goal is to deepen and strengthen prayer life and relationship with God. There is no cost for the series, which began on Thursday afternoon, September 16. The facilitator is Linda Bixby, a retired UCC Christian education specialist.

The Women’s Fellowship at Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey enjoyed a visit on Friday afternoon, September 17, with Roslyn Franken, author of Meant to Be, the true saga of her parents’ unlikely survival, love and triumph over tragedy.

The First Congregational UCC/Winter Park Women, Come Alive! enjoyed summer events that included a wine and dessert social on the church patio in August and pizza and games at an outside picnic pavilion in September. On Saturday morning, October 16, they will experience a Winter Park scenic boat tour.

Pilgrim Women at Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte assembled on Thursday morning, September 16 to consider “Women of the Covenants,” focusing on Sarah and Hagar.

The First Congregational Women’s Association at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota has on its upcoming agenda an October gathering with Pastor Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby sharing a sneak peek at his upcoming 52-week “Devotional for Husbands,” a November meeting with a speaker from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and a December session preparing their traditional holiday “Shoeboxes for (shut-in) Seniors.”

The topic for discussion at the September meeting (in-person and via Zoom) of Women Engage! (WE!) at Naples UCC was “Vaccines: Scientific, Cultural and Religious Considerations.”

Women on a Faith Journey at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach meet weekly for fellowship, prayer and reading and in September discussed the Adam Hamilton book Moses, discovering how the reluctant prophet blazed a trail of faith.
T&T has leased a portion of the property of the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine and erected a cell tower. The needle, which now stretches toward to sky after three long years of waiting, will benefit the congregation with the gift of monthly income of $1,050/month during the first year (then increasing by $50 per month). There will also be improvements to the driveway, some additional parking and space for a garden that can utilize an existing operational well. The tower also provides high speed internet to the south end of town, which includes Gamble Rogers Middle School, where high speed Internet was not previously available. All in all, it’s a win/win for all.

The aluminum can recycling effort at the Beach Church/Pensacola Beach recently added $150 to the church’s building fund.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon has entered into a contract for the sale of its parsonage parcel of land, the proceeds of which will completely pay off the church’s mortgage.

The church council at St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota has accepted a proposal of $13,267 to replace and bring all lightning rods up to code on the Sanctuary, Stewart Hall and office roofs. The Narthex and Sanctuary have been inspected by a mold and mildew expert, which recommended vent cleaning; no areas of mold were detected.

Members at Spring Hill UCC have been out of their Sanctuary since July of 2019. A severe roof leak required the roof to be replaced and the steeple taken down, and then they had to wait two years for the insurance settlement to be resolved. So now the interior of the Sanctuary is being addressed. During the time away from the Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall was used for worship, which had been the original worship space before the current Sanctuary was constructed. Meanwhile, Rich Ives brought his Red Reggio to mow some of the church’s back property.

As of mid-August, new cameras and a television were installed and operational at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota.

In mid-August, rocks were used to break the glass in four of UCC/Fort Lauderdale’s exterior exit doors from the lobby. There was also vandalism at some of the businesses in the shopping center across the street. A local TV station reported on the incident and the next day the owner of Bob’s Glass Door & Repairs, who had seen the report, came to the church to help out. The repairs for the four doors should have cost $2,500-$3,000, but he generously offered to repair the four for $1,200, which was basically his cost for the glass and labor for the major repair job. Pastor Rev. Patrick Rogers explains that the love expressed surrounding this act of violence demonstrates that God and God’s love is indeed “Still Speaking.”

The Sanctuary roof at First UCC/Orlando has been replaced as well as the roofs on the out buildings. All damaged wood due to leaks has been replaced. The work was done thanks to the generosity of contributions and pledges to the current capital campaign. Because of the urgency of this project to prevent future leaks, it was deemed necessary to proceed with the work now utilizing the insurance company reimbursement and other church funds.

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park has received a grant from the Presbytery (Good Sam is a union congregation) to purchase all of the tech equipment used for hybrid worship. Its new AV booth is a generous free hand-me-down gift from St. Andrew Presbyterian Church/Dunedin.

Rev. Bromleigh McClenghan, in a September 3 newsletter reported that the leadership at the United Church of Gainesville has decided to use the $112,900 available thanks to its participation in the Payroll Protection Plan. It was decided to use the funds in ways that would make a sizable impact, would serve multiple constituencies and would contribute to the long term sustainability of UCG. Decisions were made to tithe 10% ($11,290) to an as-yet-to-be-determined agency or ministry in the Gainesville community. Another 10% will go to the capital reserve fund, which might help offset some of any budget shortfalls in the coming year. The remaining 80% (or just over $90,000) will be used to renovate and update the church’s Education wing. This focus for funding was selected for several reasons as children, youth and various groups use these classrooms and restrooms. The current condition of these rooms is such that they serve as a barrier to participation for as they are dirty, dated, in some cases dangerous and uninviting. Not only will these rooms — with new lighting and electrical, floors, paint and fixtures — allow the church to serve UCG’s youngest members and render them more accessible (in particular to the neurologically-challenged members of the community) but they also increase the capacity for rental income and programming. An estimate for the scope of work will be discussed at the October 3 congregational meeting.
As the ARM (Anti-Racism Ministry) of the Florida Conference nears the end of its first year of activities, we’d like to share some activities that are coming up:

**October 16:** During the Annual Gathering ARM will have the opportunity to give a brief report.

**October 20 at 7pm:** Workshop Wednesday ministry team members will be available to engage in conversation and answer questions.

**December 1 at 7pm:** Workshop Wednesday we will share a Sacred Conversation to End Racism (SC2ER) hosted by ARM.

On September 30 registration opened for SC2ER facilitator training with Rev. Dr. Velda Love, UCC Minister for Racial Justice. Space is limited, so if you are interested keep an eye on this website: [https://www.ucc.org/sacred_conversations_to_end_racism/facilitator_application/](https://www.ucc.org/sacred_conversations_to_end_racism/facilitator_application/)

In October the UCC Racial Justice Ministries will launch their new website, which promises to be filled with resources. We encourage you to join the movement by taking a few minutes to check it out: [https://jointhemovementucc.org/](https://jointhemovementucc.org/)  [https://www.ucc.org/racial-justice-ministries/](https://www.ucc.org/racial-justice-ministries/)

You are also invited to join us on Thursdays at 2:30 for a Sacred Conversation to End Racism (SC2ER). Zoom Meeting ID: 969 1122 0983, passcode ARM

We look forward to linking ARM with you!

Neal Watkins at 772/59-0875; NWatkins@uccfla.org

Donna Cooney: 386/244-4336; DCooney236@gmail.com

The Racial Justice Committee at the United Church of Gainesville has scheduled an all-church read of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* by Isabel Wilkerson. Four small groups are being offered beginning in September as Zoom book discussions. A variety of dates and times will be available. The church’s ministers will be preaching on various topics of racial justice in the fall.

Members of the United Church in Tallahassee participated in the Community Remembrance Project historical marker dedication on July 17 of three known and many other victims of racial terrorism murder in Leon County over the decades. Public officials gave inspiring messages with Equal Justice Initiative partners telling the history of lynching and racial violence in clear, concise terms.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota is welcoming all to the launch of their journey to better understand White Privilege/Racial Justice (WP/RJ). Their first source of learning was a short video on YouTube recommended by the UCC’s *White Privilege — Let’s Talk* study guide; a link was provided. A discussion took place at a Zoom coffee hour on Sunday, September 19. Feedback from the congregation was received by the WP/RJ committee to further planning for future educational opportunities.

“5 Things You Should Know about Racism” Decoded with Franchesca Ramsey was shared:

1. Good People Can Unintentionally Say and Do Racist Things
2. Race is a Social Construct But That Doesn’t Mean Racism Isn’t Real
3. Colorblindness Is Not Going To Fix Racism
4. Reverse Racism Is Not a Thing
5. Racism Isn’t Just About Individuals, It’s About Institutional Power

“When love is the lens through which we see the world, justice is possible.” - Rev. Traci Blackmon

Can you imagine a church free of racism and a world where all people live without fear of violence or systems that harm God’s human creation? The United Church of Christ invites you to Join the Movement toward racial justice as we answer God’s call to be an anti-racist church. Here, we will share stories and grow together, learning from one another to build a just world for all.

Join the Movement website launches in October 2021. The full campaign website will launch later in 2021 with the following features:

- Monthly highlights of churches engaged in anti-racism work across the denomination
- Access to learning resources and anti-racism curricula
- Regular updates on the UCCB Racial Justice Assessment
- Information on local and national policies creating racial injustices

**Read Stories**  **Receive Notifications**
In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality. We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.

As you read through these brief descriptions, do you note any which sound like programs or opportunities you would like to consider for your own congregation? If so, please feel free to contact our Conference staff or the Pastors and staff of those churches to learn about people, curricula, materials and other resources that could be available to you. We will continue to share as we learn more from you. Here are a few more happenings. Please continue to participate in this conversation by contacting us at RickCarson1@gmail.com

Time for Conversations...

The second bi-monthly community conversation held at Emmanuel UCC/Sebring in August was on the theme of Women’s Equality Day, an annual celebration of women’s right to vote, which occurred on August 26, 1920. Speaker Millie Grime, a women’s rights advocate, noted some of the courageous women who were strong advocates for equal rights over the past 100 years. She also shared some history behind the Equal Rights Amendment.

Native American Sunday was celebrated at Windermere Union Church on Sunday, September 26. Featured were Native American culture and music with an exhibit of artifacts and a lesson and craft for children. The community was invited.

On September 5 Fort Myers Congregational UCC hosted a visit from the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers who were there to discuss the ongoing struggles with COVID-19 in Immokalee, the latest news in the Wendy’s protest campaign and to invite the congregation to continue standing in solidarity with them at a local Wendy’s protest that afternoon in Naples. Church members are invited to join the Women’s March Fort Myers on Saturday, October 2, for a peaceful protest and demonstration at the Lee County Justice Center regarding recent lawmaking involving abortion.
First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
(June)
The Words of the Ancient Prayer of Jesus

Faith UCC/Dunedin
(August/September)
Famous Biblical ‘Couples’

UCC/Fort Lauderdale
(August)
Hunger and Thirst

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
(September)
Calling: Various Stories of God
Calling People to New Places

United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine
(August)
The Gospel According to the Beatles

United Church of Gainesville
(September)
Return, Reunite, Reimagine

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park
(September/October)
Where Are You From? Where Does It Hurt?: A Series for Curiosity, Courage and Connection

Spring Hill UCC
(September)
The Power of WE

The Beach Church/Pensacola Beach
(September/October)
The Divine Conspiracy — Inspired by the Work of Dallas Willard

A Richness of Opportunities
Your Invitation to be Informed — Inspired — Transformed

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UCC Included in $5M Study of COVID and the Church

BY HANS HOLZNAGEL
UCC NEWS, AUGUST 2

The United Church of Christ and its local churches will play a role in a major study of the impact of COVID-19. “Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations” will last five years. It will research “how congregations are changing, innovating, and establishing new ministry practices” in response to COVID-19. Ten denominations will collaborate in the five-year study, which now has its own website.

The Hartford Institute for Religion Research announced the project July 26. A grant of $5.3 million from the Lilly Endowment will fund it.

UCC Involvement

Ten denominations are collaborating in the study. As one of them, the UCC will be involved in two ways, said Erica Dollhopf, director of the UCC’s Center for Analytics, Research and Development, and Data. Responses from UCC churches will be part of the study. CARDD will assist in the project’s overall data analysis.

The study will report findings from across denominations. But it will also yield useful “UCC-specific data” about “the trends we see emerging within our own denomination,” she said. Funding from the Lilly grant will help cover expenses CARDD incurs in the study.

How Churches Can Take Part

Churches and pastors of any denomination who are interested in taking part can fill out this form at the study’s website. CARDD will also recruit UCC participants and offer updates on the study through its Vital Signs and Statistics blog and other communiques.

Participating churches will get two to three surveys per year, Dollhopf said. “These will request that a ‘key informant,’ a pastor or lay leader, fill out the survey for the congregation,” she said. “We will also be conducting a few surveys of church members, where we will work with a sample of congregations to distribute a survey to all of their members.”

To read the entire article, go to https://www.ucc.org/ucc-included-in-5m-study-of-covid-and-the-church/

Global H.O.P.E.

“In service together, we will share the call to put faith in action, offering help, healing and hope to neighbors near and far, living into the vision of a just world for all.” – Rev. Josh Baird

The Global H.O.P.E. team in United Church of Christ Wider Church Ministries brings together the UCC’s refugee and migration ministries, volunteer engagement, disaster response and recovery, and sustainable development work. The acronym H.O.P.E. makes clear the team’s vision:

- Humanitarian
- Opportunities
- Progress
- Empowerment


“They are global and local in scope,” she said, “providing opportunities for our congregations to be active participants with the ecumenical community in providing advocacy, humanitarian collaborative efforts and sustainable development. Additionally, the name encapsulates the UCC vision for a just world for all. We are called to walk in solidarity with those who experience crisis and are in need of justice. The areas of disaster ministries, refugee and asylum ministries and sustainable development are areas where we must continue to foster hope and nurture the possibilities for a future where all have what they need.”
The Urban Forestry Committee of the City of St. Petersburg sponsoring a tree mapping event on the church grounds of Lakewood UCC on Sunday, August 29, following worship. This event involved a process for mapping the trees currently on the church property and developing a plan to add more trees.

The all-volunteer committee includes a landscape architect, a certified arborist and state and county master naturalists. Members and friends of the church were needed to help with the tree mapping and be part of this exciting initiative to “green” the church grounds.

The church’s Creation Justice Task Force will lead an online Zoom discussion this fall of the book Cathedral on Fire — A Church Handbook for the Climate Crisis — a short 54-page read divided into seven short chapters with discussion questions. It promises to be a series of lively, interactive group discussions of this inspiring and upbeat approach to the protection of our planet and its inhabitants. From a Christian perspective, the author, the UCC Environmental Ministry Director Brooks Berndt, helps readers understand our role as stewards of Earth and what we can do to safeguard nature and all those unjustly harmed by the current and future climate changes.

Saturday morning, August 7, was a Community Garden Work Day and sandwich lunch for members of First United Church of Tampa followed by talk on food sovereignty and social justice.

S.T.A.I.R. is a children’s literacy program that provides one-on-one tutoring in reading and language skills. Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte has been providing this program since 2001 helping 2nd grade students from Creek Elementary. These students, recommended by teachers, and supported by parents are bused to the church on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3-4:45pm in the fall and spring. At each gathering a snack is provided and there is one-on-one reading time and group reading activity or games, closing with an educational video teaching skills such as phonics and vocabulary. The church has helped over 400 students become better readers at a critical time in their educational development. All the tutors and substitutes are trained volunteers. [Because of COVID, the program is on hold until spring.]

Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner shares that she is often asked what she loves about Coral Gables Congregational UCC and that one of her most favorite days of the week is Thursday when the church receives folks who are in need and are helped with specific problems and situations. While the church distributes food each and every day, on Thursdays volunteer social worker Elaine Cottle and volunteer immigration specialist Raul Hernandez spend the day helping folks find a long-range plan to deal with their situations. On Thursdays, while folks are helped with an electric bill, rent, medicine, etc., Elaine and Raul also help them to access other organizations and to develop a plan for the future. She thanks church members who contribute to the work and ministry of the congregation and to the Compassion Fund — it’s the Gospel in action!

As part of its attention to caring for Earth, St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota is ceasing the use of disposable k-cups in the church office. As the office staff moves towards using only re-usable k-cups, they will be ordering bags of organic coffee through the UCC website (www.ucc.org/fair-trade-project). This coffee is shade grown, organic and comes from small farms with farmers paid a living wage for their coffee. The cost is $7 a bag and $8 for decaf with several flavors available. Church members are encouraged to also consider purchasing these coffees. The church reports that Family Promise, a Sarasota non-profit that serves homeless families or those with housing insecurity, was the church’s designated mission in May and that over $700 was collected that month for families in need. In addition throughout the year, St. Andrew has a service project that benefits Family Promise’s families with donations of children’s personal care products, diapers and underwear as well as feminine hygiene products.

As September was Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, members of Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton participated in the “Million Mile” Walk for Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation by donating or pledging to fight childhood cancer by walking/biking/running one mile at a time during the month and tracking the miles. Donations benefited Dr. Raul Hernandez shares that she is often asked what she loves about Coral Gables Congregational UCC and that one of her most favorite days of the week is Thursday when the church receives folks who are in need and are helped with specific problems and situations. While the church distributes food each and every day, on Thursdays volunteer social worker Elaine Cottle and volunteer immigration specialist Raul Hernandez spend the day helping folks find a long-range plan to deal with their situations. On Thursdays, while folks are helped with an electric bill, rent, medicine, etc., Elaine and Raul also help them to access other organizations and to develop a plan for the future. She thanks church members who contribute to the work and ministry of the congregation and to the Compassion Fund — it’s the Gospel in action!

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**Great Loves**

**The Jeremiah Project Says Goodbye**

Liz Kitchens at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park reports that the Jeremiah Project at the church came to an end in August. Begun in 2003, it created a pottery program for at-risk middle school kids. An early grant and then on-going support from the church and friends funded a ceramics studio that housed pottery wheels, a slab roller, an electric kiln, and countless glazes. During its 18 year existence it served over 2,500 students. COVID-19 and other factors contributed to the decision to close the program. Liz shares that “we leave with a full heart for having participated in an opportunity of a lifetime. And there are so many to thank…”

Well done, good and faithful servants.

**BACK TO SCHOOL**

The Back 2 School fundraiser at Good Samaritan Church/Pinelas Park was for donating “Homework boxes” for the children in Head Start at the church. The staff and teachers provided the church with a list of items they felt would be helpful for the children to have at home, and the items were assembled and delivered during August.

Members of First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen were part of the local group which collected school supplies for students at Volusia Pines school.

**The Outreach Ministry at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale feeds upwards of 150 hungry people every Thursday. This recent menu shows what can be in store.**

**The Ruth Ministry at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale**

The Outreach Ministry at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach collected over 330 pairs of underwear and 30 pairs of socks to deliver to Clothes 2 Kids, a local organization that provides new and quality used clothing free-of-charge to low-income and in-crisis school children in Pinellas County. The Women on a Faith Journey group helped students at Perkins Elementary prepare for a successful school year with donations of school supplies.

Faith Family UCC/Brandon collected school supplies for students at Mintz Elementary School. Rev. Paul Werner (Assistant Pastor at First United Church of Tampa) filled the pulpit on Sunday, August 1, and blessed the collection ahead of their delivery to the school.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota has supported its neighbors at Alta Vista Elementary School over the years — a school with over 500 students, 86% of whom live in low income households. The Mission Team used to ask members to donate

...continued on page 22
school supplies, but last year due to COVID it switched to financial donations, raising $7,000. The principal wrote in her thank you letter “the buying power and price points in using our district warehouse to purchase many of these items gives us the ability to purchase more items! Thank you for giving us the flexibility in using these funds as we find a need!” This year the church is once again requesting financial support from members.

Christian Education Chair Tonia Patterson and Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley blessed the school supplies collected at Hope UCC/Rockledge.

The Middle and High School Mission Team at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton collected school tools in August and September to add to custom made school bags for Church World Service kits for children in refugee camps. Donations were collected of blunt, rounded tip scissors, 70 count bound notebooks, hand-held pencil sharpeners, large erasers (not pencil cap), boxes of 24 crayons, unsharpened pencils with erasers and 12” rulers. On September 19 the middle and high school missions teams washed cars left by parishioners while they were in worship; the funds went toward the purchase of new school uniforms for underprivileged local school children.

In August First Congregational UCC/Orange City held its annual school supply drive, focusing on collecting crayons, spiral notebooks, glue sticks, composition books, pencils and hand sanitizer.

Sunday School children and youth at Coral Gables Congregational UCC are supporting Lotus House Homeless Shelter in Overtown. Every month they will be collecting a different item that the women, children, or LGBT youth need. In September they collected new pens, pencils, crayons and markers.

Naples UCC collected boxes of new crayons in August to be distributed to children at Grace Place, a local non-profit educational center that provides pathways out of poverty through educating children and families.

The GALS Women’s Flock at UCC/Fort Lauderdale collected school supplies for children in Oakland Park, and Janet Edmonds delivered the donated items for those in the school in need of assistance.

Emmanuel UCC/Sebring is creating the “Garden of Hope,” an ADA-accessible community garden on the southwest corner of the church property. No Kid Hungry reached out to the church, which applied for a grant from the organization, receiving $26,500 (in addition to $1,000 from the Florida Conference UCC to expand the Shepherd’s Pantry). The irrigated beds will sit raised above the asphalt so they will be easily accessible to those in wheel chairs. Much of the construction materials and equipment were donated by local suppliers.

Steve Wills of the food pantry says “God planted a seed. It is beginning to sprout.” Shepherd’s Pantry has gone from providing about 500 pounds of food each month to 800 pounds, which helps about 150 families every month. In addition, the Boys & Girls Club and Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs receive about 20 bags of food each month. A front page article about the project and pantry appeared in the September 7 issue of the Highlands News-Sun.
Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities.

These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities.

Most churches will be collecting the offering on October 3 as part of World Communion Sunday, but contributions can be made at any time.

The Insurance Board offers interactive webcasts that address a wide variety of topics essential to keeping churches and ministries safe. All of our training videos are led by industry experts. Topics include COVID-19, Human Resources, Emergency Planning, and more. To view our online learning page, visit: https://www.insuranceboard.org/online-learning/

Our Sincere thanks... ... to unsplash www.unsplash.com and its talented artists and photographers for the many generic photos and images used in this issue.

We appreciate the generosity of this free service.

"Where Have all the Young Folks Gone?"
Breaking News – Relationships Matter!

"If we had relationships with them, we would already know the answer!"

For more answers visit https://carducc.wordpress.com/2021/07/26/breaking-news-relationships-matter/
Preparing and sharing food played an important role in ancient times. In the Bible, food could signify respect, love, longing or faith in much the same way it continues today. Meals and foods are described throughout the Old and New Testaments, and although the Bible doesn’t provide step-by-step recipes, certain foods are mentioned—those are prepared foods and raw ingredients that were common and of course “locally sourced” in the Middle East thousands of years ago and still are today. This summer the Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour offered an online and interactive “Cooking from the Bible” series in which participants explored the historic process of preparing Middle Eastern classics, which are all kid friendly and healthy! Each of the four online classes could be enjoyed by children and adults of any skill level. The unleavened bread and the stuffed grape leaves required simple cooking, so younger children needed their parents’ assistance; tabouleh salad and the honeyed wheat dessert did not require cooking. For each class, grocery kits (free to church members and $15 for non-members) were available for pick up at the church office.

After a long hiatus caused by the pandemic, the United Church in Tallahassee resumed “Shelter Meals” — a 30 year tradition — starting on August 15. A list of needed items is made available and 4-5 volunteers each month sign up to spend 2-3 hours preparing and then serving the homeless the Sunday meal at the Kearney Center.

The Food for Thought program at Spring Hill UCC provides snacks for kids at Spring Hill Elementary. This helps the kids concentrate and learn, as well as relieving a financial burden on the teachers, who would normally provide the snacks from their own funds. When church members donate to the food pantry, they are reminded to include non-sugary cereal, goldfish crackers and other non-sugary snacks.

The Fellowship and Outreach Team at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park hosted a dinner event via Zoom on Wednesday, July 21. Folks brought their meal to the computer and enjoyed fellowship with others as they ate. In June the church’s food pantry served a total of 856 people (representing 332 households) and in July the number was 782 (278 households).

On the first Wednesday of each month, two shifts of volunteers from Naples UCC spend three hours each helping pack food at the Harry Chapin Food Bank. The church also has resumed its “New Member Potluck” in which hosts accommodate a gathering of from 15-25 people, who bring the foods – so no cooking is required of the host!

Volunteers from First Congregational UCC/Winter Park will help measure and bag food for needy children in a program sponsored by U.S. Hunger (formerly Feeding Children Everywhere). The project takes place in Fellowship Hall following worship on October 17.

In July Rebecca’s Pantry at First UCC/Orlando served 53 families (172 people). Members from Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach volunteered to help unload a truck of collected donations to help restock the food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park.

The second Sunday of the month is set aside at Pilgrim Congregational Church/St. Petersburg to collect non-perishable food and supplies for the St. Pete Free Clinic and Food Bank.

The Wheelbarrow Ministry food collection at Hope UCC/Rockledge benefiting the Central Brevard Sharing Center collected over 300 non-perishable food items in July along with $85 in cash. In August 174 food items were donated plus $110 in cash/checks. The church also donated $170 to the Cocoa High School Fresh Market to help feed students who come to school hungry.
The monthly food drive in May at North Port Community UCC to benefit the Salvation Army brought in 290lbs.

In July, members of the United Church UCC-DOC/St. Augustine and the St. Augustine Friends Worship Group (Quaker) raised funds together to buy a much needed 15.7 cubic-foot freezer chest for Pie in the Sky, an organization that delivers food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, to some 460 food insecure seniors in St. Johns County several times a month. On August 5, Tom and Betsy Simpson, Pam Brown, Warren Clark and Richelle Ogle gathered at the Pie in the Sky facility to celebrate the delivery of the new freezer chest and to dedicate it. At the same time, they delivered a check for over $600 -- the excess above the cost of the freezer chest -- so that Pie in the Sky could fill the new freezer with food for their next deliveries.

September was Hunger Action Month at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton and all month non-perishable food items were collected for the Boca Helping Hands food pantry. On October 2 the church will participate in the Hustle to End Hunger 5K, an in-person (virtual option) run/walk to benefit CROS Ministries (Christian Reaching Out to Society), an agency serving Palm Beach and Martin counties.

Volunteers from the Imperial Sun Court of All Florida gathered at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale on Saturday morning, August 28, to create 100 “Lee’s Lunches” – a PB&J sandwich, bag of chips and bottled water – to help feed those in the community in need.

Between January-June, the food pantry at Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte served 924 bags of groceries to 2,328 adults and 733 children; in July the pantry served 110 households (378 people). While providing financial assistance to the Homeless Coalition, church members also help serve food on the third and fifth Fridays of the month. The Mission of the Month for August was collecting dry beans and rice for its food pantry. It serves several Haitian families and these items are always highly requested. The church also has a monthly Sandwich Ministry and, in August for instance, used 18 loaves of bread to make 200 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for homeless folks who live in the area.

During one recent week in September at Faith UCC/Dunedin, 156lbs of food was collected for donation to the Dunedin Care Food Pantry.

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 11am-noon at Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey is “Love a Lunch” time. A free healthy lunch is offered to anyone in need. October 2 is the hunger walk to help support feeding hungry children in Pasco County, and the church will have a table and walkers. The church currently feeds 70 children at Richey Elementary School every weekend of the school year with its Pack-a-Sack program.

Peanut butter Sunday returned to Fort Myers Congregational UCC on September 26. PB (and other non-perishable foods) can be placed in the shopping carts in the Narthex with the donations taken to a nearby Presbyterian Church as part of the ecumenical food pantry that serves the area.

The Beach Church/Pensacola Beach continues its support of the food pantry of Interfaith Ministries, founded in 2000 by a group of local churches to address the needs of under-resourced, under-served citizens of south Santa Rosa County. It is funded by its thrift stores sales, individual contributions and support from churches and civic organizations.

The Coconut Grove Crisis Pantry benefits from food drives at Pilgrim Congregational Church/Miami.

Rev. Jen Daysa (Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park) has a new vlog. It’s “The Contemplative Foodie: Learning the Jesus Way One Ingredient at a Time.”

She says: “I’ve always found the kitchen and the table to be great teachers not only of the love of food, but the love of life. Foodie culture has become immensely popular in recent years. Done poorly it can become gluttonous and consumeristic, an extravagant lifestyle for the wealthy and privileged. Done with intentionality and contemplation, it can transform us mind, body and soul... and, it doesn’t need to cost a lot! As a practicing Contemplative Foodie and Jesus-following Pastor, I am committed to learning the Jesus-Way One Ingredient at a Time, and I invite you along on the journey with me.”
Developing a Safety Program

The Insurance Board provides a Loss Control Manual that contains guidance to help develop a safety program and provide information regarding specific areas of concern such as people, property, transportation, youth activities and management. Managing a church property and its many activities is no simple matter, and it is hoped this manual makes it easier.

Fire Prevention Resources

Fires affect thousands of companies each year resulting in injury, lost customer trust and building damage. The Insurance Board has free fire safety resources available for you and your ministry. Find fire safety checklists, common fire hazards, advice for holiday fire prevention and more here https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety.../fire-prevention/

Copyright Concerns for Ministries

Join the Insurance Board and the UCC’s General Counsel for a live webcast: “Copyright Concerns for Ministries.”

During these challenging times, ministries rely heavily on the virtual environment and various electronic mediums to share the printed forms of inspiring poetry, quotes from prayer books and daily affirmations, as well as words from songs during worship and through other forms of ministry. As a result, some ministries have been shocked to discover they are actually in violation of copyright infringement. Join us as Heather Kimmel General Counsel, United Church of Christ, offers valuable information on how to help your ministry avoid this situation.

Register here: https://www.insuranceboard.org/copyright-concerns-for...

Join us Wednesday, September 29, at 2pm EST. [If you’ve missed this, contact the Insurance Board regarding the availability of a recording.]
UCC Justice and Local Church Ministry Grants - 101

Justice and Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ has decided to take a bold step in creating a common application that streamlines our granting process. The hope and goal is to ensure granting is made easier for congregations in the UCC as we honor the intentions for funding for seven funding areas. Come and learn about the new application process, application deadlines, and types of congregational grants available from JLCM grants for 2021-2022 cycle.

The webinar was on September 14. If you missed it and want more information about it, contact the national UCC office https://ucc.zoom.us/webinar/register/6916298349188/WN_AdPDD9-HRzWGoipJs3XPqQ?fbclid=IwAR07ifkdMwONmZioedUWAM4eUpCrhw0eq3riLe_c0SzkPz2Kj7bu5JiHeH

October Writer’s Week

Our October Writer’s Week workshops are open for registration. This year we’re offering morning and afternoon options for Book Proposal 101, Understanding Contracts and Copyright, Marketing Tips, and Overcoming Writer’s Block.

Be sure to apply for a Book Development Consultation as well. The staff of The Pilgrim Press will schedule individual 60-minute sessions with eight writers — chosen by application — to provide collegial critique, to brainstorm book development, and to encourage new book projects.

Webinar: Environmental Justice Movement Takes Lessons from Its Past

One of the best resources of the environmental justice movement today is its own history. Leading scholars in the field of environmental justice have described the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit as one of the most significant events in the movement’s history. It was an event hosted and organized by the UCC’s Commission for Racial Justice.

In 1991, this summit literally redefined the word “environment.” No longer did the word refer to remote wilderness areas and pristine natural landscapes as was often the case for largely white environmental organizations. The environment became where one lived, worked, studied, played and prayed. It became the water one drinks in one’s home. It became the air one breathes in one’s neighborhood. It became the safety of one’s workplace.

The summit produced the landmark 17 Environmental Justice Principles that are still used as a source of moral guidance for environmental organizations to this day. The ripple effects of the summit continue to be felt today. In this webinar, we will learn from three key participants in the summit: Charles Lee, Vernice Miller-Travis and Richard Moore. Even if you can’t make the scheduled time of 1pm on Wednesday, October 13, sign up anyway, and we will send you a recording. Register now!
OneBlood collected blood from donors at Plymouth Congregational Church on Sunday, August 29, between 9am-2pm. Donors received a OneBlood towel, a $20 eGift card plus a wellness check that included blood pressure, temperature, iron count, pulse and cholesterol screening. Over at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park, the Orlando City Soccer Club Blood Drive took place on Sunday, September 26. Donors received two free Orlando City tickets, a OneBlood gift plus a wellness check like that at Plymouth. Christ Congregational UCC/Miami had a OneBlood visit on Sunday, September 12, with gifts and checkups.

The Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton participated in a pooling and GoFundMe fundraising effort on behalf of a church member who lost a relative in the Surfside building collapse and all the family’s personal belongings.

The Endowment Team at Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda recently allocated $2,500 to the church’s Social Justice Ministry and $1,500 to the Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens.

The Summer Bible Camp — “Embodying and Exploring Our Faith” — at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota was offered in-person on Wednesday mornings, August 11 and 18, and via Zoom on those evenings. Participants had prayed the Lord’s Prayer at noon every day during the month of June, opening their hearts to forgiveness and peace, with prayers for the church and how to dwell in Christ. The Camp was an opportunity for conversation on what the summer had stirred within them.

Rev. Drew Willard (member, United Church of Gainesville) was a presenter at the Wild Goose Festival in Hot Springs, NC, from September 2-5. He led a convocation hall discussion titled “Jesus’ Strategy of Evoking Hospitality” and several sessions of “After Hours Bible Telling at Sunmaid Susie’s & Mayor John’s Fireside.”

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park is holding an outdoor Craft Fair & Wine Stroll on Saturday and Sunday, October 16-17. Free wine will be available as attendees shop at vendors’ tables on Saturday and specialty coffees on Sunday morning. Free COVID vaccinations (no appointments necessary) were made available in Fellowship Hall at the church from 5-8pm on Friday, September 17, and will also be offered on Friday, October 8.

The United Church in Tallahassee offered its first weekly half hour Zoom chat on Thursday evening, August 12. It was a very casual, very brief, no-frills opportunity for folks to connect that started with prayer and then took off sharing joys, celebrations and prayer concerns.

Pilgrim Congregational UCC/St. Petersburg will be holding a weekend retreat on Friday and Saturday, October 8-9, on the church campus that is open to church members and visitors. The gathering will focus on intimacy with God from a finished work perspective, exploring the contemplative life of a variety of saints who discovered intimacy with Christ in their daily lives.

The very popular Christmas Bazaar & Cookie Walk at Spring Hill UCC will take place on Saturday, December 4 from 9am-2pm. On Saturday, October 2, the church is holding a Rummage Sale & Flea Market that is offering space for vendors and the sale of food and beverages.

One of the ways Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey celebrated its centennial was holding a games and ice cream social on Sunday afternoon, August 22. Pfister, Pitts & Friends Band provided the music and a hula hoop contest was one of the games played (winning time was 9.6 seconds).

A support group for those who have experienced grief and loss over the past year or so was held at Coral Gables Congregational UCC on Saturday afternoon, August 21. It was led by a professional marriage and family therapist with over 40 years of experience. Church members and friends participated on Sunday, October 3 in the Miami Out of the Darkness Walk to End Suicide. The walk

In “Across Florida” our intent is to share with you what is happening at our 90+ churches throughout the state. It is obvious from these entries that there is an exciting vibrancy evident within our congregations.

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

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

See something that catches your eye or brings a smile to your face? If an idea sounds good and you’d like more information about what they’re doing, contact that church.
is a united effort to end suicide, while showing up for yourself, recognizing and honoring those you love and raising awareness about preventing suicide. Resources and information will be available, and the family-friendly event is for hope, healing and help for those who need it.

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour, in association with volunteer Raúl Arguello (a Certified Financial Advisor) offered a free, Spanish-language virtual workshop on finances and how to better manage your money. The three videos covered “Basic Concepts on Budget and Bank Transactions,” “Income and Paychecks” and “Financial Security.” They were viewable on the church’s YouTube channel and website.

The annual Gathering of the Waters traditional kick-off of the church year at the United Church of Gainesville took place on Sunday, August 29 both in-person and virtually. Each member and friend was invited to bring some water that is somehow personally sacred and add it to the communal vessel. They could be waters of peace, waters of hope, waters of homecoming or waters of healing. Each person or family was invited to share briefly where their waters were from and what they represent. The live gathering took place at the 9:15 service but virtual witnessings were recorded over several days ahead of the 29th and shared at the live service.

Members and friends at Naples UCC were encouraged to bring Bibles that have special meaning to them to be featured in the Narthex through the end of September. Notecards with names and any relevant information accompanied the Bibles displayed.

The members of First Congregational UCC/Orange City voted on awarding a $50,000 scholarship to a Stetson University student. Interest from the $50,000 will be awarded each year. Terry Rabun, a Stetson alumnus, will determine the requirements for the scholarship.

Pleeeease send us your news

We want to share your happenings with all our Florida churches

Emails, newsletters, e-blasts are always welcome

JUST ADD US!

Send to: RickCarson1@gmail.com
First Congregational UCC/Winter Park will be participating in the Orlando Pride parade and festival on Saturday, October 9. The church will have a booth between 12-7pm and marchers in the parade.

The directors of the annual Space Coast Pride parade and vendors’ venues postponed the September 25 events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The gift baskets prepared by Hope UCC/Rockledge for the free raffles were kept on display in the church Narthex, and they have received monetary donations. The church is exploring ways to honor the LGBTQ community with these gift baskets and monetary donations.

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

- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson (United Church of Gainesville).
- *The Rent Collector* by Cameron Wright and *Always a Guest* by Barbara Brown Taylor (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)
- *When We Were the Kennedys: A Memoir from Mexico, Maine* by Monica Wood (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)
- *Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith* by Obery M. Hendricks and *What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* by Robert Funk, Roy Hoover and the Jesus Seminar (Faith UCC/Dunedin)
- *Searching for Sunday: Leaving and Finding the Church* by Rachel Held-Evans and *The Story Keeper* by Lisa Wingate (Naples UCC)
- *Tomatoland* by Barry Estabrook and *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)
- *Anxious People* by Fredrik Backman (First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen)
- *Tropic of Stupid* by Tim Dorsey (Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton)
- *Spiritual Warfare Is Real* by Jim Cymbala (North Port Community UCC)
- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson, *The Kindest Lie* by Nancy Johnson and *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
- *The Divine Conspiracy: Jesus’ Master Class for Life* by Dallas Willard (The Beach Church/Pensacola)
- *Compassionate Civilization* by Robert Work (First United Church of Tampa)
- *The Gift of Forgiveness: Inspiring Stories from Those Who have Overcome the Unforgivable* by Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)
The St. Pete Beach Commissioners have unanimously approved a settlement agreement to which Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach had agreed at a recent mediation hearing. This means the church has won the Federal land use law suit against the City that allows the church to continue receiving donations for parking on its lots.

In late January, PAG obtained a preliminary injunction against the City in a suit the church had filed in August 2020 after the City barred the church from allowing the general public to park in its lots across from the beach. The City had also sought to restrict the church’s youth group from evangelizing, praying and seeking donations from those who parked in their lot.

The City has agreed to pay $15,000 in damages for donations lost between the time of the latest magistrate ruling against PAG until it received the temporary injunction in January. Because the church could not agree on the amount of legal fees to be reimbursed, PAG’s attorneys will file a fee petition outlining the hours worked during each phase of the proceedings and the hourly rate charged. The attorneys have excellent backup, including reference to similar proceedings to justify costs.

[More information about this case may be found in the October/November 2020, December 2020/January 2021 and April/May 2021 issues of this newsletter.]

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New for Advent and Christmas

"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Jesus enthusiasts likely cringe at his sharp words in Matthew 10:34. We often imagine a child-inviting, good-news-bringing, body-and-spirit-healing Jesus. Alas, this double-sided Jesus is difficult to witness.

Of all the things he could’ve brought instead of peace, why bring a sword?

Precision.

With a meticulous commitment to justice, Jesus cuts into our world of destruction: he severs oppressive systems, dissects violent divisions, hacks at the hate that poisons our shared divinity.

After a year of one crisis after another, might we embrace the Crisis who arrives in the form of a tiny little baby?

Jesus Crisis | 2021 Advent-Christmastide Devotional $4.50
Ships November 1st.

From Miracle on 34th Street to Love Actually, generations of Christmas films tell us about American spirituality and social values:

- How the Grinch Stole Christmas weighs materialism against community
- The Polar Express tests the wonder of miracles in an age of cynicism
- And Die Hard (yes, Die Hard) wrestles with the impact of broken relationships on holiday joy

In Christmas on the Screen, journalist John A. Zukowski takes readers on a tour of Christmas films and American values, asking the question, “What does Christmas mean to us?”

Bring the popcorn and hang some holly for this exploration of beloved movies!

Christmas on the Screen | Reviewing the Evolution of American Spirituality (Zukowski) $24.95
Ships December 1st.
Coral Gables Congregational UCC is proud to offer “Our Whole Lives: Lifespan Sexuality” program this fall. It believes that in this day and age this program is a must for our children. “Our Whole Lives” teaches honest, accurate information about sexuality that changes lives. It dismantles stereotypes and assumptions, builds self-acceptance and self-esteem, fosters healthy relationships, improves decision making and has the potential to save lives. OWL is led by a trained church member team and Associate Pastor Rev. Megan Smith. Families of 6th-12th graders joined in an informal BBQ cookout on the CG church green for a time of fun and fellowship on Friday evening, September 17. Folks from Christ Congregational UCC/Miami were invited to join in the festivities.

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park is planning to resume offering its “Our Whole Lives: Sexuality and Our Faith” series for parents and youth in 6th-9th grade. Normally presented every other year, COVID required canceling it last year. Camp Sunday School began on September 12, with youth and children in separate locations outside on church property. Each camper will get their very own labeled camp chair and supplies.

Plymouth Congregational Church/ Miami has welcomed South Florida Music to offer classes on Wednesdays and Saturdays for children birth through eight years of age. Knowing that researchers have identified the first years of life as the time in which an individual learns at the most rapid rate, exposure to developmentally appropriate music education in this time period may have the greatest impact on future musical achievement, by stimulating neurological development and training the young mind how to discriminate sounds and organize musical thoughts. Dr. Joy Galliford, an internationally known early childhood music specialist, is providing this time of learning, enjoyment and fun, which began in September.

There was story telling time done by scientist Dr. Debbie and Dr. Dale during VBS at the Beach Church/Pensacola Beach – with donated piazza thanks to Jeff May with extras shared with local fire fighters and deputies.

The Sunday School kickoff at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton took place on Sunday, August 29, after worship. Everyone was welcomed to reconnect at the annual back to school picnic. Kids could bring their swim suits to slide down the Emerald Crush water slide.

Summer camp at Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte ended with a week spent in “God’s Wonder Lab” VBS. Each day started with scripture, songs and experiments. Bible stories were illustrated by the teachers sharing experiments: there was Jell-O in a petri dish where the students added fruit loops and gummy worms, dancing raisins and Saul turning into Paul related to flowers that change color. Snacks were made based on the day’s lesson and Bible crafts each day — stained glass butterflies created with tissue paper, “Jesus is the Light” suncatchers and “Glory to God” kites.
For the 2021-2022 year, Coral Gables Congregational UCC will be using WHIRL, a progressive lectionary Bible based curricula for elementary-aged children as well as enhancing the program with mindfulness, yoga, mental health awareness and hands-on learning. In Sunday School a foundation for a lifetime journey with Christ is laid, nurturing children’s compassion for others, encouraging their spiritual questions and listening to their experiences as they live out their faith. Each Sunday, a child will view a short WHIRL animated video that connects the Bible story to life today. WHIRL contains social and emotional support for a child’s well-being, which is so important in today’s pandemic world. WHIRL includes some contemporary music — which will be played in the classrooms — as well as some old church favorites from the past. Handouts, crafts and leaflets at home, as well as a weekly e-mail from Associate Pastor Rev. Megan Smith will let parents know what their child has experienced and accomplished during their Sunday School hour.

A German-language playgroup is forming at the church for parents of children ages 2 and up (through elementary school). The church celebrated German Back to School/Day of Creation with a service (in-person and online) on Sunday afternoon, August 29. This is a day often recognized in Germany during the first week of September.

Blessing of Backpacks

The Back to School Blessing at the United Church of Gainesville took place on August 8 and was open to all children and youth, preschoolers through high schoolers. The children were brought to the Courtyard at the end of the worship service and stood in a circle in the center of the Courtyard. The congregation exited the Sanctuary and assembled (masked) around the Courtyard under the overhang. The children and youth were blessed and sang “Alleluia” together.

On Sunday, August 22, at Coral Gables Congregational UCC all children attending PreK-3 through 5th Grade Sunday School received a special blessing on their school backpacks and school devices. Infants through 12th graders not attending Sunday School were invited to drive by the Sunday School entrance between 11:45am-12:15pm to receive a blessing tag for their backpack or blessing sticker for their device. School teachers, custodians, administrators, and college students were also invited to stop by at that time and receive a blessing.

The Children’s Ministry at Naples UCC held an open house and backpack blessing on Saturday and Sunday, August 14-15. On Saturday parents were able to visit the classrooms and learn about programs planned for the year. The new Sunday School year resumed on Sunday, and children of all ages were invited to bring their school backpacks to be blessed during the Time for Children.

All children and youth were invited to bring their backpacks to worship at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami for the annual Blessing of the Backpacks. Each backpack also received a tag as a reminder of the blessing. Nine Guardian Ad Litem children overseen by three GAL volunteers — Daniel Best, Margarita Morell and Barbara Parker — were outfitted with new backpacks and supplies for an excellent school year.

Kids Corner

New Children’s Books

Frog and Toad. Charlotte and Wilbur. Elephant and Piggie. Now meet Slug and Snail, the slowest fast friends, on a journey to discover the meaning of home.

Featuring dynamic scenery and diverse peoples through stunning collage art, Picture the Bible brings familiar Bible stories to life in a fresh way and raises engaging questions for young readers.

There was a blessing of students and their backpacks at JupiterFIRST Church

Backpacks were blessed on August 29 at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/ Boca Raton
United Church of Christ clergy, congregants, and disaster teams are waiting to learn more about the destruction left behind by Hurricane Ida. The Category 4 storm barreled into the Louisiana Gulf Coast on Sunday, August 29, swamping New Orleans and taking down the power grid.

It also brought torrential rains, high winds, and floodwaters to parts of Alabama and Mississippi. The storm arrived 16 years after Hurricane Katrina slammed that same area, leaving 1,800 people dead.

“It’s heartbreaking,” said Lesli Remaly, minister for disaster response and recovery with the UCC’s Global H.O.P.E. team. “Raising money for a storm this size certainly makes good sense, as we know long-term recovery and rebuilding will be necessary,” Remaly said.

Initially, four deaths had been confirmed. Reports of injuries and deaths are expected to climb as communication returns. The president of the power company Entergy said more than 2,000 miles of transmission lines are out of service across Louisiana. More than 1 million customers in Louisiana and Mississippi, including all of New Orleans, were left in the dark. And it may be weeks, in some spots, before the power comes back. The flood threat in Ida’s aftermath stretched from the Gulf into the northeast.

The UCC has launched a Severe Storms 2021 appeal to receive donations for Hurricane Ida relief. Please visit here to make your gift. You may also text SevereStorm2021 to 41444 to make a donation. Thank you for your gift.

How to Help

The Missions Committee at the UCC at The Villages began a campaign in September for money to buy Church World Service Disaster buckets. While taking the collection bucket to church, Sandy Lynch (Chair of Missions) and Cherie Harrold (Administrative Committee) discovered the ceiling was dripping in several places from a leak in the air conditioner’s overflow valve.

The first use of the disaster bucket was to catch drips from the ceiling — luckily before they had a real disaster!
Relief Efforts for Haiti

Thank you for your support of the United Church of Christ’s International Disaster Efforts. Because of you, we have helped thousands in the midst of devastation and loss. We turn to you again as we assist with relief efforts in Haiti.

“The island of Haiti suffered major damages and loss of life,” said the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, associate general minister, Wider Church Ministries and Operations. “We are issuing an appeal through the Global H.O.P.E. team to assist with short-term and long-term recovery needs.” A massive 7.2 earthquake has killed more than 1,500 people to-date. Search and rescue efforts are expected to be hampered by Tropical Depression Grace, which came ashore on Monday, August 16.

“The funds raised will support immediate relief efforts assisting survivors as well as to have resources for long-term rebuild opportunities,” said Joshua Baird, team leader of Global H.O.P.E. Baird was in touch with the partner networks and said that the ACT Alliance reports that more than 60-percent of the people of Haiti have been impacted by the disaster. Both the ACT Alliance and Church World Service have spoken about “significant infrastructure challenges,” with road closures due to civil unrest compounded by earthquake damage.

“We hold our partners and Haitian siblings in our thoughts and prayers through this time of suffering.”

With you, the United Church of Christ can provide the needed resources for those experiencing extreme loss in Haiti. We appreciate your gift.

Our Florida congregations have been reaching out to their members to support relief efforts in Haiti, many doing so in e-blasts encouraging responding to the UCC appeal. Other outreach has included:

Rev. Ed Middleton at Cocoa Beach Community Church shares the following: “Sometimes motivation and inspiration comes from the BEYOND, and even simply beyond the walls of the church. A sojourner who often worships in the Cocoa Beach Community Church congregation was touched by what she saw from and read about Haiti and the devastation being reported nationally and regionally. Betsy Bray put word out on her social media sites encouraging friends and neighbors to bring goods to her garage, and contacted [me] to invite congregants to join in by collecting specific goods in their Social Hall. At the same time she was in communication with an organization in Miami that has ongoing deliveries to Haiti and had a ship leaving within a week she had joined the effort, and her garage was beginning the long recovery process post-Ida. Sometimes the vision of one person can be claimed by multiple communities to bring about good.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC has advised its members who wish to give financially to consider FOKAL Haiti Relief, a Haitian organization that is on the ground and able to channel funds to smallholder farmers associations, grassroots women’s organizations and small local ethical enterprises who are the true first responders; their website is at FOKAL Haiti Relief. Giving through the church is possible noting “Haiti Earthquake Relief.”

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton has advised consulting websites like Charity Navigator and GiveWell to determine charities’ legitimacy and avoid scams. Charities that the church Missions team assists, that are providing aid in Haiti, were listed along with organizations recommended by PBS News Hour, GiveWell and WPTV.

Now we are turning our attention to our neighbors along the Gulf Coast who are beginning the long recovery process.