The United Church of Christ and the November Elections

The opening Worship was led by Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan. Minister of Faith Formation Neal Watkins provided a voting tutorial instructing Gathering participants on the mechanics of voting using the online Zoom platform. The business session was called to order by Conference Moderator Rev. Barton Buchanan (Windermere Union Church). The quorum call reported by Conference Registrar Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) announced that there were 131 ministers, retired ministers, delegates and Board members (and 38 visitors and guests) registered with 60 churches represented — a quorum.

Greetings were heard via video from the General Minister and President of the UCC, Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer.

Regional Conference Ministers Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove and Rev. Leslie Etheredge introduced clergy new to the Conference:
- Jeff Mueller, Interim Pastor (Union Congregational Church/Holly Hill)
- John Arens, Pastor (First Congregational UCC/Fort Pierce)
- Joshua Longbottom, Associate Pastor (Community Church of Vero Beach)
- Todd Petty, Pastor (Church of The Palms UCC/Delray Beach)
- Shane Montoya, Pastor (Miami Shores Community UCC)
- Laura Callendar, Interim Pastor (Faith Family UCC/Brandon)
- Mary Alice Mulligan, Interim Pastor (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)
- Bromleigh McClenehan, Pastor (United Church of Gainesville)
- John Barnette, Pastor (Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte)

The Nominating Committee Report was presented by Chair Dyanne Edds (Hope UCC/Rockledge) with two additions. The report with additions was unanimously approved. Sumner Hutcheson III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami) was elected the new Moderator and Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) was elected Assistant Moderator [a listing of the Florida Conference Annual Gathering 2020]

...continued on page 2

Pre-Election Day Communion Service of Unity in HOPE

The United Church of Christ invited the church to pause and gather in worship together for a church-wide Pre-Election Communion Service of Unity in HOPE on Monday, November 2, at 7pm. It was a 90-minute service that included encouraging words from former General Ministers, Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry, Rev. Dr. John Thomas, and Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Black, as well as former Associate General Minister, Dr. Edith Guffey.

The gathered were led in Communion by former Executive Ministers of Justice & Witness Ministries, Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson (First United Church of Tampa) and Rev. Linda Jaramillo. Several full communion partners joined as well.

Rev. John C. Dorhauer offered a message of hope.

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“...As leaders in the wider church, we ask only one thing this day — let us all pause to ask what love will ask next of us.”

The National Officers of the United Church of Christ
newly-elected may be found on page 9].

Mike Downs (Naples UCC), Committee Chair of Legacy Funds, presented its report. He noted that $48,000 in grants have been given to local churches this year for technology upgrades/improvements and further stated that the Florida Conference is among the top UCC Conferences in the country to provide local support through our endowment.

A worship break featured a video from Rev. Traci Blackmon, the UCC’s Associate General Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries, with an appeal to support “Neighbors in Need.”

The Conference Minister led the presentation of 2020 financials and the 2021 budget. Rev. John thanked the Budget and Finance Committee for its help preparing the proposed 2021 budget and expressed his gratitude for the OCWM and Per Capita giving from the local churches throughout this year. He stressed that the 2021 budget is slightly less than 2020 given the anticipated decrease in expenses for travel, meetings, etc. The major assumption in preparing the budget was that pre-pandemic activities would not return until at least mid-year 2021. In addition, he shared that “Other Income” sources are still required to balance the budget each year. The budget of $900,479 was approved, 99% approving with 1% abstention.

The “Establishing an Anti-Racism Ministry” resolution was presented with discussion led by Rev. Donna Cooney (United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine). She thanked the team that worked on the resolution and introduced team members by way of a video. The resolution was approved unanimously. [see page 9 for more about the resolution].

There were outgoing remarks from the Moderator, and Rev. Dr. Anna Copeland (Community Church of Vero Beach) extended an invitation to all for next year’s Annual Gathering in October at CCOVB. Rev. John shared some closing comments around the theme of “Where do we see the Light?”

The Gathering adjourned at 10:30am.

Prior to the official opening of the meeting on Saturday morning, several other activities were scheduled.

On Wednesday evening, October 7, an introduction to Zoom was offered for those who needed one.

On Thursday, October 8, the Conference Board of Directors met and a virtual social hour was shared at 4pm for a time of conversation and catching up with friends across the Conference. That evening at 7pm an informational hearing was scheduled on the 2021 Conference budget with an introduction to the Legacy Funds that make grants and awards available to Conference churches and authorized ministers.

An educational hearing and question period on the anti-racism resolution was held on Friday, October 9, at 7pm that was to be on the agenda as part of the day’s business on Saturday.

Considering Donating to the Conference

Consider donating to the Florida Conference of the UCC. There are several ways to give, and your generosity will be greatly appreciated. Click below.

- 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
Pre-Election Activities in our Churches

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg engaged in sidewalk messaging and sign waving along the busy street in front of the church on October 25 in time for the election. An election prayer vigil took place on Monday, November 2, at 6pm, when the assembled turned to scripture, song and prayer for assurance, comfort and strength. There was also a labyrinth walk on Election Day at 7pm as the polls closed – a deeply spiritual moment of calm, assurance and mutual support when new perspectives and insights emerged. Participants were asked to consider a word to focus on as they walked the labyrinth only to find that the word changed mid-walk — hope to mercy, peace to trust. It was a very spiritually moving experience providing much needed grounding in these anxious times.

One of the great traditions of our UCC fore-bearers in the Congregational tradition was what was called an Election Day Sermon — a noble tradition going back as far as the mid-1600s in the American colonies. At the center of every town in Puritan New England, there was a Congregational Church. The Sundays before an election, almost every Congregational preacher in the land devoted the sermon to the body politic. It typically touched on the nature of government, human nature, the qualifications and duties of rulers and the need for repentance and reformation. On the Sunday two days before the national election, Rev. Dr. Laurie Hafner revived this tradition at Coral Gables Congregational UCC and offered up an Election Day sermon.

In times of great challenge and uncertainty, the church is called to remind us we are anchored in a faith that holds fast for justice and peace in spite of social, political and theological positions that divide us. The murmurs of discord are loud but the actions of unity can be louder. Believing that on these things we can agree — all of creation is sacred, we are all shaped in God’s image, we are called to care for one another and God loves us all. Because no matter what happens during election season, we are still called to be the church.

On Monday, November 2, the UCC/New Smyrna Beach scheduled a brief 15 minute prayer service on Zoom at 6pm. Those interested heard scriptural words of promise and hope with prayers that God guides us and our country in the days ahead. Rev. Dr. Diane Langworthy asked God to empower our voting to further justice, mercy and equality in the country, remembering whose we are and praying for clarity about the call in our own lives as we move forward through whatever is before us, as God’s Holy people.

Members of Faith UCC/Dunedin were invited to join an election eve prayer vigil sponsored by the Dunedin GreenFaith Circle. It was an opportunity to pray for a safe and peaceful election outcome.

The First United Church of Tampa had a pre-election day Communion Service of Hope and Healing on Monday evening, November 2.

Florida Conference Office Closed on Election Day

The Florida Conference office space served as a polling place in Orange County on November 3 (Conference professional staff worked from home and were reachable by e-mail and phone). Serving as a polling site offered local residents an opportunity to get a glimpse inside the home of one of their neighbors.

Florida churches sometimes serve as polling sites. This year Christ Congregational UCC/Miami was one, and it was hoped that voters and passers-by would notice the church sign and consider it might be “a good place to worship.”

...continued on page 4
**Post-Election Activities in Our Churches**

On Wednesday, November 4, we passed a critically important milestone for our nation. The days and weeks and months (and years) leading up to this day have been so difficult for so many. In such times, feeling the presence and solidarity and support of our community is all the more important, the *United Church of Gainesville* offered a time for prayer, poetry and candlelight beginning at 5:30pm in the west parking lot. Attendees (no more than 50 were permitted) were masked and socially distanced, and the gathering was livestreamed via Zoom. Guest speaker Carol Lewis, a clinical psychologist with expertise in trauma and resilience, spoke on “Healing from Political Distress” at a Sunday seminar on November 8. As the past 4+ years have been a distressing time for many people, this seminar, just a few days after the election, discussed how to move forward from “politically-induced anxiety.” Attendees discussed how to reset minds and bodies in these challenging times, using “resilience tools” including grounding and mindfulness and engaging in a mindfulness practice. Handout included “Four Domains of Awareness,” “Six Steps to Emotional Health” and “Structured Processing.”

**UCC/Fort Lauderdale** kept to its regularly scheduled Tuesday evening Zoom education classes on Election Day and held a session at 7pm. Participants discussed America’s voting history and whether the Bible has anything to say about voting.

An election vigil was held at *Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park* on Wednesday morning, November 4, on Zoom. The invitation sought to remind participants of God’s presence in the democratic election process and that God’s promises are sure no matter what the election results hold for us.

**UCC Officers Urge Worshippers to Tap Healing Power of Love to Close Political Divide**

Speaking for the elected officers of the United Church of Christ, General Minister and President the Rev. John Dorhauer issued a moral call for healing on November 5 following the November 3 U.S. general elections. Here’s the text of the statement:

As we gather to worship, we acknowledge that we are a church and a nation in need of God’s providential mercy.

A political battle has been waged within a continuing global pandemic and a domestic pandemic of race-hate whose wounds are both ancient and fresh.

Worshiping with us today are those who are trying hard to celebrate a political outcome and those who are trying to heal from it. It is hard to celebrate any outcome when the margins are so thin and come at the end of years of widening distrust between political rivals. It is hard to heal when the tactics we engaged in to win these elections were so, in a word, unkind. We have opened wounds here that will take time, trust, and empathy to heal.

We claim Jesus as our guide. He is for us the embodiment and incarnation of God’s eternal and undying love. We know that there is nothing in this world that can separate us from that love of God known in Jesus.

As leaders in the wider church, covenant partners with all who worship as the United Church of Christ, we ask only one thing this day: let us all pause to ask what love will ask next of us.

We have arisen as a community of faith within a democracy that empowers every citizen with a voice and a vote. Our voices of late have been hard to hear — choruses of shouting at each other have often replaced the gentle and deep listening to each other that engenders lasting relationship and trust. Narratives of mistrust and division have replaced our more endearing narrative of the common good, shared interest, and mutual ministry.

We call upon the members of our shared household to center on the healing power of God’s redeeming love. Our mission can certainly be enhanced by political outcomes – but it isn’t resolved by them. Our mission is to love all, welcome all, and seek justice for all. The world will come to know we are Christians by our love. Let our singular commitment be to a love that surpasses all understanding, heals all wounds, and restores all hope.

Faithfully,

The National Officers of the United Church of Christ

**John C. Dorhauer**, General Minister and President

**Traci Blackmon**, Associate General Minister

**Karen Georgia Thompson**, Associate General Minister
made an unexpected trip north a few weeks ago to be with family during a time of need and to help with settling my mother into the hospice where she now has taken charge, as much as anyone of us takes charge, of her eventual passing. I wish I’d seen this strength in her all along the course of my own 60 years. As with so many things, we see when we are ready to see. And I am ready.

While sitting with her on one of her last days in the house where she lived for 70 years, I came across a little piece of writing I did in 2009 that she had saved all this time and it spoke to me about readiness, and willingness, and faithfulness. Here, then, slightly edited from its first appearance in Elmhurst, Illinois, in October of 2009, is a Pastoral Epistle that might speak to you, too, if it is time.

“One day, I went to work at my morning hour and discovered a spot on my shirt. That’s important to me and, since I would be at the church well into the evening, I knew I couldn’t live with that spot all day long. I thought it was no problem as I keep a Tide pen in my top drawer. You all know what a Tide pen is, right? This handy little wand that promised me that spot can be gotten out without quitting my wardrobe and washing the shirt. Maybe it says something about me that I keep one handy at all times, but that’s a topic for a different day.

“I open the drawer; no Tide pen. I borrowed one from an office mate and did my best. I ended up driving home and changing my shirt. Now, move forward a day or two. I was cleaning out my desk (also a topic for another day) and, as I looked for things to toss, there it was in plain sight. My Tide pen! Right there in the pencil well where it was last week, where it was when I was looking for it and didn’t see what was right in front of me.

“I’m afraid a similar thing often happens with relationships as with Tide pens. There are those who love us all around and there are those who will accept our love in the places where we live, work and play. There are some we might have the opportunity to love as Christ loves who instead know only loneliness, sorrow, sadness and longing because we’ve lost them in the mix of things. People all around us come to feel alone because they can’t find someone to love them; people come to feel alone because they are looking for a perfect love that no one but God can offer and they’ve decided there is no one for them, they will be alone, life will a solitary endeavor.

“Now, I am not talking only about romantic love; plenty of people live a full life without romantic love. What I am talking about are the deep, honest relationships that are life-giving and mutual, vital and intimate across the whole spectrum of what it means to love. And I am claiming (still!) that those relationships are a primary function and purpose of our faith communities inasmuch as they model Christ for the world. We know and are known so that none might go missing in the grand drama of life (and we are living in a dramatic time!); we ride the rising tide of feeling and connection that marks Christian community, and we invite others to rise with us. We celebrate that love is right here all along because each person is right here all along, waiting to see and be seen. So, forgive and help me when I don’t see you, and be on the lookout for others, too, because love is seeking you in return.”

I don’t know why she saved that one for all these years, but today I am reminded of what I once said to another congregation in another place and time. I remain hopeful that I am ready, and willing, and faithful both in giving and receiving that love that is made manifest in the power of the one in whose name I am baptized, even Jesus. It’s time.

Be at peace, and be in touch, won’t you.
Greetings, friends. I suppose it might be an understatement to suggest that 2020 has been a challenging year, but the churches of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ have stepped up to the many challenges we’ve faced and have provided faithful and vital ministries in communities all around the state. Add to that the powerful witness of UCC chaplains in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes and other settings and it is clear that our witness to a God of love and mercy and justice and peace has been strong in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Conference setting, we’ve engaged with local churches and pastors since March to assist with information and resources about how to conduct online worship, when to safely reopen for public worship and how to model new ways of being in ministry when our buildings are closed. We’ve helped search committees and pastors find each other and come together with new visions of what ministry can look like in these unprecedented times.

We’ve equipped local churches for their continuing ministries with $50,000 in grants to upgrade the technological capacity needed to gather a congregation and community while socially distanced or quarantined. We’ve met virtually with church councils and candidates for ministry and responded to a wide variety of needs that have arisen in the life of our faith communities this spring, summer, and fall. And we’re ready to be as present as we can be as winter comes and a new normal evolves during a pandemic that just won’t quit.

We’ve empowered local congregations by advocating for — and making funds available for — their participation in social justice ministries in their local communities. We’ve continued to emphasize national programs of the church such as the Three Great Loves mission of caring for creation, children and neighbor. We’ve shared resources to help educate people during this election season relative to voting in keeping with our values as a church of Jesus Christ whose mission is to create a just world for all.

The coming year, 2021, will prove to be a challenging year for us as the pandemic continues to influence our common life; more so, we’ll be embarking together as a Conference to create an anti-racism ministry that will challenge old models of relationship and build new ones in keeping with Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one.”

All the ministry of the Florida Conference is made possible by your generosity and the giving of gifts from our local churches. In this year’s annual appeal, I am honored to invite your philanthropy by becoming a “Friend of the Florida Conference.” Perhaps you’ll make an immediate gift by going to www.uccfla.org and pressing the donate button and offering a gift of any size in keeping with your desires and capacity. Perhaps you’d like to make an enduring gift by funding the endowment we call “Church redevelopment,” which has allowed us to make sizable grants today and which we hope will exist well into the future to fund ministries yet unimagined. And maybe you’d like to consider a legacy gift by remembering the Conference in your estate planning and offering a gift that will outlive you but extend your witness into coming generations.

I invite taxpayers over age 70 1/2 to take notice of recent tax legislation. For 2020 the CARES Act waives the IRS requirement to take a required minimum distribution from your defined contribution retirement plan. In addition, if you have an IRA you are still eligible to make a direct qualified charitable distribution that is tax free, even when claiming the standard deduction. These may provide you with additional tax benefits; consult your tax professional if you think this may apply to you.

There are many ways to share your vision for powerful ministry in the Florida Conference through the sharing of your philanthropic endeavors, and your financial gifts are appreciated and carefully stewarded by our staff and Board of Directors. We’re glad for your participation and partnership in our continued offering of extravagant welcome to all who seek God for the transformation of their lives, and we proclaim that God is indeed still speaking to the church and to the world in these times of rapid change.

Your immediate gift will be most welcomed and I’m happy to talk with you about an enduring gift or a legacy giving plan that fits your needs and wishes. To donate, go to www.uccfla.org and press the donate button. You can also send your gift through the mail to the Church House at 9300 University Blvd, Orlando, FL 32817. To be in touch, call me personally at 407/835-7501 mail to the Church House at 9300 University Blvd, Orlando, FL 32817. To be in touch, call me personally at 407/835-7501

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A Message From Our Moderator

BY REV. BARTON BUCHANAN
PASTOR, WINDERMERE UNION CHURCH

Committed to Making a Difference

The last four years of serving our Conference has given me the behind-the-scenes look into how it is managed. All of our Conference ministers and support staff are professionals to the highest degree. I am humbled by their work ethic and commitment to our churches. Our Conference is thriving during difficult times because of their leadership, our Board of Directors and a commitment from our churches.

I have also witnessed how the Florida Conference is committed to doing ministry and standing up fearlessly for peace and justice issues. I will never forget the spontaneous expression of compassion and generosity poured out for the Immokalee migrant farm workers living in deplorable conditions. Rev. Alan Coe (Mayflower UCC/Naples) made a presentation at our last Fall Gathering informing us that federal funds were available to build a housing community for the workers. However, the funds could not be utilized to purchase land on which to build the community. The Florida Conference sprang into action. Our Board of Directors allocated $100,000 to be added to donations received from our Florida churches. We purchased the land to assist in the creation of a safe and quality housing community for the workers and their families [read more about the Immokalee on page 6]. Our Conference does so much more than provide the corporate infrastructure to take care of church business. The Conference is committed to making a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

John Lennon’s song lyric, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans,” became a profound reality for us all this year. Regardless of how well-organized our Conference and churches were, no one planned on leading during a pandemic. Were we sure when we turned the key that the vehicle of ministry was going to function? Now, after many months of shelter-in-place and no in-person meetings, the answer is a resounding Yes! The Conference and our churches are still running, performing the ministry and tasks they were created to perform.

Over my professional career, I have read many books on management. One common theme I have discovered is that individuals and institutions which thrive learn how to adapt to change. The ability to adapt does not happen by accident. In order to thrive during a pandemic, it requires our leaders and congregations to move forward quickly and courageously. Our vision right now may be a bit impaired by the storm of COVID-19, but we, the church, continue to minister.

• We are feeding the hungry, giving a cool drink of water to those who have become parched
• We are clothing the naked with hope, compassion and doing whatever it takes to meet their needs

Our vision as a church is clear! We are one of God’s vehicles in sharing the good news: God loves us all! It is our love and commitment to the Divine purpose in this world that drives us. We have especially proven this year we are a people of adaptability, creativity, purpose and vision. We will minister and be a force of healing and hope during one of the most frightening and confusing times in human history. Like my car’s windshield wipers, we just know when it starts raining, we go into action.

Serving the Florida Conference has been a privilege and honor. Thank you for trusting me in this role. I am a stronger and better human being for being a part of the process of making the church a beautiful and powerful reality in this world.

Our vision at times may be blurred meeting the needs of the day, but we continue to move forward courageously and passionately with a clear vision and purpose to serve humanity and our planet.

Witnessing firsthand how our Florida Conference staff, Board of Directors and our churches are discovering new ways to minister and still thrive is without a doubt one the highlights of my life. As my time serving the Florida Conference UCC as Moderator is coming to an end, I am reminded of this classic passage from Romans:

More Than Conquerors

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31-39. (New International Version)

Thank You...

Rev. Barton for your committed service, thoughtful leadership and insightful guidance as Moderator.

Your Florida Conference faith family
E-mail Invitation to Fake ‘Worship Service’ May Contain Dangerous Links

Scammers are again targeting members of Florida Conference churches, this time with a calendar invitation sent via e-mail from a compromised Gmail account.

The invitation is for a “FL Conference Worship Service @ Sun Jan 10, 2021 10am - 2pm (EST).” There is no such service, and the links in the e-mail invitation likely lead to viruses, malware or attempts at identity theft or fraud.

If you received this e-mail, please disregard it and do not accept the invitation or click on any links in it. If you already have, you should run anti-virus or malware scans on the computers or devices from which you accepted the invitation or clicked the links. You should also delete the item from your calendar.

From e-Celebrate, October 14

Professional Ethics Training Webinar Offered

The national setting of the United Church of Christ offered a professional ethics webinar on October 21, a 90-minute session titled “Ethics for Retired Clergy with Tara Barber” that provided professional ethics (boundary) credits.

As Committees on Ministry, it is important to engage with authorized ministers at pivotal life and vocational moments; the transition to retirement is particularly tender as it involves a significant change in both work life and one’s identity as called to serve. It is a time for careful attention and support, clear boundaries and clear communication. This webinar explored best practices for COMs as they work with ministers navigating this life change, including such questions as:

How does your committee assist in ritualizing and supporting the transition to retirement (and do you offer this with specialized ministers)?

What resources are available to support the transition from leave-taking to thriving in retirement?

Retired ministers with standing in the Florida Conference will receive credit for professional ethics (boundary) training upon showing proof of registration and participation in such events. Proof of participation may be sent to Dana Ney in the Conference office. Watch for the next offering of this and other such webinars.

From e-Celebrate, October 14

Please note that staff travel continues on-hold due to COVID-19. Rev. Leslie will be on sabbatical leave during the month of December, and those needing assistance from her should contact the Conference office.

December 3
CM Rev. John Vertigan, Council of Conference Ministers via Zoom

December 6
CM Rev. John Vertigan, preaching at an ordination via livestream

December 7-12
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, virtual meeting of UCC Authorizing Ministry in the 21st Century

December 8-11
CM Rev. John Vertigan, virtual meeting of UCC Authorizing Ministry in the 21st Century

December 8-9
RM Rev. Raymond Hargrove, virtual gathering of UCC Search and Call staff

December 14
CM Rev. John Vertigan, UCC Board meeting via Zoom

December 15
CM Rev. John Vertigan, UCC Council of Conference Ministers via Zoom

January 23
CM Rev. John Vertigan, Florida Conference Board of Directors via Zoom

February 4
CM Rev. John Vertigan, UCC Insurance Board via Zoom

February 9
RM Rev. Leslie Etheredge, Western Region Committee on Church & Ministry virtual meeting

Staff has ongoing virtual appointments/meetings with church staff and leaders

End-of-the-Year Procedures and Financial Deadlines

The end of 2020 is fast approaching, and we need your help to make our year-end bookkeeping and crediting as efficient and timely as possible.

Please make every effort to send your 2020 OCWM and Per Capita funds on a check dated on or before December 31. The funds must arrive at the Florida Conference Office on or before January 10 to receive credit for 2020 giving to the Conference and for the Conference to receive credit at the national setting.

Please try to meet this deadline or, perhaps, remit the remainder of your 2020 giving early in December! If you have any questions, or concerns about these dates, please contact Beth Shedden at these addresses:

Beth Shedden,
FL UCC Financial Administrator
9300 University Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32817
bshedden@uccfla.org

Thank you for your partnership with the Florida Conference, your commitment to the United Church of Christ and for your attention to this end-of-the-year request.

From e-Celebrate, November 25

From e-Celebrate, October 14
The Florida Conference, local churches and the denomination helped fund the purchase of ten acres of land in Immokalee for the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) project. The land was purchased and the IFHA Board is beginning a capital campaign to raise approximately $18 million to begin the construction process. The permitting process should be complete by February. When the project is complete, there will be apartments for 128 farm worker families that will be safe, secure, and affordable. Here is a link to a three-minute video about the project https://vimeo.com/465478691

If you would like to learn more about the IFHA project, the website is www.ifha.info. Once on the site you can request additional information, schedule a Zoom presentation for your church or mission team with members from the IFHA Development Committee and become a part of this new and exciting project.

Newly-Elected Officers, Board and Committee Members

Moderator Sumner Hutcheson III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami)
Assistant Moderator Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)
Registrar Marty Synnott (Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach)
Treasurer Vacancy
Chair of Budget and Finance Vacancy
Chair of Legacy Funds Michael Downs (Naples UCC)
Chair of Nominating Committee Rev. Karen-Curtis Weakley (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Chair of Personnel Rev. Dr. Dawson Taylor (Naples UCC)
Board of Directors
Rev. Vonshele Beneby (member, Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Sally Cash (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)
Rev. Michelle Carter (Jensen Beach Community Church)
Rev. Alan Coe (Mayflower UCC/Naples)
Rev. Shelly Wilson (Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach and Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg)
Paul Capaldo (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Vacancy Youth under 25
Budget and Finance Committee
Rev. Booth Iburg (Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach)
Enrique Martinez (Spring Hill UCC)
1 vacancy plus chair
Legacy Funds: Grants and Awards Subcommittee
Dyanne Edds (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Nominating Committee
Bunny Gruntler (Sunset Congregational Church/Miami)
Rev. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach)
Bert Perry ((New Hope UCC/DeLand)
3 vacancies
Personnel Committee
Rev. Michelle Carter (Jensen Beach Community Church)
Chance Colon (Spring Hill UCC)
1 vacancy
Committee on Church and Ministry (Western)
Rev. George Miller (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring)
Rev. Mike McMillan (Faith UCC/Dunedin)
Tom Faquett (Trinity UCC/St. Petersburg)
Rev. LaTrell Harrison (Windermere Union Church)
Committee on Church and Ministry (Northeast)
John Fox (CrossRoads UCC/Melbourne)
Committee on Church and Ministry (Southeast)
Rev. Jason Fairbanks (Chair) First Congregational UCC/Lake Worth
Bob McDonnell (Faith Congregational Church/Port St. Lucie)
Synod Class of 2021, 2023
Rev. Vonshele Beneby (Hope UCC/Rockledge)
Rev. Michelle Carter (Jensen Beach Community Church)
Rev. Michael Ford (Congregational UCC/Punta Gorda)
Rev. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach)
Rev. Brad Lutz (Coral Isles Church/Tavernier)
Marcelino Rivera (Windermere Union Church)
Vacancy Youth under 25
Our churches continue to adapt, expand, tweak, reverse course, innovate — and pray a lot — as they adjust to being church in the age of the novel coronavirus. In recent issues we have been sharing what we had heard from our congregations on ways in which they were conducting Sunday worship and other church activities. In this issue we update what we have learned — including that a growing number of congregations have opened to in-person worship or are planning to do so soon.

More church activities can be found in the Time for Conversations, Food, Music & Arts and other featured sections in this issue.

We close this rundown with some thoughts from Rev. Andy Bachman (United Church of Gainesville) and Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC).

Altamonte Springs — Altamonte Chapel Community UCC
9:30am in-person Sunday worship (taped for YouTube)

Auburndale — Christ’s Promise UCC
10:30am Sunday worship on Facebook Live
• Evening Bible study via Zoom on Wednesdays; morning prayer and devotion on Facebook

Bal Harbour — Church by the Sea
Virtual worship on Sunday is at 10:30am on Facebook and the church website
• In-person worship will not resume until after January 1
• Wellness experts share in a Self Care Lunch & Learn webinar series
• Every Tuesday evening a virtual service is offered with prayerful meditation and music

Boca Raton — Church on the Hill Congregational UCC
The Sunday service is on Facebook Live at 10am and the bulletin (with the full text of the sermon) provided online on Saturday; Zoom Fellowship follows worship
• First outdoor worship service was held on November 8; these will occur on the second Sunday of the month until the Sanctuary is re-opened
• On the first Sunday of the month, members are invited to come to the church after virtual worship to take the Lord’s Supper

Boynton Beach — Boynton Beach Congregational UCC
No virtual or in-person Sunday worship at this time
• Rev. Jack Copas posts a weekly sermonette message on YouTube

Brandon — Faith Family UCC
Sunday services are being livestreamed at 10:30am via Facebook; a virtual hospitality time via Zoom following worship has begun
Members could come “down to the river” on October 25 to enjoy fellowship and music

Coral Gables — Coral Gables Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 11am and posted on YouTube
• An eight-page plan for re-entry for public worship has been created composed of three stages with instructions and directions for a well-organized, safe return; in mid-November limited phase-2 inside activities were announced
• A Zoom conversation on visioning the “new church” was held on three Sunday mornings in November
• Drive-in worship was offered on October 11; another took place November 15
• The “Grace, Gravity and Getting Old” series included topics such as “The Brain and Aging,” “Mental Health and Aging” and “Five Wishes”

Deltona – Deltona UCC
Sunday worship is at 10:30am in-person and on Facebook
Autumn was observed with a Pumpkin Patch and a Fall Festival with gift baskets and homemade crafts, kids activities and food trucks
Dunedin — Faith UCC
Sunday services continue to be streamed on YouTube and Facebook Live

- Witness Wednesdays have resumed in front of the church with positive messages of love, hope, inclusion and justice.
- Thanks to a generous gift, 250 masks with the Faith UCC logo were made available

Fort Lauderdale — UCC/Fort Lauderdale
Sunday worship is posted on YouTube

- The Ruth Ministry has resumed outside on church grounds

Fort Myers — Fort Myers Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on YouTube; Zoom coffee time at 11:30am

- The church has adjusted its reopening for worship date to no earlier than Sunday, January 17
- Church members participated in the Women’s March Call to Action sidewalk demonstration on October 17

Fort Walton Beach — Eternal Hope UCC
Sunday morning worship began in-person on June 21 (limiting attendance to 10) while continuing to livestream at 10am on Facebook

- Pastor Rev. Booth Iburg e-blasts a weekly message to church members

Gainesville — United Church of Gainesville
Sunday “virtch” church worship is pre-recorded and available for viewing on YouTube Sunday morning

- The church’s Coronavirus Advisory Team surveyed congregants asking them ten questions ranging from COVID-10 personal risk assessment to safety

Jacksonville — Arlington Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10am via Facebook and posted on website; in-person worship began on September 20 (Facebook viewing continues)

- The Sunday morning in-person Bible class based on the UCC study materials, Weekly Seeds

Lake Helen — First Congregational UCC
The church is currently without a pastor and no Sunday services are being offered; considering engaging a Supply Pastor; first virtual service available on YouTube beginning September 20

- The church will not resume in-person worship until after the first of the year
- The annual Basket Social took place on Saturday, November 14 outside on the porch
- There are late afternoon gatherings every Tuesday and Friday at the park and Parish House front porch; there is a Friday evening Zoom Scripture & Prayer discussion

Lake Worth — First Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10:30am is in-person and via Facebook Live and YouTube; Zoom Fellowship following service at 11:30am

- On Thursday mornings there is a time of Zoom chat and fellowship in the church’s “virtual parlor”

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

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

Miami — Christ Congregational UCC
Sunday in-person worship resumed in the Garden Chapel in November and is livestreamed at 10:30am on Facebook

- Bible study resumed beginning in October on Zoom

Miami — Plymouth Congregational Church
Limited in-person Sunday worship at 10am, livestreamed and later posted on website, YouTube and Facebook

- For four consecutive Wednesday evenings in November it was Pajama Story Time on Zoom with readings from Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s book, Children of God Storybook Bible

Naples — Mayflower
In-person worship resumed on July 5 requiring an extensive list of procedures and safeguards to be followed; service taped for posting on Facebook and is circulated as a YouTube video

- Matching grant from Florida Conference has made possible the purchase of new video cameras and a computer to upgrade video capability and plans to livestream services
- Plans underway to consider how to proceed with worship when seasonal members and friends return after first of year
Naples — Naples UCC
Sunday service is livestreamed at 10am
• Church council has voted to remain closed until the end of the year; re-opening will be determined by meeting metrics of the Harvard Global Health Institute
• A Zoom series on “What’s Your Spiritual Type” ran over five Thursday mornings
• Rev. Dr. Dawson Taylor held a “Dialogue with Dawson” session on October 8 for a Q&A discussion about the life, future and upcoming plans for the church

New Smyrna Beach — UCC/New Smyrna Beach
Sunday services are at 10am on Zoom
• The church participated in the first annual New Smyrna Beach Trunk or Treat

North Port — North Port Community UCC
In-person Sunday worship at 10am began on July 19; viewing online will be available by noon
• In October Zoom prayer gatherings, a new program, began on Thursday mornings
• Beginning in October Tuesday Bible study began meeting outside on the church lawn

Ocala — First Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is at 10:30am on Facebook and YouTube
• The church in conjunction with Temple Beth Shalom broke ground on Monday, October 19, for their new Ocala Tree of Life Sanctuary

Orange City — First Congregational Church
In person Sunday worship at 10:30am began July 5 but ceased at the end of August and reverted to Zoom; in-person service began on November 1
• The annual Teddy Bear Sunday was held on November 8 to share donated stuffed bears and other animals for distribution by first responders to youngsters in stressful situations

Orlando — First UCC
In-person worship began Sunday, June 14, in Crimson Hall (not the Sanctuary); in-person ceased in November through December
• The Mary Magdalene Bible study has resumed in-person

• The thrift shop is now open

Pensacola Beach — Pensacola Beach Community UCC
Sunday worship podcast posted on Saturday
• In-person Sunday worship in the Sanctuary began on June 14 (with restrictions) but were canceled beginning July 5 for the remainder of the month until August 2; on-site worship with limitations resumed in August in the Sanctuary and services were available for viewing on podcasts, posted on the previous Saturday; on-site worship was suspended beginning September 20 but resumed back in the Sanctuary October 11
• The church supported Interfaith Ministries to accept turkeys and hams for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays as well as items to fill its pantry

Pinellas Park — Good Samaritan Church
Zoom worship on Sunday begins at 10:30am
• Offers many “pop-up” events including “Tampa Bay Haunts” for Halloween and a virtual Thanksgiving gathering

Port Orange — Port Orange UCC
Recordings of the Sunday service are available via calling into a phone site or on the church website
• In addition to conducting a Thanksgiving food drive to benefit families with children at a local elementary school the church also held a “Thanksgiving Feast” dinner at the church on November 12

Punta Gorda — Congregational UCC
Sunday worship at 10am is on Facebook Live or viewed on YouTube; the Leadership Team voted to approve in-person worship starting September 20
• A matching grant from the Florida Conference has enabled the church to livestream services simultaneously on YouTube and Facebook
Rockledge — Hope UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on Zoom
• The Big Red bloodmobile bus has scheduled a re-visit to the church

Sanibel — Sanibel Congregational UCC
Sunday worship is livestreamed at 11am and posted soon thereafter on YouTube; an in-person outdoor service began Sunday, November 1
• Tuesday morning Bible study returned on October 20 via Zoom
• The annual Christmas Eve beach service will not be held this year

Sarasota — First Congregational UCC
Sunday services continue to be livestreamed at 11am on Facebook (the bulletin is e-blasted in advance) with later posting on the church website and livestreaming will continue after the pandemic; a simulcast on the website was created beginning September 20; beginning October 18 there will be a half-hour outdoor worship at 9am
• The first outdoor service was attended by about 35
• *Traveling Together* by church member Jeff Jones was used for a discussion of ways for exploring discipleship together

Sarasota — St. Andrew UCC
Sunday worship is live at 10:30am having switched on June from an online app to Facebook Live; up to 10 people can now RSVP to attend in-person worship in the Sanctuary
• Members from the church are involved with a new group formed to support a mask mandate, support Black Lives Matter education and support LGBT educators and students in Sarasota County

Sebring — Emmanuel UCC
In-person Sunday worship began on June 7 at 10am; also appears on Facebook Live and posted on church website and YouTube
• Church members and friends joined in the Rally for Support and Celebration of Diversity in Highlands County held in Sebring on Sunday, October 11

Spring Hill — Spring Hill UCC
A reflection/sermon is recorded for YouTube (in lieu of a service on Zoom, which was the platform before April 19); in-door worship began on September 6 (reservations required so as to not exceed seating limits); listening to the service live on FM radio in church parking lot is possible

St. Augustine — United Church UCC-DoC
Virtual Sunday worship takes place via Zoom at 10am; Zoom coffee hours follow
• The Turning Table outreach ministry offered a mini-seminar on November 12 that provided information about Fair Housing and federal student financial aid for college

St. Pete Beach — Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC
Pre-recorded Sunday worship is livestreamed at 8:45 and 10am on the church website where it is posted for later viewing; a brief in-person worship on the pavilion (with limitations) began on October 4 at 8:30 and 9:30am
• Brief in-person worship is being held on the church’s new pavilion
• Members were invited to provide a brief video of what they are thankful for this year that was shared during worship on November 22

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

Please send your electronic newsletters, Facebook posts and e-blasts to celebrateflorida@uccfla.org.
Now, Here, This
From the previously unexplored, now ever-occupied corners of our homes to the particularities of this historical, cultural moment, the details of our lives seem more visible, and often more pressing, than ever before.

United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine
(Fall)
The Many Hats of Mary Magdalene
(January)
What Does It Mean to be Open and Affirming?

United Church of Gainesville
(October)
Now, Here, This
From the previously unexplored, now ever-occupied corners of our homes to the particularities of this historical, cultural moment, the details of our lives seem more visible, and often more pressing, than ever before.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale
(Fall)
Love at the Core

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota
(Late Fall)
A Textual Triptych
A triptych, especially in religious history, is typically a work of art (usually a painted panel) that is divided into three parts but remains connected thematically (and physically). This November ministers offer a nerdy-preacher theme, a “textual triptych.” That is, all will preach on the same Biblical passage (this time, a chapter of Isaiah) but each with their own lenses and pointing towards a theme of home. The ministers are hopeful that this exercise will both draw parishioners deeper into reflection but also bear witness to the holy and mysterious nature of the Bible. Each reader brings something different to the text; each verse awakens and inspires a variety of interpretations in individual readers.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City
(October)
The Pilgrims

Vero Beach — The Community Church of Vero Beach
In-person (space limited) in Sanctuary and livestreaming on Facebook at 10:15am; Zoom coffee at 11:30am
• The church celebrated Harvest Sunday on November 22 with members bringing donations of fresh seasonal veggies and fruits to decorate the Chancel with the items being donated to the Food Pantry of Indian River County following worship.

Windermere — Windermere Union Church
Sunday virtual worship on YouTube is at 10am with La Iglesia del Pueblo services at 11:30am
• First outdoor service was planned for November 15
• On the third Saturday of the month members prepare sack lunches that are delivered later that day to the homeless in Orlando.

Winter Park — First Congregational UCC
The Sunday worship video goes out late on Saturday both on a streaming service and YouTube channel
• The plan is to return to the Sanctuary on January 10 with a limit of 70 persons
• The annual Walk through Bethlehem will be a drive-thru instead
• A two-part series on dementia was offered via Zoom in October

St. Petersburg — Lakewood UCC
Sunday worship is at 10:30am through Zoom
• The church is experimenting with a “soft” re-opening with in-person gatherings and services outside
• Members waved signs and participated in sidewalk messaging about voting along the busy street in front of the church

St. Petersburg — Pilgrim Congregational Church
In-person worship since June at 10:30am
• The Sanctuary is shared with Risen City Church, which meets at 8:30am
• The two congregations collect and deliver food to a St. Pete food bank, amounting to some 400+ pounds of non-perishables each month

Tallahassee — United Church in Tallahassee
Zoom worship services are every Sunday at 10am
• The annual Artisan Market took place but with canned foods, homemade soups and Christmas ornaments available for purchase online

Tampa — First United Church of Tampa
Sunday morning worship is at 10:30am on Zoom
• Church members celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month on Saturday evening, October 17, by enjoying favorite Latin foods and beverages together via Zoom

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

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

Vero Beach — Coral Isles UCC
Sunday worship is at 10am on Facebook; a virtual social hour follows
Seizing the Opportunity

BY REV. ANDY BACHMANN
ASSOCIATE MINISTER, UNITED CHURCH OF GAINESVILLE

Our transition to an almost entirely online format has been challenging and exciting. The resilience of our community has been incredible, and we are so grateful for your continued support.

We recognize the opportunities that the online church has offered us. We do our best to create visually stimulating, emotionally engaging experiences that bring the sacred to your home. We have been able to track our viewership, and we are thrilled to report that the reach of UCG has stretched beyond our city limits to places as far away as Washington, Wisconsin and Spain, just to name a few. We have also been able to bring our worship experiences to those who have previously been challenging to reach due to age or physical ability. We have even heard that many of you have immensely enjoyed coming to worship while still in your pajamas, a cup of coffee in your hand.

In planning for our future and hoping to strengthen our ministry for the next chapter of our lives, the Board of Business, with Church Council approval, began a “quiet” capital campaign to raise funds necessary to bring our technology capabilities up to meet our increasingly online world. Starting this fall, we will be upgrading our facilities with increased Wi-Fi strength, live streaming capabilities for worship or any other event we hold in our Sanctuary, as well as “remote,” real-time viewing in Reimer Hall and the West Wing. These new technology upgrades will also include a new hearing loop for those audibly-challenged and improved lighting in our Sanctuary.

Our quiet campaign began by asking each member of the Board of Business to ask just three people if they would be willing to join us in our support. We thought we would begin small, then, as needed, expand our asking circle. We were able to raise funds required in the first pass.

Aided by a grant from the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ and a generous gift from our Endowment Committee for this year’s total earnings, we have all we need.

Stay tuned for progress on our work! We believe that these upgrades will enable us to share the mission, message and continued good work of the United Church of Gainesville with the broader world. They will make us more accessible to a broader community, who could use a good dose of the good news that we share and believe. How lucky we are to have such a supportive and generous congregation! Thank you for your continued support, and help us envision how we can be an even better United Church in the next chapter of our lives together.

From the November newsletter of the United Church of Gainesville
Florida Church’s Free Parking Now a Federal Religious Freedom Case

BY HANS HOLZNAGEL
UCC NEWS, NOVEMBER 13, 2020

(This accounting is an update on the article which appeared in the October/November issue of this newsletter.)

If people park at your church to walk to a nearby beach, can you invite them to donate toward your youth group’s mission trip? A federal lawsuit seeks to answer that and other legal questions for Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach.

Situated one city block from a popular beach, the church has been letting the public park for free in its lot for years. Sometimes church teenagers are there to hand out informational fliers and invite donations. In recent years, the City of St. Pete Beach has objected to those practices, saying they violate a zoning code. This summer the city ordered the church to stop letting beachgoers park there. On November 4, a federal judge heard the church’s request for an injunction to lift that ban for now; a ruling is pending.

But there’s more to come in this case. In the Tampa Division of U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida. The church has requested a jury trial, saying inviting motorists onto its property and interacting with them are matters of religious freedom and part of its public mission.

Long History of Welcoming the Public

PAG Church has offered free parking for beachgoers and for various public events since 1957. Since 2016 it has collected voluntary donations. On selected days, young church members are on hand to welcome motorists, give out literature describing their mission trips and accept contributions in person, said Jeanne Haemmelmann, the church’s Associate Minister for Youth and Young Adults.

The church’s senior-high group has about 50 participants, she said, and some need scholarships for the group’s annual mission trips. “Each youth who works the parking lot ‘earns’ $15 an hour, which is actually a credit to their mission trip account,” Haemmelmann said. “Each youth is responsible for raising most of the money for these trips, so this is one way that we ensure that every youth who wants to go on a trip is able to do so.”

Besides funding scholarships, the donations are used to buy building supplies for work done on the trips. The next one – COVID-19 pandemic permitting – will be to a Native American reservation in South Dakota. “We only have youth out there during peak season and holiday weekends,” she said. “We have raised anywhere between $16,000 and $24,000 a year.”

Stationed at the parking lot entrance and wearing shirts identifying themselves as church members, the young people greet motorists in a low-pressure, friendly way, Haemmelmann said. “They say that the parking is donation-based and if you would like to make a donation, it goes to support our mission trips. If people ask what the cost is, they are told there is no cost. “Often people say they have no money and of course the same answer is given. No money needed. We are just happy to have people be able to use the lot.”

Recent History of Tension

The city first cited PAG Church with a zoning violation in the summer of 2016, alleging it was violating neighborhood rules by operating a commercial parking lot. A city magistrate heard the case and concluded that, while “paid parking” would be illegal, “soliciting donations and evangelizing to those who parked in the lot was not a violation,” the church noted in this year’s suit.

The city again brought the church before the magistrate in the fall of 2016 on the grounds that the youth had used a sign that said “fundraiser” and that this amounted to paid parking. The magistrate told them to stop using that sign but said free parking could continue and the church could still accept donations.

But objections from the city and some of the church’s neighbors continued, leading to the current case. In July 2020, St. Pete Beach again told the church to cease, this time citing another code: “Off-street parking spaces shall be reserved for the exclusive use of residents, customers, patrons or employees of the principal use of the property they are designed and intended to serve.”

Church’s “Right to Use its Property”

The church responded in August with a federal court complaint, arguing that serving the public is part of its mission. “Anyone that enters onto the church property is someone in need of God’s love, and therefore akin to what a secular business would call a ‘customer’ or a ‘patron,’” the church wrote. “The church is not a commercial business but rather offers the public the gift of a free place to park and the opportunity to support the church. Members of the public are free to donate, or not to donate, to the youth group when parking on the lot.”

Among other legal points, the church cited its constitutional rights to free speech and expression and equal protection of the law. The latter is being violated, it said, because the city has not objected to beach parking at a shopping plaza or other nearby lots. The church also cited a federal law passed in 2000.

“St. Pete Beach is using an increasingly common tactic among cities and counties – cowering behind misinterpreted
zoning codes – to limit or eliminate the religious freedom of its community members,” said the church’s attorney, Daniel P. Dalton, whose Michigan firm, Dalton & Tomich, specializes in religious-freedom cases. “The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 broadly protects Pass-a-Grille Church’s right to use its property within the parameters of its spiritual mission, which is clearly the case here.”

As part of its federal complaint, the church asked the court to issue an injunction that would allow it to continue its beach-parking program — and would stop St. Pete Beach from interfering. It also asked the court to declare the city’s actions “arbitrary and capricious” and to rule that part of the city code “is void for vagueness and is unenforceable against the church.”

After hearing arguments November 4 on the church’s requested injunction, federal Judge Thomas Barber ordered both parties to continue legal preparations and report back in two weeks. The jury trial requested by the church has not yet been scheduled.

Parking as Hospitality

More is at stake than the use of parking spaces, according to the church. “The city does not consider the many youth whose lives have been changed because of the donations that people freely give to support our mission endeavors,” said PAG’s Senior Minister, Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann. “The church is not the church if ministry and discipleship are defined by entering a church building, then leaving, because the church will be penalized if you visit a friend, walk the beach or break bread with a neighbor.”

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

Welcoming people to the parking lot has spiritual dimensions, Jeanne Haemmelmann said. As the teens guide drivers to parking spaces, they “usually end up speaking with them about past or upcoming mission trips,” she said. “It is always so refreshing to hear people share their own stories of their experiences in youth groups growing up. Often people ask if we could offer a prayer for someone in their family and of course we are happy to do that. We also tell them about services at the church or let them know if they know of a youth who would like to join the group they are welcome.”

Where There’s a Will There’s a Way

The Basket Social is an annual event at First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen that is a tradition in the community. But how to make it happen this year with COVID-19 and buildings being closed for all activity — even worship — was a dilemma.

Never underestimate the resilience and resourcefulness of UCC members!

An enterprising group of members brainstormed and planned an event that the community looks forward to with safety precautions in place. As folks prepared baskets to be raffled, they sent photos and a list of contents to a coordinator. Each basket was assigned a number and the photos were posted on the church website. The photos and lists were also put on posters.

The Saturday and Sunday prior to the event, tickets were sold, the posters were on display and folks were able to tell a committee member which baskets they wanted their tickets to go for. On Saturday, November 14, the baskets were displayed on the Parish House porch, those in attendance were able to add their tickets to those already in the containers and at 2pm the basket raffle took place. Committee members phoned all those who were not present and made arrangements for them to pick up their baskets.

The committee composed of Suzy Smith, Betty Doherty, Nancy Ballesteros, Greta Tibbetts and Ray Arroyo did an excellent job of finding a way this annual event could take place outdoors with masks and social distancing. And the $825 raised is much appreciated!
The United Church of Gainesville invited writings and art from its members for the UCG’s annual Advent devotional booklet. Original writings and art, or favorites that remind one of the season were solicited. An art seminar on Zoom was held on November 29 when instructions were provided to help create a crafty advent wreath. This seminar was great for both parents and their children to do together and for anyone interested in crafting. Recycled jars were decorated, which can be used in advent celebrations or as a candle holder or gift wrap for a special handmade treat.

Naples UCC livestreamed and Facebook Lived “Gypsy Jazz with Glenn and Friends” on Saturday afternoon, October 11. This Ministry of Music’s virtual concert featured Glenn Basham (violin), Michael Blasucci (guitar) and Diego Verney (percussion).

Music Director Hilton Jones at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg created music videos for worship on All Saints Sunday, November 1, and for Thanksgiving Sunday, November 22. Church members were invited to submit pictures of people considered saints for the All Saints music video—a people alive or historical figures or people who have entered life eternal. For the Thanksgiving music video, pictures of things for which congregants are thankful were requested.

As part of their sponsorship of this year’s “10K Race 4 F.I.S.H. — A Virtual Run in 2020” at Sanibel Congregational UCC, the church offered a virtual concert on Sunday afternoon, October 25. Featured were the Wild Coffee Duo of Abbey Allison pianist and Susie Kelly cellist (photo). The program was “Wild Coffee Duo Concert: A Running Playlist for F.I.S.H.” Runners were able to warm up, run their best, then cool down with such selections as the theme from “Chariots of Fire” and the Olympic theme from 1984 as written by John Williams. Or they relaxed in a comfy chair or with loved ones to enjoy the music. The concert was available on the church’s YouTube channel as well as its website. Donations to F.I.S.H., an area human services organization, were made online through the church’s website.

A new program is underway at Faith UCC/Dunedin: a creative writing group. It invites poetry, prose, flash fiction and more with all levels of experience invited welcomed. The plan is to share creative writing—and receive critique of the work from fellow group members. Meetings will begin meeting once a month.

An interfaith Thanksgiving service was livestreamed on Wednesday evening, November 18, from Temple Beth Am. The choir from Coral Gables Congregational UCC was featured. For Advent, the church used Maya Angelou’s poetry and her stirring vision of faith, freedom and dignity as part of its mid-day Tuesday devotions.

“Wednesdays @ 1pm” are weekly live-stream features at the Community Church of Vero Beach that delves deeper into Music and the Fine Arts at the church and around the Treasure Coast. These livestream only events feature tours of artists’ studios, musicians’ roundtables, gallery tours, interviews with poets and local musicians and more. On Wednesday, November 18, Andrew R. Galuska (Director of Music and Fine Arts) sat down for an interview with Carol Ludwig about the Loyola University and Sacred Heart University spiritual direction formation programs. Carol is on staff of the Audire Spiritual Direction training program at the Orlando diocesan San Pedro Center for Spiritual Development.

There will be an artful prayer Zoom session on December 3 at the First Congregational UCC/Sarasota when Cindy Woodling leads a session exploring the art of haiku poetry and helping participants create a holiday haiku word collage/poetry prayer.

Rev. Drew Willard (member, United Church of Gainesville) was a featured participant in “An Evening of Sacred Storytelling” on Thursday evening, October 29. The Zoom and Facebook event (www.facebook.com/InterfaithCouncilLake-County) was presented by The Interfaith Council of Lake County and included representatives of the Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Unitarian faiths.
How Do We Describe Ourselves?
by Rev. Mary Alice Mulligan
St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota

Recently I heard someone describe their affection for St. Andrew to someone who didn’t know anything about us. The first thing she said was, “St. Andrew is an older congregation.” She also mentioned our commitment to justice and peace and our Open and Affirming stance, but they were not first. I have heard various people refer to St. Andrew in this way. “We are an older congregation.”

Lots of congregations across the United States might use a similar description, sensing that they are a little “top-heavy” in the age categories. But let me encourage us to refrain from describing St. Andrew that way, as if our older congregants are the only people who matter.

Perhaps we could work on using another term. How about saying, “We are a diverse congregation” instead? Think of who is in our church. We have people who are working in lots of different fields, both full and part-time; and we have people who are retired.

One of our leaders is turning 90 in a few months and another family has a baby turning six months soon. Some of us worship in the Sanctuary on Sunday mornings and others of us worship livestreaming in Facebook.

We have accents revealing our varied geographical origins. Some of us are longtime single people, others have been partnered or married for many decades. We are gay and straight. Admittedly not many of us are people of color, but some are. And most of us present as the gender assigned at birth, but we eagerly welcome people who are different from the majority of the rest of us.

We treasure our diversity, because we keep each other on our proverbial toes when we are not all the same. So let’s use that as our descriptor. We can say it to anyone. “St. Andrew is a diverse congregation. There is a place for you.”

From “Minister’s Moment,” weekly e-blast from St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota, November 11

A Rabbi and a Minister Walked...

Two communities of faith, each with their own sanctuaries, acknowledging the highest tenets of their respective and collective beliefs — two communities of faith, each with their own sanctuaries, acknowledging the highest tenets of their respective and collective beliefs, coming together in a safe space to put faith into action. Rabbi Ze’ev Harari and Rev. Dr. Harold (Hal) McSwain are working together with their own and each other’s congregations to promote mutual understanding with love, justice, compassion and regard for the integrity of every human being.

Temple Beth Shalom and First Congregational UCC, both of Ocala, broke ground on Monday, October 19, for their new Ocala Tree of Life Sanctuary, to house both communities of faith. The location is along 80th Avenue, near Sholom Park, where now there’s nothing but an empty field. Due to COVID-19 only a limited amount of people were able to attend in person so the event was livestreamed.

This seed of an idea will grow into a vibrant worship and activities center, serving both the temple and the church as well as a growing and thriving community — two communities of faith, each with their own sanctuaries, acknowledging the highest tenets of their respective and collective beliefs, coming together in a safe space to put faith into action. Here Jews and Christians will share space, welcoming everyone into their respective fellowships without discrimination, as a vivid expression of interfaith harmony, to build bridges throughout the Ocala community.

Ocala Tree of Life Sanctuary will provide an open and affirming haven in which adults, children and youth of different faiths will learn to live, work, play and worship together with dignity, mutual respect and honor. The Sanctuary will offer community space for meetings, lectures, concerts along with interfaith worship, workshops and dialogue.
In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality. We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.

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

The Racial Justice Committee at the United Church of Gainesville made it easy to pick up Black Lives Matter yard signs with a drive-through at the church parking lot on Sunday afternoon, October 18.

As part of its “Theological Studies,” Sanibel Congregational UCC offered “How Can I Keep from Singing: Musicians and the Civil Rights Movement” on Wednesday mornings from November 11-25. Most folks are aware of the significance of spirituals during the days of slavery, but the role of music in the struggle for civil rights included far more than the use of spirituals. This class explored the lives and music of several musicians significant in the ongoing struggle for civil rights, including Marian Anderson, Mahalia Jackson, Harry Belafonte and the musicians of Motown. The Zoom class included lecture, music clips and video clips.

The virtual discussion of How to Be an Antiracist continued at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park on Sunday afternoons in sessions led by church member Rev. Jean Cooley. Participants learned about systems in society that are inherently racist as well as about our own unconscious bias.

The church held four virtual house meetings in September to listen to the worries of members and friends during these unsettling times. All of the concerns voiced at house meetings across the county are being collected and tabulated. The FAST (Faith and Action for Strength Together) virtual assembly on October 26 voted on the new concern that will be the focus in the coming year as FAST continues to work for affordable housing, a coordinated access to mental health services and issues involving children.

The Racial Justice Committee at the United Church of Gainesville made it easy to pick up Black Lives Matter yard signs with a drive-through at the church parking lot on Sunday afternoon, October 18.

Hope UCC/Rockledge held a Justice and Witness sign wave in front of the church on September 26.
The October GROW guest speaker at Fort Myers Congregational UCC on Sunday, October 18 and 25, was retired UCC minister Rev. David Minnick. His presentation was “A Study of Christian Anti-Semitism” and utilized the DVD “Constantine’s Sword.”

On Saturday, October 17, members from the church participated in the Women’s March Fort Myers “Call to Action” sidewalk demonstration which lined the sidewalks from McGregor Boulevard to MLK Boulevard.

LIFE (Lee Interfaith For Empowerment) continues to advocate for the establishment of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund in the city of Fort Myers to build new rental apartments for someone making less than about $35,000 a year (80% of Area Medium Income). FMCUCC members of LIFE with representatives from other congregations in LIFE were at a meeting with the City Manager and were praying and singing outside City Hall during the budget meeting. While there has been some progress the City Council has not yet addressed the housing needs that surfaced in LIFE meetings. The 10th Annual Assembly of LIFE took place on November 9 via Zoom. About 250 people, including 23 FMCUCC Network members, attended.

The Zoom education class at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale completed a very successful six-week series on racism in our society and decided to then focus on some other current events and contemporary issues as they affect us and challenge our religious teachings and faith.

Their first session looked at the legacy of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and some of the issues for which she argued as well as the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote. They reviewed that struggle and how it still impacts us by looking at references from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament for direction in their faith journey. That would be followed by a session on the Abraham Accords — why they came about and their potential impact for the future.

The Community Action Committee at the United Church in Tallahassee shared with its church members the long tradition of helping the Florida farm workers. The church has given them shelter, demonstrated with them and welcomed them into its worship service. They write that this year more than ever it is important to support them, as they are some of the most essential workers we have as we all have bought and eaten fruits and vegetables that they have harvested.

This is the time of the year when they have no work, and many of them live in rural areas where there is little access to food distribution centers. The farm workers who are of particular concern are those who have been hired under a visa arrangement, which means they can only work for the agricultural business that hired them and this visa becomes invalid if they seek work elsewhere.

This year the church is assisting these farm workers with a $500 donation to the Out of Our Bounty fundraiser sponsored by the Farm Workers Association of Florida. Donations to this fund will be used to buy food for these farm workers.

A new group in Sarasota County is forming to support a mask mandate, support Black Lives Matter education, and support LGBT educators and students. Each of these topics has come up against much backlash where conversations became extremely hostile, even to the extent of death threats. Members of St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota were encouraged to follow these issues and support the mask mandate (which the school board voted to maintain through the end of the 2020/2021 school year) and racial and LGBTQ equality in the schools.
Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson (First United Church of Tampa) returned (virtually, of course) to help Naples UCC connect our Christian faith to the prophet Micah’s call to “do justice.” What might this mean for us today? This special event – “What Does the Christian Faith Have to Say About Justice” — was held on Monday, November 9 via Zoom to hear and ask questions of one of the UCC’s pioneering voices for Justice.

Some 130 church members from diverse congregations in Manatee County came together for a virtual Zoom workshop on October 22 to learn how diverse congregation can come together to address the root causes of poverty and injustice in the community. Rev. Brian Bagley-Bonner (Faith UCC/Bradenton) served on the organizing committee and Florida Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan was one of the denominational leaders from across the state who participated. Others represented the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Progressive Baptist State Convention of Florida, United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church.

“I am so glad to see Black and White congregations coming together to address systemic racism in our community,” said Rev. Edward Barthell, Pastor of St. Stephens AME Church/East Bradenton and co-chair of the workshop.

Commented Rev. Brian, “We are so excited to be a part of this diverse group of congregations to make a difference in this county. Unfortunately, up until now Manatee County has struggled to bring faith communities together across racial, socio-economic and theological divides. We are very positive about the DART model of focusing only on the things about which we can agree to work together with power.”

The HOPE (Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality) convention on October 26 saw something like 425 committed people joining together to work for systemic change in Hillsborough County where First United Church of Tampa had 44 participants. The assembled agreed to continue working on increasing the number of youths who receive civil citations in the county, work with sister state organizations to see how adult arrests for minor misdemeanors can be decreased and monitor the $10 million promised for affordable housing by the County Commissioners. Also decided was to work on a new problem area — mental health.
October proved to be anything but uneventful for Rev. George Miller (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring).

A racially-charged posting on the social media page of a Highlands County Commissioner created a controversy in the community. At an October 6 Board meeting of the commissioners, Pastor George spoke up. According to the Highlands News-Sun, he said that he believes Sebring is more peaceful than other places because people can speak up and be heard, but that comments like those attributed to the commissioner make him, a white man, feel unsafe. “Social media is called social media because it is available to society...you were not hacked; you were caught.” He went on to say, "Please hear the words we are saying, because when Black and Brown say this hurts, it’s not for this White man to say ‘You’re wrong. Shut up’.”

And Pastor George was only getting started.

On October 6, a Letter to the Editor written by Rev. George appeared in the Highlands News-Sun. He took to task James Fansler, the Chief of Police of Lake Placid, for comments the Chief had posted on social media, remarks that appeared to support vigilantism and were perceived to be anti-gay, transphobic and racist. As a result of the letter, the Chief and Rev. George had a one-on-one conversation with the Pastor inviting the Chief to take part in a peaceful gathering promoting unity in the community that was to take place on October 11 (the Chief was unable to attend).

According to the newspaper (October 11), the Chief said after the Pastor had publicly called him out he had revisited posts he had made that had generated a negative reaction which, he said, enabled him to see their point of view. “I never took the time to look at it from that perspective...If you take a moment and see from someone else’s perspective [what] to see as making light can be offensive and hurtful.” In an interview with the newspaper, Chief Fansler asked, “Can you imagine a world where people listen to each other?” If you feed your mind garbage, you will put out garbage,” he added. “If you feed it positive things, you will put out positive things.” He reported that he had gone through his social media account and deleted “potentially offensive posts,” and he reached out to Rev. George to discuss the matter and apologize.

Rev. George shared with the Highland News-Sun: “It left me with a great sense of hope that if we are able to talk things out, then how much more so can a lot of the issues in the local community be taken care of by simply having a civil conversation...I felt that my concerns were heard and this has been a positive experience in the way of moving forward.” In the November 5 issue of the newspaper the Pastor said “I feel validation that there are proper avenues to express concerns far better than on Facebook. It feels good as a citizen and local pastor to know that local leaders hear our concerns and take them seriously. I am deeply impressed with James Fansler that he called me personally to express remorse about his posts. I really appreciate how he reached out to me with what I felt like a productive conversation that we had.”

Chief Fansler was suspended from October 12-19 without pay for postings he had made on social media and in a public meeting that were judged to have been inappropriate.

The power of the pen and voice. Some “stirring the pot” -- the kind of “good trouble” the late John Lewis encouraged and what our clergy can get into when they speak truth to power and hold the powerful accountable.

"Speak up. Speak out. Get in the way. Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America.”
Congressman John Lewis,
March 1, 2020
The “Establishing an Anti-Racism Ministry” resolution was presented before the annual Gathering of the Florida Conference on October 10 and approved unanimously.

The Anti-Racism Ministry officially began the journey towards restorative racial justice by meeting on November 5 with Rev. Dr. Velda Love, UCC Minister for Racial Justice. During this one hour Zoom gathering, Dr. Velda offered guidance, direction and encouragement to the team. On the following Thursday, the ARM team met via Zoom to unpack Velda’s message, to strategize, explore and ask questions about what it means to be on a “restorative racial justice journey.” What does it look like? What is the goal? Are there different components? Different directions? What do we need to take with us? Where do we start?

One component that we agreed upon early in the process was that Sacred Conversations to End Racism (SC2ER) would be the model that we would follow on this journey. From the SC2ER website (www.ucc.org/sacred_conversations_to_end_racism), we learn that the goal of the restorative racial justice journey -- thus the goal of ARM -- is to:

• address and dismantle racism in our churches, our homes and neighborhoods
• deconstruct the myths of skin supremacy
• recognize and change the language and the narrative of the dominate culture
• decolonize our thinking

One thing is for certain, accomplishing these objectives will not happen quickly!

This will not be a quick trip through the church and around the neighborhood. Instead, we are embarking on a journey which will last a lifetime. In the words of Dr. Velda, it’s a movement, not a moment. And movements which require commitments: commitments of time and energy; commitments to learning, un-learning and re-learning; commitments to engage in conversations and receive revelations which are often uncomfortable, and always restorative.

The good news is that commitments have already been made, and this journey of lifetime has begun. The ARM team is currently 18 people strong and getting stronger! Everyone is welcome, invited, needed and included. If you’d like to be added to the mailing list, if you have questions, ideas or inspirations or if you are looking for resources and conversation partners contact either Neal Watkins (Conference Minister for Faith Formation) at NWatkins@uccfla.org or me at DCooney236@gmail.com. We look forward to making this Journey towards Restorative Racial Justice with you!

**Book Study for Antagonists, Advocates & Allies**

Saturdays from 8-9:30am beginning January 9 – March 13

International best-selling author Catrice M. Jackson describes this book as “The WAKE UP Call Guide for White Women Who Want to Become Allies With Black Women.” Each chapter in the book ends with exercises and questions designed to stretch and transform our understanding of who we are and who we can be. The book study will be facilitated by Rev. Mardie Chapman (member, Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg) and is open to everyone. However, space is limited. If you’d like to participate send an e-mail to DCooney236@gmail.com to reserve your place and receive the Zoom link.

**HELP WANTED**

ARM needs a logo!

If creating logos is your thing, and if you have time to do your thing – let us know!

**SC2ER Every Thursday at 1pm**

If you are ready to engage in a Sacred Conversation to End Racism, ARM has you covered! Every Thursday at 1pm, you are invited to login to Zoom and join meeting #361 687 8295.

The conversation is facilitated by Rev. Donna Cooney and typically lasts one hour. If you have questions and/or would like to receive resources, send an e-mail to DCooney236@gmail.com; you can also text or call 386/244-4336. See you there!
Conference Ministers Address Racism, White Supremacy and Privilege in the Church

October 2020

Dear Members of the United Church of Christ:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ.

In August the National Setting of the UCC committed to hire a consulting firm to lead them through “an objective racial equity assessment” to hold the national setting of the church accountable to the ideals the church has espoused regarding racial equality and inclusion.

We recognize that the history of the UCC includes a wide array of narratives: those of myriad immigrants, formerly enslaved persons, colonists, indigenous communities and more. Our predecessor bodies included abolitionists as well as slave owners; those who believed that racial inequality was established by God, and those who affirmed God-given racial equality with passion and fervor. Our predecessor bodies included those who pressed for the forced assimilation of indigenous peoples as well as those who stood in solidarity with and advocated on behalf of indigenous people. Our history contains the very best of American history regarding racial equality and it contains some of the worst. As a body made up of myriad traditions, theologies, languages, and geographies, our predecessor bodies reflected the society and time around them.

Yet out of that complexity and contention arose something new: a movement of unity in the face of difference, our United Church of Christ.

The tragic events we have witnessed in 2020 have magnified awareness of the disparities in our church and society based on race. The Council of Conference Ministers affirms the commitment of the national setting to racial equality and inclusion and recognizes the need to engage in our own process of critical self-reflection. Therefore, in this moment, the Council of Conference Ministers invites the congregations and members of our conferences to recognize and affirm our call to:

• Consider anew how racism has divided us, damaged and at times destroyed our siblings in Christ, and broken the bonds of peace;
• Ask for forgiveness for our silence in the face of racial injustice;
• Take responsibility for our part in the struggle for racial justice;
• Recognize the political, theological and spiritual diversity of our congregations and to heed the great commandment of Matthew 22:37 to love God with all our souls and with all our minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves;
• Witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ by engaging in deep self-reflection to “remove the log from our own eye” (Matthew 7:5) so that we may become more aware of our own racism and repent of it;
• Build processes of racial inclusion and equity in church membership, leadership, and service; and
• Engage in the sacred work of dismantling racist structures and white supremacy where we find them in the church and the community.

As Conference Ministers, we are on this journey with you and will facilitate and support this work by providing resources that will enable reflection, dialog and action in addressing systems of institutional racism and white supremacy. The reflection and engagement will be different in each conference depending on its unique histories and narratives.

Our covenant is that we will move into self-reflection and clear-eyed conversations with open hearts to hear one another without fear or judgment. We understand that talking about racism, white supremacy and privilege in the church is difficult. However, due to our shared commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in response to God’s invitation to unity, we are empowered to engage in these daunting and uncomfortable conversations. May we do so, as we are led by the Holy Spirit as God’s people.

Grace and Gratitude,

The Council of Conference Ministers United Church of Christ

New Anti-Racism Center Lifts Resources for Action and Reflection

As part of its recommitment to dismantle white supremacy, the UCC’s Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) has updated its website to include a new Anti-Racism Center. The creation of the center is one of many actions to be taken as a follow-up to the “Pandemic of Systemic Racism” statement released by CHHSM board and staff last June.

“We released our statement on systemic racism — and are following up with projects like the Anti-Racism Center — in order to work toward achieving the goal of our vision statement, ‘Together, we create a just, caring and compassionate world,’” says Michael J. Readinger, CHHSM president and CEO. “CHHSM will offer additional resources, studies and activities in the near future in response to our call to be serving leaders.”

The new area provides a rich array of resources — books, articles, poems, podcasts, and videos — that offer grounding for racial equity work from movement leaders as well as materials from CHHSM, its member ministries, the UCC, other nonprofits and other justice movements. It includes resources for reflection as well as materials to support action. Read more

From e-Celebrate, October 28
Port Orange UCC is dealing with air conditioning problems in the old nursery and the Sanctuary, hoping that maintenance contracts will prove to be a wise investment. An overdue project is the painting of the Sanctuary walls with a special focus on its beautiful west wall mural. Painted in year 2000 by the church’s own world class artist, Bonnie Morisset, in consultation with her and advice from a local top paint supply company, they will be sealing the entire wall with a clear matt finish preservative paint ($128/gal) to seal the wall and prevent further cracking and/or separation of the wall board. Prior to sealing seven different spots where the wallboard has cracked or come loose will be repaired.

The Finance and Facilities Committee at Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville has been working for the past few months to obtain quotes for the replacement of or repair of several areas of the church’s roofs, which have been leaking. Brad Negaard and Brian Ellis are on F&F and are in the construction business. Their review and input have been extremely important to the decision-making process, having received bids from three different contractors. The areas in most need are the areas that encompass several rooms and Fellowship Hall. The existing roofing material will be removed, and Styrofoam insulation and a new roof layer will be installed. All other flat roofs will be inspected, cleaned and repaired where necessary. The total cost for the work will be $66,898. It will be funded partly from the church’s capital improvement fund and, if necessary, using some of the money from the recent sale of the church’s Arlington Promise House [Bowers] property next door.

Naples UCC is in the process of upgrading every toilet, faucet and paper towel dispenser on its campus to touchless systems for the safety of members, staff and visitors.

Work has begun at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg on the renovation of the Fellowship Hall to accommodate the new adult day care program that will be offered by Neighborly Services. The mitigation of the asbestos in the ceiling is complete. Electrical work is proceeding. A fire alarm system that includes the Sanctuary building is underway. The addition of three accessible restrooms will begin. The church is eagerly awaiting welcoming this new program, which will address the needs of senior citizens in the area.

Immediately following the Blessing of the Animals on Sunday, November 22, Coral Gables Congregational UCC inaugurated its Best Friends Memorial Garden. A special area near the Chapel and around the statue of Saint Francis of Assisi has been set aside as a space to memorialize departed best friends. A plant and a personalized etched stone can be placed in the garden during a special service with a $150 donation suggested for the plant and stone.

The United Church of Gainesville is continuing its partnership with local farms to raise funds and awareness for a women’s gardening project in Guatemala through Growing Hope Globally (GHG). This organization is committed to creating programs that will have a lasting impact on not just hunger but also on the root causes of hunger worldwide.

The partnership encourages congregants to shop at several local farms involved with GHG. The church solicited financial contributions for the organization with donors receiving a free copy of the church’s first ever UCG “Soup and Salad” cookbook.

On Sunday November 15, just before Thanksgiving, Kathryn Seagle of the Compassion in Action Committee hosted a seminar regarding the Eat Local, Grow Hope Globally partnership. She discussed food insecurity, hunger at home and abroad, fasting and the Growing Hope Globally project in Guatemala.

Did you know the global refugee population has increased by 50% over the past five years? The United Church of Christ welcomes refugees and asylum seekers to our cities, neighborhoods and churches — it’s what Jesus instructed us to do.

This #GivingTuesday, the United Church of Christ is raising funds to address the plight of refugees and asylum seekers here in the U.S. and globally.

Join us on December 1 as we continue to seek a Just World For All.
The Ruth Ministry at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale has partnered with “The Imperial Court of All Florida”, a local charitable organization, to make 200 “Brown Bag” lunches for those who are hungry. The Imperial Court provided all of the materials and Ruth Ministry provided the “Bag” lunches for those who are hungry. The Imperial Court was representing the Gainesville Community Ministries food pantry. Members of Youth United and Compassion in Action were on hand to remove items from cars trunks. The church also has established partnerships with local farms, encouraging members to support them.

Food donations for the Outside the Gates Food Pantry were left at First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen on October 31.

Faith UCC/Dunedin continues its support of the Dunedin Cares non-profit/donation-based organization located behind its neighbor, Faith Lutheran Church, by providing it with food and household items where families in need can choose what they need, supermarket-style. IMAGE Each year during the month of October, church members pause during worship to do an act of justice: write letters to elected officials on behalf of hungry kids and families as part of Bread for the World’s “Offering of Letters.” Writing a letter this year is easier than ever because the letters are electronic. Congregants were encouraged to visit the Bread for the World: Offering of Letters website (https://www.bread.org/2020-offering-letters), scroll down and click on “write to Congress” link, choose whether you would like to write on international or domestic hunger issues (both can be done), fill out the form and click send. A script is provided but one could write a handwritten postcard or letter to Congressional leaders asking them to help alleviate hunger.

First United Church of Tampa celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month on Saturday, October 17, with a Zoom meal (you brought your favorite Latin food and drink) and a time of music and poetry.

The Good Samaritan Church/Pinelands Park food pantry is now feeding four times as many people as it did before the pandemic struck. That’s more than 1,000 people every month. From January through August the pantry served 4,866 individuals. Newly-homeless are the most common ones they are now serving. In August the pantry was open 13 days and served 771 adult clients and 252 children, representing 359 households. Beryl Fruth reported that 40 households were served in just two hours on September 28.

When Naples UCC distributed Communion elements on Friday, October 30, in the church parking lot, it was also a Cans for Communion drive to collect nonperishable food items and general supplies for Grace Place Pantry.

The drive-through home-cooked rib dinner fundraiser held at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach on Sunday, October 24, had enough leftovers to serve this special meal the next day to its Colors of Hunger diners, the community-sponsored feeding program for SE Volusia County. A win-win for all involved!

Sanibel Congregational UCC in conjunction with Temple Bat Yam is continuing its once-a-month no-contact drop-off food drives to support the clients of F.I.S.H. and the Gladiolus Food Pantry.

On Thursday afternoon, October 19, at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour, Chef Dulce cooked up a meal and shared info “How Food Affects Mood” in another installment of the church’s Self-Care Lunch & Learn series.

On the second Sunday of every month Pilgrim Congregational UCC/St. Petersburg collects and delivers food to a St. Pete food bank, amounting to some 400+ pounds of non-perishables each month. Risen City Church, which shares the PCUCC campus, contributes to this effort.

Each week the local Panera donates its leftover bread and bagels to Deltona UCC. After its members and visitors take what they need, the rest is delivered to the United Methodist Children’s Home nearby – where the children are always excited to see the bagels arriving!

On the third Saturday of the month at 10am in the preschool building at Windermere Union Church, sack lunches are prepared to be delivered later that day to the homeless in Orlando.

Harvest Sunday was celebrated on November 22 at the Community Church of Vero Beach, sack lunches are prepared to be delivered later that day to the homeless in Orlando.

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The Missions Board at Fort Myers Congregational UCC has come up with something they’re calling a Reverse Advent Calendar as a way to help participants feel good every day in November (rather than December) by giving back in a meaningful way. Traditionally a Reverse Advent calendar tells you to add a food item to a box every day in December, leading you to have a container full of 24 items by the time Christmas comes. Then, to cap the whole thing off, you’re supposed to take the box to a local food pantry. But the congregation is changing the Advent emphasis to a Thanksgiving theme and asking folks to fill their box during the month of November. The items chosen to fill the reverse Advent calendar donation box are inexpensive and easy to find.

Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton is providing Thanksgiving baskets to families in need by helping Boca Helping Hands with its Thanksgiving Box Brigade program. The organization is providing its clients with a turkey and a box filled with everything a family needs to prepare a holiday meal.” COTH is participating by monetary donations with one basket costing $27.20.

The food pantry at Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park changed its request for help with Thanksgiving food to distribute. Church members were asked to purchase one pound canned hams to donate and pantry funds were used to buy other items. Ahead of turkey day, folks were able to participate in a virtual “Pop-Up” event on Monday, November 9, to share Thanksgiving memories and recipes. A Thanksgiving Day virtual gathering took place from 4-5pm among members of the church who wished to enjoy their meals in front of the computer while talking and laughing with church friends.

The Thanksgiving food drive at Port Orange UCC has sought to benefit families with children at a local elementary school with gift cards. Congregants could donate specific food items or donate monies that would go toward the purchase of the gift cards. The church also held a “Thanksgiving Feast” Fellowship Dinner on Thursday, November 12 with turkey provided and guests bringing sides and desserts.

A generous member of Faith UCC/Dunedin has underwritten the cost of 250 face masks featuring the Faith UCC logo. Members and friends are purchasing the masks and making donating for them, with over $400 collected by the end of October. Funds collected will be donated to Dunedin Cares to help with the purchase of Thanksgiving food items for those insecure in the community.

Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach is encouraging its members to support the efforts of Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army, which are both distributing foods for Thanksgiving. It’s possible to help sponsor a meal by filling up a bag with non-perishable fixings and return it to the Salvation Army by the Monday before Thanksgiving. Both agencies can also use volunteers. The feeding ministry provided a Thanksgiving lunch on the Wednesday before to 67 folks.

There was a great Thanksgiving pie sale fundraiser at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach. Orders were accepted up to November 23. The pies—seven varieties—were baked by John Buchanan and Donnie Coleman.

Both Gladiolus Food Pantry and F.I.S.H. of San-Cap have long been supported by Sanibel Congregational UCC and are again providing the fixings for Thanksgiving dinners for their clients in need. The effects of Red Tide in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more people struggling to provide for their loved ones and themselves and turning to these two organizations for their everyday needs. Both agencies hope to bring a little feeling of normalcy for their clients in an uncertain time. The church’s Mission and Benevolence Committee encourages congregants to provide another reason for its people to celebrate and give thanks by donating to support these efforts.
Committee will match donations up to a total of $500 with all proceeds to be split between the two agencies.

Some 30 families who receive donations from the food pantry at Spring Hill UCC received a turkey with all the fixings. The turkeys were donated, and the rest of the meal was up to church members, who provided the side dishes or donated funds to cover those costs.

Rev. Tom Lacey and his family invited members of Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton to join them for a Thanksgiving picnic outside at the church on that Thursday afternoon. Everyone brought their own meals and were provided their own tables.

Congregants at Arlington Congregational Church/Jacksonville collected bags of food for Arlington Community Services, the local food pantry, in time for Thanksgiving.

Pensacola Community UCC welcomed the donation of turkeys and hams (and monetary donations) for Thanksgiving that were delivered to the food pantry at Interfaith Ministries.

Food donations continue to be collected at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg for Operation Attack, an all-volunteer ministry supported by over a dozen local congregations in south St. Petersburg that assists clients with food, clothing and other needs.

Believing that Thanksgiving dinner always tastes better if you don’t have to cook it yourself, Naples UCC had it all covered, drive-thru style. The interested could pick up one or more meals from the church portico on Tuesday afternoon, November 17, take it home and gather later with friends. Each meal included turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans with bacon and pumpkin pie for $20. The catering was provided by Delicious by Design, a mission of St. Matthew’s House (a housing and feeding ministry). During worship on November 22, the church received its traditional Thanksgiving offering benefiting the Harry Chapin Food Bank, which works with selected partner agencies and senior housing sites.

Instead of a food drive for Thanksgiving, this year Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach decided to collect donations for CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse), the official domestic violence center for Pinellas County providing advocacy, prevention, intervention and support services. Items provided ranged from body wash and shampoo to diapers and pacifiers.

Hope UCC/Rockledge had a Thanksgiving-themed non-perishable drive-through food drive on November 21 at the church with the food going to the Central Brevard Sharing Center.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota hosted an outdoor Thanksgiving Fellowship at noon on Sunday, November 22. Some simple food, lemonade, iced tea and water were served. Guests were masked and sat at tables safely distanced and other protocols were followed.

The Basket Brigade at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park, led by the Spirit Keepers and Come Alive!, are leading the charge to generate bountiful baskets to support the Ward Chapel Food Pantry. Congregants are being asked to fill a laundry basket with a baking/roasting pan, a $10-$25 grocery card (for a turkey and pie) and food items that will provide a family of five with a Thanksgiving dinner. The church also provided members with contact info for other agencies worthy of supporting.

The Community Church of Vero Beach joined with other interfaith communities in the area in asking its members to donate non-perishable items in a pre-Thanksgiving drive-thru food donation at First Baptist Church on Sunday, November 15.
We are proud of the many authors who are clergy or staff — past and present — in our Florida churches and Conference. Their diversified talent covers a wide variety of subjects and interests.

You can support these authors by purchasing their books as Christmas gifts, stocking stuffers or hostess “thank you’s” — or just treat yourself!

Check out these books On Our Bookshelf.

Catching Stars While Walking into Walls: Finding Our Way to God’s Heart in the Daily and the Ordinary by Rev. Dr. Kathy Rooke (former Pastor, Faith Family UCC/Brandon)

In the Footsteps of Disease (Friesen Press), The Call of Africa (Legacy Publishing) and Time to Stand and Stare: Meditations on a Mountain Path by Martin Gwent Lewis, M.D. (most recently Pastor of Chapel on the Hill UCC/Seminole)

Growing Older, Thinking Younger: Ministry to Boomers (Pilgrim Press) by Rev. Dr. Keith Haemmelmann (Senior Pastor, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

Rise of the Spiritual Activist (West Bow Press) and Praying For An Eclipse (trilogy) by Rev. Dr. Guillermo Márquez-Sterling (Associate Pastor, Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

Alzheimer’s: A Beautiful Spirit Celebrated (Richardson Publishing) by Rev. Linn Possell
The Long Winding Journey Home (Outskirts Press) by Revs. Larry and Sandy Reimer (Pastors emeriti, United Church of Gainesville)

A Fine Day for a Killing Spree (Amazon Digital Services, Inc.) by Rev. Ned Michael (Pastor, Edgewater Union Church)

FreeK Week, A Christmas Dozen, Christmas Stories to Warm the Heart (Burt Creations) and The Bookseller’s Daughter by Rev. Steven Burt (a retired UCC pastor who lives part time in The Villages)

Rev. Dr. Jerry Schumm (a retired UCC minister who served both Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami and Coral Gables Congregational UCC) Pass the Paddle: Mississippi Dreamin’ Come Hell or High Water

Rev. Dr. Michael Price (Former Pastor at Chapel on The Hill UCC/Seminole) Murder on the Disoriented Express: How the Actions of the Laity May Be Killing Their Congregation; Backfill: How the Later Gospel Writers Transformed the Historical Jesus into the Risen Christ

Books are available online from sources such as Amazon.com where you can search by title/author or by using your favorite search engine, such as Google, Yahoo, etc.
3 Great Loves Resources

This is the link for the new (and free) 3GL Resource Document that churches and pastors can download and customize/adapt the stuff in there for their setting.

Here is what we have to describe it. Feel free to use/adjust/edit for anything and for the newsletter, too perhaps.

“During the 2020-2021 programmatic year, 3 Great Loves can be a valuable and easy to engage denominational initiative, even if your church hasn’t actively participated since its inception in 2017. With this free resource guide, we re-introduce you to 3 Great Loves, outline its contours and framework, provide adaptable and customizable resources, and invite you to find your place and part in this denominational program of living out God’s love.

From introductory letters, sermon suggestions, sample sermon, 3 Great Loves theme song, newly created 3 Great Loves worship liturgies, to children’s coloring pages, and more. This resource is made for customization with ready to use materials.”

Also, here is the link for the stewardship theme materials for print and digital:

Finally, here are the videos testimonials on YouTube for churches to stream for each of the loves and a general call to love through our giving.

The developer backed out of its plans to go ahead with a housing development project on the beautiful Douglas property in Pinellas County, land (44 acres plus a lake) that the owner had hoped could become a preserve and park before she died. The pressure has been great from residents of the area to preserve the land. Plans are being worked out and negotiated between Dunedin, which allocated $2 million for the land, and Pinellas County, which will be asked to make up the remainder of the money needed. Members of Faith UCC/Dunedin are being encouraged to sign petitions to city and county officials to save the land.

Sunday, October 11, was the first Sunday school Zoom class at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami on “Protect the Environment.” It was its first in the series on “Be the Church.”

For the last four years, the City Manager of DeLand, has visited First Congregational UCC/Orange City annually to keep congregants up-to-date on the progress of The Bridge — the shelter being built in DeLand for homeless people in West Volusia County. In return, the church has had an annual fund drive to help the shelter when it is complete. It was officially opened on September 28 and is now occupied. Due to the generosity of the congregation, $860 was able to be applied to utility costs. The Bridge will provide many much-needed services to the homeless in the area.

The Green Team at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota invited parishioners to a three-part discussion series based around a movie, book and webinar all focused on regional environmental concerns and advocacy. The documentary film was “This Changes Everything” based on the book of the same name by Naomi Klein. A Zoom session was scheduled to discuss the materials covered. There was also a Zoom presentation of the PBS documentary, “Climate Change: The Facts” as well as a three-part discussion series of the book The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea by Jack Davis with an exploration of the gulf’s history and the coast’s flora and fauna.

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg continues its support of a nearby elementary school by purchasing items that include children’s clothing, cloth and disposable masks and vinyl gloves.

For the second year in a row, Naples UCC partnered with the Holocaust Museum of Southwest Florida, Temple Shalom and the Movies that Matter film series for a viewing and panel discussion of issues raised and how the area is affected. “Sustainable Nation”
is a one-hour documentary that follows three individuals who are doing their part to bring sustainable water solutions to an increasingly thirsty planet. Participants were able to view the movie in their own homes and watch the panels on Zoom. Also, church members were invited to be an NUUC Creation Care Voter by making a personal commitment to vote for candidates and policies consistent with caring for God’s creation. Before voting they were encouraged to ask themselves: Do the policies of the candidates I support reflect my position on climate change and will any actions proposed preserve the planet for current and future generations.

Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami is calling on sewers to get to work creating handmade pillowcases. These (along with a pillow) will be given to each child who comes into the Chapman Partnership for the Homeless. Fifty are needed at the moment and another 100 soon. Instructions are provided.

Want to learn how to save energy and water in your home and reduce your utility bill? The Community Weatherization Coalition (CWC) is a local non-profit that United Church of Gainesville members helped found, and several UCG members serve as active volunteers (UCG member Mari-anne Schmink is the President of the volunteer CWC Advisory Board). The CWC has helped Alachua County residents save hundreds of thousands of dollars in utility bills, by saving energy and water in their homes. The CWC’s new “Super Savers: Home Energy Online Workshop” was held November 12 and November 18 at which viewers could learn how to save hundreds of dollars annually on utility expenses, with super simple changes, and be able to take part in a new do-it-yourself home energy tune-up program.

Deb Swim and Carol Schwarz at the United Church in Tallahassee will be leading a study on people of faith and climate solutions. It will begin in January and cover topics such as: sources of global warming; climate change and environmental degradation and their likely course in upcoming years, with and without effective counter-measures; promising strategies to reverse course or at least to mitigate these threats and avoid disaster; policy targets to promote change here in Florida; our religious vocation of creation care.

On Friday, October 23, several Friends/friends from the St. Augustine Friends Worship Group and the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine went out on the Litter Gitter to pick up trash in the Matanzas River. Local environmentalist Captain Adam Morley steered the boat while sharing his knowledge of environmental issues affecting the community. The main message: stop using plastic whenever possible, especially single-use plastic.

Please send your 3 Great Loves story to Lynn and Sheila.

Women at Coral Gables Congregational UCC had a study on Saturday, October 17 using the book Women Rowing North: Navigating Life’s Currents and Flourishing as We Age by Mary Pipher. A morning of sharing insights and support for women living with cancer took place on Saturday morning, November 7, on Zoom.

Little Fires Everywhere by Celeste Ng was the subject of a discussion among women at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami on Saturday morning, October 17.

The Anam Cara Women’s Circle at Faith UCC/Dunedin had “Legacy” as its theme for a fall series in its “Musings” newsletter. It invited women of the church to celebrate someone they want to remember. Someone in their family who inspired or mentored them? What makes you strike a warrior pose and hold it long? ACWC welcomed short reflections—a story (200-300 words), poem, a cartoon, photograph or illustration. On Sunday afternoon, November 22, it was “A Recipe for Friendship” as the gathered Zoom-shared a time of friendship, gratitude and some favorite Thanksgiving recipes. ACWC also invited participation in its Saturday morning contemplative silent labyrinth walk, taking around 20 minutes with a brief time of reflection before and after. They are able to use the labyrinth at a local Episcopal Church.

Women Come Alive! at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park will offer an opportunity on Sunday afternoon, December 6, to share and discuss virtually favorite family holiday traditions.

At Naples UCC Women Engage had a discussion of the value and importance of monuments and memorials in public spaces. The November 19 Zoom event was led by church member and educator, Dr. Heather English.
In September, two donations were made by Faith UCC/Dunedin. The first was a $250 contribution to the RCS Haven, which offers help to victims of domestic violence. During the pandemic, domestic violence incidents have increased dramatically. The Leadership Team thought it was important to support this worthwhile shelter which serves the community. In addition, members of the congregation asked about supporting the St. Petersburg Islamic Center whose building was recently hit by gunfire yet again. The Islamic Center is raising money to purchase security cameras and Faith made a $250 contribution to stand in solidarity with them and help them meet their goal.

The faithful knitters at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota worked to get a box off to their friends in South Dakota in early October so that they can be prepared for the winter. Through this program, items such as hats, scarves and mittens are knitted, primarily for children on the reservations and Native Americans of South Dakota. They call their effort “stitches of love and friendship.”

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As a fundraiser for the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine, member Myra Smith is creating handmade masks – varying fabrics (including Christmas-themed) with a suggested donation price of $10.

The outreach is able to provide a weekly meal, clothing and toiletries and guidance regarding resources such as housing and health insurance.

September was a pretty good month for the thrift shop at Port Orange UCC with weekly sales averaging about $200 a day. Sales one morning in the furniture room alone totaled $100.

From Monday, October 26-Friday, November 6, interested parties at the United Church of Gainesville were able to sign-up for a 30-minute spot to come and walk the labyrinth in the Sanctuary. Participants had the place all to themselves (or with a COVID cohort), surrounded by altars composed of photographs, honoring all the saints of our lives whom we have loved and lost. Participants were welcome to bring a photograph of a dearly departed loved one to create these altars of love in preparation of and for All Saint’s Day. On November 1 (and also on Wednesdays, October 28 and November 4) the labyrinth stayed open into the evening hours; the labyrinth at night is a beautiful setting during which to walk the labyrinth.

An outdoor flea market was held at Spring Hill UCC on Saturday, November 7 from 9am-2pm. Church members donated items, there was a bake sale and vendor space was also available. The annual Christmas bazaar was not held this year, but Christmas items were available at the flea market.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC has begun a new beginner, conversational Spanish Zoom class on Fridays for help with basic Spanish language skills. CGCUCC’s German language church celebrated St. Martin’s Day on November 11 that included a virtual lantern parade.

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour will be hosting the mobile mammography bus on Saturday, December 12, at the church offices in Bay Harbor.

Rev. George Miller (Pastor, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring) was before the commissioners of Highlands County on Tuesday, November 3, asking the officials what data and arguments he and others would need to provide for a reconsideration of a COVID-19 mask mandate.

On December 12 Hope UCC/Rockledge will host another community blood drive at the church in conjunction with an outdoor socially-distanced/PPE-equipped yard sale that will run on December 11 and 12 from 8am-2pm each day. On both days there will also be grab-and-go hotdog/hamburger lunches, New England corn chowder and a bake sale.

The quilt fundraiser at the United Church in Tallahassee, made possible by the Graceful Threads sewing group, raised more than $3,000 for Connection First Inc. in their work with local youth and restorative justice programs.

This year the Community Church of Vero Beach is studying the Narrative Lectionary at its men’s and women’s adult Bible studies. The Narrative Lectionary readings line up with the major church festivals (Christmas, Transfiguration Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost), providing a broad story of our faith using a chronological approach.

As a fundraiser for the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine, member Myra Smith is creating handmade masks – varying fabrics (including Christmas-themed) with a suggested donation price of $10.
Across Florida

Members of Hope UCC/Rockledge participated in the Space Coast Pride Walk on September 25.

As Coral Gables Congregational UCC seeks to widen its welcome and do justice for everyone in the LGBTQ+ community, a trans/non-binary workshop was held on October 13 via Zoom. The training sought to equip participants with the language and the action to be a congregation that affirms transgender and non-binary people. It discussed gender and the Bible, terminology and language and practical ways that CGC-UCC can be trans/non-binary affirming as a congregation and in one’s own life.

October 18 was Pride Sunday at the United Church of Gainesville where its Open and Affirming Committee hosted a panel discussion on the history of the Pride Festival in the city of Gainesville. Also, a seminar about the Open and Affirming designation was offered where UCG members shared about the journey to becoming an ONA congregation. It was followed by a virtual Pride brunch.

Rev. George Miller (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring) and church members and friends joined in the Rally for Support and Celebration of Diversity in Highlands County held in Sebring on Sunday, October 11. The walk ended with remarks from a couple speakers and a song from church accompanist Carnide Thermidor before peacefully dispersing. Celebrants were encouraged to wear whatever they wished and waving whatever flags with which they identified.

The worship series in January at the United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine in January will have as its focus: “What does it mean to be open and affirming?” They will explore what it means to be open and affirming, paying special attention to Bible stories which affirm all people.

The UCC ONA Coalition shared information about National Coming Out Day on October 11 — the annual celebration of the millions whose stories of coming out of the closet are also stories of minds and hearts that were changed. “Coming Out” isn’t an opportunity only for LGBTQ people, but for friends and allies—and especially churches. When ONA congregations come out in their communities, they are claiming the power to change the world.

Some ways to celebrate were suggested: Observe Sunday, October 11, by including Thanksgiving for LGBTQ members and neighbors; plan strategies for your congregation that will help your it become more visible in the community as an Open and Affirming church. There is an ONA 201 webinar that is available that shares best practices learned from ONA congregations that are making a difference, including tips on marketing and communication.

DISCUSSIONS/SEMINARS/PRESENTATIONS WE’RE HAVING...
via Zoom, or other livestreaming

“Super Savers: Home Energy Online Workshop,” “Healing from Political Dis-tress,” “The History of the Pride Festival in the City of Gainesville,” “The Beatitudes” (United Church of Gainesville)

“A New Look at Plague in the Old Testament,” “Plymouth’s Pilgrims: Their Church, Their World, and Ours — A Historical Introduction and Discussion,” “Living and Caring for Pets During the Pandemic,” “The Myth of the White Jesus” (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)


“America Then and Now” with David Halberstam, “White Power & Paramilitary America” with Kathleen Belew, “The Politics of Conservatism” with E. J. Dionne (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

“The Abraham Accords” (UCC/Fort Lauderdale)

“The ‘New Now’ of Church,” “Share and Support: Post-Election,” “Sermon on the Mount,” “Trans-Non-Binary101,” “Grace, Gravity and Getting Old” (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

“The Gospel of Mary” (United Church UCC-DOC/St. Augustine)

The Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)
BOOKS WE’RE READING AND DISCUSSING TOGETHER...
via Zoom, or other livestreaming

*Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens and *Beyond Belief* by Marcus Borg (Naples UCC)

*Summer of ’69* by Elin Hilderbrand (First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen)

*Rainbow in the Cloud: The Wisdom and Spirit of Maya Angelou* by Maya Angelou and *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson (Faith UCC/Dunedin)

*Still Life* by Louise Penny and *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park)


*Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson, *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid and *Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (Church on The Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton)

*Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)

*Holy Envy* by Barbara Brown Taylor (First United Church of Tampa)

*Florida (Short Stories)* by Lauren Groff (Hope UCC/Rockledge)

Dr. Martin Lewis, the retired Pastor at Chapel on the Hill/Seminole, had a book signing on Sunday, November 22, for his most recent work, *Time to Stand and Stare: Meditations on a Mountain Path.*

The event was at his new church home, Pilgrim Congregational UCC/St. Petersburg.

**Halloween**

**Deltona UCC** offered the community a Pumpkin Patch. Almost every pumpkin was sold, and those that weren’t went to a local farm for baking pies and feeding the animals! On Saturday, October 24, it held a Fall Festival that featured a silent auction with gift baskets, Granny’s Attic with homemade crafts, kids’ activities and food trucks.

Instead of its annual Halloween party, the Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Ratn organized a Trunk or Treat on Sunday, October 25, following worship. It was a time to show off costumes in the church parking lot. At the same time, a fundraiser was held to help Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation move one step closer to finding a cure for children with cancer. Monies raised went toward research to discover better treatments and cures.

**Hope UCC/Rockledge** prepped treat bags for a drive through Halloween Trick or Treat community event on October 31 with 121 kids taking advantage of the opportunity. A very witchy Pastor handed out the treats.

The Christian Education and Community Outreach Committees at the United Church in Tallahassee hosted the church’s first ever Drive Through Community Trick or Treat. The event was held on Saturday, October 31, from 6:30-8:00. It provided a safe, free way for the kids in the community to celebrate Halloween. Everyone who participated (kids and
parents) stayed in their vehicles and wore masks. Volunteers directed traffic, and cars drove up to the front of church four at a time, where the dressed-up volunteers safely distributed the candy bags. Quart-size Ziploc bags of Halloween candy were filled to about ¾ full — and they quickly ran out of candy!

The UCC/New Smyrna Beach participated in the first Annual New Smyrna Beach Trunk or Treat, supporting the community safely while do something for area children to observe the joy of Halloween. It was held at the Marine Discovery Center parking lot on Friday evening, October 30. It was suggested that 500 candy bags (with the ID of the donor) be available. Lori Lee, Carolyn Cote, Marcia Naugle, Donna Lambert and Pam Hopper and youth group teams helped provide, decorate and fill bags. Some 300 cars showed up, many containing multiple kids. A chute was used to pass out the candy to comply with social distancing.

The United Church of Gainesville scheduled a 30 minute Halloween walk-through event on Saturday, October 31, from 10:30am. Church youth groups as well as some childcare workers invited children to come in their Halloween costumes, have safe fun and receive some goodies (due to allergies, fun prizes instead of candy were handed out). Participants entered the small church parking lot where they were greeted by staff, invited to follow a one-way path through the parking lot and playground while stopping at 10 stations along the way; safe, fun prize-winning activities were offered at each station. Then there was a virtual Halloween parade on Sunday, November 1, when kids were able to tune into Zoom time from 10-11am wearing their Halloween costumes. Each child had an opportunity to share his/her costume or anything about their Halloween with friends and childcare aides (who of course were dressed up as well).

Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour had planned a Pumpkin Patch Party outside the church offices, but the town of Bay Harbor Islands denied the permit. They advised the church that no permit would be granted for gatherings larger than 10 people.

The normal Pumpkinfest fundraiser luncheon at First Congregational UCC/Winter Park wasn’t to be this year so the pivot was to an all-ages Trunk or Treat. It took place on Saturday evening, October 24, in the church parking lots with nine trunks — including Charlie Brown, Hogwarts, Little Red Riding Hood, Starbucks and a monster and a sloth — competing for the best decorated car prize, which was won by Peter Rabbit. Treats were also available through the church drive-through. Smiles were evident through the masks!

The Board of Christian Education and the Christ Congregational UCC/Miami Women collected individually pre-packaged candy, chips, cookies and prizes for a Halloween Grab & Go for church youth held on Saturday, October 31, from 5-6pm. There was also a drive-by opportunity to pick up Halloween treat bags on Saturday, October 31. Participants were encouraged to dress in costume and decorate cars.

On Sunday, October 25 at 6pm, members of Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park were invited to join together for a night of fun via Zoom. Participants gathered their supplies and participated in as much or as little as they liked. The event was for any age and activities were geared for fun and excitement. Attendees could decorate cookies, go pumpkin bowling, make ghost lollipops or do crafts and play games. Resident story teller Martha Taylor shared scary stories to put everyone in a frightening mood.
Naples UCC celebrated loved ones who have passed away in the last year with a special Communion service as they remembered those lost through word and song. A special virtual choir video — featuring the Chamber Choir, singers from all over the country, a brass quintet, organ and timpani — performed “How Great Thou Art.”

The online service of gratitude, memory and hope at Coral Gables Congregational UCC took place at noon, with a candle lit for those members who have passed away in the past year. The candle was sent to the family member or friend submitting the person’s name as a remembrance of their light that lives on.

The United Church in Tallahassee conducted its first ever virtual candle vigil on All Saints Day. Those watching the service on Zoom were asked to have a candle ready and during the roll call portion of the service those who had submitted a name had their name called and they unmuted their device. The individual then said “We remember” so that the spotlight came upon that person who would then light their candle and say the name or names to be honored and remembered before muting once again.

Photos of deceased love ones to be remembered during the All Saints/All Souls service at Faith UCC/Dunedin on Sunday, November 1, were included in a special video shared during the service.

Every year, the universal church observes All Saints Day on November 1, taking time to thank God for the saints of the church, whose faithful lives (and sometimes deaths) have witnessed to their commitment to Jesus Christ and modeled that faith. St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota has experienced the deaths of nine members since All Saints Day a year ago. Those individuals were remembered in worship November 1, with photos or small mementos of deceased loved ones placed on the Communion Table during the service.

Other congregations which devoted time to remembrance included Faith Family UCC/Brandon, Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami, Christ Congregational UCC/Miami, Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park, Fort Myers Congregational UCC and First United Church of Tampa.

Mourning the Saints

It has been a year of abundant grief. On top of the pain and loss we experience collectively in what we used to call “normal” times, this year has added 205,000 (and counting) Saints to the numbers of those who have gone before. This year has added trauma and pain and loss in ways that continue to hold our hearts captive. This year has called us to cling to faith with clarity and strength and prayer.

So, in calling on our faith that all those who have gone before are in community with All Saints, the national setting of the United Church of Christ extended an invitation to join in honoring those who have passed, especially to COVID-19. A service of All Saints with music, prayer and lifting of names was scheduled via Zoom on November 1 at 6pm. Those interested were able to contribute a name to the visual list of people in memoriam, simply by filling out a form. Additionally, congregations which had a communal memorial were welcome to send photos to have them included in the national service.

Adapted from e-Celebrate, October 14
Fort Myers Congregational UCC is asking its members to send a signed tracing of their hands that will be made into a large Advent paper wreath in time for display on November 29. In this way it is hoped that congregants will be brought together — at least symbolically — for the season. Pictured is the felt wreath that Carolyn Martin has created.

As is tradition, members of the United Church of Gainesville were invited to submit original writings and art — or favorites reminiscent of the season — for the church’s Advent devotional booklet.

The Advent theme this year at Coral Gables Congregational UCC is “Lighting the Way...” Each Sunday in Advent, beginning November 29, members were invited to light a candle as part of worship to symbolize “Lighting the way for...” “hope,” and then the following week, “peace,” followed by “joy” and finally for “love.” Throughout Advent there will be Advent vespers or “sunset prayers” on Wednesday evenings in the church courtyard with a brief service of candlelight, music and prayers following safety guidelines. Each weekday morning beginning on Monday, November 29, at 8am there are morning Advent devotions on all church social media with mid-day devotions on Zoom every Tuesday noon beginning December 1.

First Congregational UCC/Winter Park is continuing its beloved tradition of the Walk Through Bethlehem which, in these uncertain times, will be a Drive Through Bethlehem. It will take place December 23, from 7-8pm. Carloads will journey safely through Bethlehem to visit a live nativity scene. On the way they will experience live music, King Herod and the Wise Men, animals and the heavenly scene with the children angels.

Members of First United Church of Tampa are able to participate in a Zoom Advent study that takes place on Thursday evenings. The daily book of reflections, Keep Watch with Me: An Advent Reader for Peacemakers by Michael T. McRay and Claire Brown, is the resource being used. Participants are invited to share reflections on the readings.

The Worship Team at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota has assembled Advent resource kits to help church members prepare to welcome Christ this year. Inside the kit are items that will help guide congregants as a church, even as they are apart, to be together during Advent.

The November “Cold Brewed” session at the Community Church of Vero Beach (livestreamed on Tuesday, November 17) was a discussion about the practices of Advent led by Rev. Dr. Anna V. Copeland and the Ministry team.

North Port Community UCC will hold its All German Christmas Worship Service on Saturday afternoon, December 19, with Rev. Attila Szemesi officiating. This will be the church’s first German service since the beginning of the pandemic. CDC guidelines will be observed. [Photo from last year’s service.]
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (Isaiah 43:2, NRSV)

My brain knows that the hurricane season ends on November 30. But I always assume that if we make it to mid-October that we are in the clear, so to speak. So, when the Tropical Storm/Hurricane/Severe Storm/Coastal Flood watches and warnings started pouring in this past weekend, my only response was: “well, it is 2020 after all.”

When I awakened yesterday morning to the sounds of wind, rain, more warning alerts, and text messages from friends, family, and colleagues from around the country checking on me, I realized that yet again, Tropical Storm Eta had not truly departed our company. And pretty much had the same response.

Charles Albert Tindley was born in Berlin, Maryland, on July 7, 1851. His father was a slave, and his mother was free. In his Book of Sermons (1932), he speaks of being “hired out” as a young boy, “wherever Father could place me.” In addition to being a pastor who grew his congregation to over 10,000 members, Rev. Tindley was also a prolific hymn writer. The first verse of his best-known hymn has been in my heart this week:

When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me,
When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me,
When the world is tossing me
Like a ship upon the sea;
Thou who rulest wind and water,
Stand by me.

Tropical Storm Eta has been a unique storm. Forecasters struggle to pin down its path. It continues to attack Florida in multiple locations but seems to have a propensity for Southwest Florida. It is a record-breaking, late-forming storm.

Yet as the storm rages, God is with us. As COVID-19 rages in our county and in our nation, God is with us. As divisive politics rage, God is with us. As frustration over social distancing rages, God is with us. As uncertainty and doubt rage, God is with us.

Let us never forget that.

From “Going the Distance – A Daily Devotional” of Naples UCC, November 12

Romans 8:31 has been heavy on my mind for the last week. (What then shall we say of this?)

Many of my peers are providing commentary on the election. I voted. I hope people in our UCC faith communities voted, too, in keeping with the values and ideals preached about in our pulpits and adult education classes. Yes, I think the election was fair and will be over once the counting is done. Yes, I am hopeful that our nation will move into 2021 with new hope for a time of cooperation and progress in government. Will it happen? I don’t know, and I’ll leave the punditry to the pundits.

Many of my peers are providing commentary on the pandemic. I wear a mask in public, and “in public” takes on a more narrow meaning daily as the number of cases in Florida spikes despite all the knowledge we have about how to mitigate the impact of an out-of-control virus. Many of our churches have reopened in one way or another for on-site worship. Many have not, and each has its reasons that arise from the complexities of living together in community. Is it safe to reopen? What will happen if we don’t? I can speak to the social and organizational realities behind those questions, but I’ll leave the science to the scientists and will trust it for my own approach to daily living, when and how I’ll worship.

So what shall we say of this? It seems the one thing I might be qualified to talk about, and perhaps even that is questionable, is the role of the church and of spirituality and religion as we negotiate these fraught times. When it comes to the election, the church can be a leader in emphasizing our human potential for deep and abiding relationships that can, if we choose, look beyond the partisan divide toward unity in the body of Christ. When it comes to the pandemic, the church can be a leader in reminding us of the answer to the questions, “Who is my neighbor?” and “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Do the answers provided by our faith outweigh our desire to eat in restaurants, dance at weddings, worship in person or attend indoor functions? What shall we say of this? What is the role of our faith in meeting the challenges of these days?

One of the questions in the liturgy for baptism in the United Church of Christ asks, “Do you promise, by the grace of God, to

God is with Us
by Rev. Dr. Dawson Taylor
Naples UCC

The Commentary the World is Waiting For
Rev. John Vertigan
Conference Minister

“What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?”
Romans 8:31
Pastors Reflect

Disaster Response & Recovery

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

Responding to Natural Disasters

As I write this, I just finished listening to a conference call with the Florida VOAD regarding tropical storm Eta. The storm brushed the southern part of the state headed out in the Gulf and now is headed to the Tampa area. After every event in the state, the FLVOAD begins daily conference calls to help coordinate response and recovery efforts. The FLVOAD does this in conjunction with Volunteer Florida, a state agency tasked with strengthening Florida’s communities through national service, fostering volunteerism and leveraging resources. You may not have heard of Volunteer Florida before, but the agency does amazing work.

One of the benefits of the FLVOAD is being part of a collective statewide response and recovery effort combining resources and talents for the benefit of an affected population after a disaster. In such a large state, it is sometimes difficult to know what is going on in different areas. Having the statewide presence of FLVOAD helps tremendously. Let me know if you may be interested in being a point person in your area that I may call on after a disaster or be someone who could contact me and let me know what is happening. It would be a great help to the response effort and to let the Conference office know what is happening in a timely manner. If this is something that interests you, please reach out to me at revalcoe@gmail.com or 239/227-8500 so we can connect. This would also help having eyes on the ground to report to FLVOAD, especially in the immediate aftermath of a storm or other event.

There are at least three things this year that make it a unique hurricane season:
For those who live in the Panhandle, you have felt the effects of storm after storm and you still see damage from Hurricane Michael that has yet to be repaired.
It has been a record year for land falling hurricanes. The agencies that make the annual hurricane predictions were a bit short this year, but they are only predictions and guidelines. We know that it only takes one storm to change our lives in a dramatic way.

With the restrictions of the pandemic, volunteer disaster recovery work is for the most part on hold although there are a few denominations doing limited work.

The Mission Ministry at Spring Hill UCC reports that $150 from Mission funds, $80 from the congregation and $250 from a mailed-in donation were collected for a total of $480 for its blanket fund.

These blankets will be a blessing to those suffering from natural disasters or other causes.

Pastors Reflect

The answer, of course, is “I do!”

Beyond the confusion being sowed in our electoral process, beyond the punditious, beyond the politicization of the COVID-19 pandemic, and beyond even the science behind our collective response, our discipleship in the name of Jesus Christ (Paul says that nothing can separate us from His love) is the commentary the world is waiting for, and I commend us to our baptismal vows in creating loving community, deeply meaningful relationships, and a just world for all.

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

Conference Call, November 11
Youth Ministry Today: Programmatic Suggestions

Local UCC youth ministers will share practical steps for you to engage your youth as we live through the current health pandemic, but also grapple with the uprise of racial injustice and intolerance of groups who have traditionally been deemed “other.”

“Tuesdays for Nurture” is a Tuesday webinars series in which we faithfully focus on education for the people of God. Topics from faith-filled politics, to interviews of key leaders, to “how to’s” in congregational life, to the impacts of current realities on the life of the church will be featured. Each webinar will include clear suggestions on what YOU can do to change the church — and the world — towards the world God imagines for us. “Tuesdays for Nurture” and “Thursdays for the Soul” are offered by Faith Education, Innovation, and Formation and Justice and Local Church Ministries of the National Setting, United Church of Christ.

Click here.

Youth Around the State

This is what Fall Kick Off looks like at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach during COVID. A great time was had by all, “seeing” each other again and still able to do some fun team building. The evening ended with social distance soccer.

Youth United and Middle School Together at the United Church of Gainesville kicked off their year with a fun Team Trivia night and are looking forward to another great year ahead. Youth will continue to meet via Zoom two Sundays a month with other small groups being announced. Recently, the youth have engaged in a conversation about Indigenous People’s Day, helping with the Food First and health kit drives, began a knitting circle and creating Halloween goodie bags for homeless children.

On Sunday afternoons in November, high schoolers at Coral Gables Congregational UCC participated in a Zoom class, “Faith in an Anxious World,” on how our faith can call us back into wholeness and health in an anxiety-ridden world. The sessions were led by Associate Pastor Rev. Aaron Lauer.

Share The Good News

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

Please send your electronic newsletters, Facebook posts and e-blasts to celebrateflorida@uccfla.org.
Parents and their children at Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami were able to join Interim Director of Children’s Ministries Andrea Burt on Zoom for Pajama Story Time. For four consecutive Wednesday evenings in November she gave a dramatic reading of beloved Bible stories from a compilation of stories as told in Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s book, *Children of God Storybook Bible*.

Toddlers and pre-K aged children at Church by the Sea/Bal Harbour get to watch “Toddler Tuesdays” for stories and games. These videos are pre-recorded and non-interactive so they can be watched any time on Tuesday on the church website.

Sunday, October 11, was the first Sunday school class at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami on “Protect the Environment.” This Zoom class was the first in the series on “Be the Church.”

In November the United Church of Gainesville followed a “home worship” theme during services. Children from United Tribes were invited to drive by and pick up an art house kit on Communion Sunday afternoon, October 18, which included a few art house making projects, directions and most of the supplies. Completed Happy Art Houses were returned to the church by November 1 to be included in a Sanctuary display. In October, families were also invited to create a video of how they are worshipping at home during the pandemic. The video could be anywhere from 30 seconds to 2 minutes long, showing church members where worship takes place, what is done and how everyone connects with each other, to UCG and to God. The submissions were saved for a later viewing. Every Sunday during Advent videos will be shared to help children in making a holiday craft in lieu of the usual Christmas Craft Fair. The videos will cover things such as origami doves for peace and coffee filter snowflakes for joy – with most of the necessary items being things most people have at home or that can easily be obtained at the grocery store.

October 18 at the United Church in Tallahassee was “Children’s Sunday” at which the kids led the worship service and church teachers were honored.

Using old-fashioned snail mail, Naples UCC Pen Pals will connect the young (pre-school-6th graders) with the not-so-young, in friendship. There are delightful kids and many kind, wise and interesting people in the church, and it is hoped that this pen pal program will help bridge the generational gap and bring the church family closer together. Also, this fall Sunday School families explored what it means to have compassion for others, ourselves and the world through Illustrated Ministry Compassion Camp. The endless options of the program allowed families to learn together at home, outside at NUCC and online during virtual Sunday School.

Below: Kid’s time at First UCC/Orlando

**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.**

- **Rev. Dr. John Danner** (Sanibel Congregational UCC): [www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com](http://www.periwinkleponderings.blogspot.com)
- **Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby** (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota): [www.gracetraces.blogspot.com](http://www.gracetraces.blogspot.com)
- **Rev. George Miller** (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring): [https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/](https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/)
- **Rev. George Miller** (Emmanuel UCC/Sebring): [https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/](https://pastoralsole.blogspot.com/)
The United Church of Christ effort to abolish medical debt stands at $51.8 million with the latest buy announced in New England.

A collaborative effort by 122 UCC congregations, four Associations and more than 100 households in the Southern New England Conference has abolished in $26.2 million in medical debt. Two separate buys benefited families in seven states and first responders around the country. All will soon be receiving letters telling them that their medical debt has been forgiven.

“Our scriptures call us to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free,” said the Rev. Jocelyn Gardner Spencer, senior pastor of the United Church on the Green in New Haven, Conn. “In the midst of a pandemic that is disproportionately impacting communities of color and with widespread unemployment causing people to lose their insurance just when they may need it most, eliminating medical debt for vulnerable individuals and families is a tangible way in which we are responding to our call to make God’s love and justice real.”

Gardner Spencer was one of the local, regional and national UCC leaders who announced the medical debt buy via Zoom on October 25. A Conference-wide fundraising campaign in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, birthed before the pandemic, along with a contribution from the UCC National Setting, raised over $200,000. The gifts were sent to the New-York based nonprofit RIP Medical Debt, which bought up debt in August for pennies on the dollar in 65 counties in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont.

That purchase wiped out $8.4 million in medical debt for 7,175 households, with the average forgiven being $1,171.

A second purchase funneled $107,000 of the church donations into a new fund created to respond to COVID-19, and eliminated another $17.8 million in debt for 12,144 health care workers and first responders across the United States. Texas, Oklahoma, Michigan and Georgia were the top four states represented, with average debt forgiven being $1,466.

From its first buy in May, RIP’s Helping COVID Heroes Fund has already wiped out $46 million in debt for 36,662 people working on the front lines of the pandemic. The UCC is one of the first 10 organizations contributing to this fund.

To read the entire article: Click here.
Watch the entire Oct. 25 announcement here.

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

We appreciate the generosity of this free service.
The staff of the national setting is working on a Christmas Pageant and full worship service coming for local churches to use as worship for on or around December 27 or as piece meal.

Each piece will be downloadable as a video file from the national setting, with more details released in marketing before November 20.

In the meantime, as congregations are planning for Advent and Christmas, please know that the following components are coming for your use in worship through Advent and beyond:

11 digital hymns as music videos:
O Come, O Come Emmanuel (with John 1: 1-5)
In the Bleak Midwinter (with Luke 2: 1-5)
Star of Country Down (with Luke 1: 46-56)
Away In a Manger / Santo Santo Santo
   O Come All Ye Faithful
Each Winter as the Year Grows Older - v 1 & 3
Jesus, Jesus, What a Wonderful Child
Angels We Have Heard on High
O Little Town of Bethlehem
Silent Night
Go Tell it on the Mountain

A “Lessons and Carols” Pageant service (including some of the above)
The “Lessons and Carols” will be streamed on Christmas Eve for all on Facebook and YouTube as “Thursdays for the Soul” (3:30pm ET)

A fully produced UCC Movie: “A Very UCC Christmas: 2020”
with four scenes and music tracks as above
Scene 1: The Board Room Brainstorming
Scene 2: Finance Committee Transformations
Scene 3: Faith Formation Finds Volunteers
Scene 4: Lessons and Carols
The full movie will be streamed on our platforms (YouTube and Facebook) on December 27 (10am ET).

From e-Celebrate, November 11

Blessings for Christmas and the New Year