Greetings, church.

I’m glad for this opportunity to reflect for just a moment on the happenings of this past year and to shed light on some things that I hope will happen in the next year. First, let me thank you for your covenant partnership with all your neighbors in the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ. Your generosity of spirit, of time and energy devoted to local mission and Conference programming, and your generosity in offerings to Our Church’s Wider Mission, as well as your annual remittance of per-capita dues, are all contributions that make ours a strong and stable conference.

Additionally, the competence and devotion of our staff makes a difference that is hard to quantify but would be noticeable in their absence. Thank you to Dave Cyril, Dana Ney, Beth Shedden, Leslie Etheredge and Neal Watkins for your service to the Conference and to our

Hopes and Plans for the Coming Year

Zoom address by Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan to the Florida Conference UCC at its Annual Gathering, October 16, 2021

The Gathering began on Wednesday, October 13, at 8pm with an opening vespers service entitled “Liberation Through Lament” led by Teña Nock-Hope (Member in Discernment from First United Church of Tampa). She explained that the purpose of such a ritual is to help us create a sacred space to express embodied grief. This could be made manifest in various ways including silent tears, wailing, holding ones’ self and rocking, holding the person next to you and crying. No matter what happens, the most important thing is to know is that your grief is sacred and needs to be honored. It is our hope that in virtual community we will find and claim liberation through acknowledging our grief. Grief must be acknowledged; it is sacred it is connected to God. Grief is connected to God because God is love, and we are rooted in this love. It is the kind of love that endures. We would not be capable of grief if we were not capable of love. It is further proof of our humanity.

On Thursday the Gathering resumed with a farewell to and celebration of the ministry of retiring Regional Minister Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove.

Honoring the Ministry of Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove

The celebration may have been on Zoom, but the affection was very personal and heart-felt. The gratitude...continued on page 4
Board and Committee members whose contributions of advice and counsel help make ministry here a pleasure.

Now, for a very brief look at 2021, in which we planned for an in-person Gathering, hoped for an early resumption of staff travel, and were instead faced with a surge in COVID cases that came close to shutting us down again and contributed to the general clouding of the civil and political climate here in Florida. I’ll point out four highlights.

The first ever virtual General Synod of the United Church of Christ. This event stands as illustrative of the ways in which all of our settings of church have persisted and sought to thrive while the pandemic continued into another season of our common life. While not perfect, it worked to invite worship, workshops, business and even community building activities to take place nationally, even as you have made these same efforts pay off locally.

The Florida Conference offered $28,000 in grants to churches and individuals since last we met this way. These served to facilitate continuing education time for pastors, theological training expenses for members in the ordination path and opportunities for new outreach and mission projects in several congregations around the Conference, including new initiatives in anti-racism ministry.

The Florida Conference said good-bye to a church that was formerly part of us when we bid farewell to the Avon Park Jetsons, and Star Trek and Lost in Space years away; yet, here we are. It just doesn’t seem possible that when the radio plays “oldies” it is stuff we danced to at wedding receptions in the 1990s. But enough — what’s ahead of us in our hopes and plans for the coming year?

Let’s look at 2022. When I was a kid the year 2022 was the year the Jetsons, and Star Trek and Lost in Space years away; yet, here we are. It just doesn’t seem possible that when the radio plays “oldies” it is stuff we danced to at wedding receptions in the 1990s. But enough — what’s ahead of us in our hopes and plans for the coming year?

As for me, I would want to note that in 2021 I completed my second term as a Director on the United Church Insurance Board and my second term on the United Church of Christ Board. Those responsibilities being behind me, I have accepted a Director’s role on the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ that will keep me, and us, connected nationally and globally in our shared gospel work.

Significantly, we celebrated the retirement of the Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove. This led to an intentional study of our staff size in relation to other conferences of similar size and in reference to our own evolving needs and leadership styles here in Florida. The Board of Directors voted to not fill Rev. Hargrove’s position at this time, to invite a realignment of staff responsibilities and to take up the matter of staff size once again at a given point in 2022 when we’ve had a chance to experiment in our staff team. More on this in a moment.

Our experiment in staff alignment will continue. What does it look like? As previously noted, the Rev. Leslie Etheredge takes on responsibility for our search and call efforts and our Committee on Ministry Work. Her title is updated to Associate Conference Minister — in keeping with national norms — and her ministry involves the whole geography of Florida rather than being dedicated to just the Western Region. Neal Watkins has staffing responsibility for our volunteer-led ministry teams: Anti-racism, Eco-Justice, Youth and Faith Formation, WISE and others that will arise in our life together. He also provides visioning, planning and spiritual retreats for local church boards and congregations. I encourage you to use him in that way! My role expands to include more purposeful representation at installations, ordinations and other moments in the life of the church as well as a renewed focus on support to local pastors in their day-to-day ministry.

What does this mean to you? If you have needs, please call any one of us. Our likely answer, if not a simple one, will be that we will discuss your need in our team and appropriate
Opportunities

Insurance Board Offers Webcast on Abuse Prevention
The Insurance Board webcast on October 29, “Abuse Prevention: Back to Basics,” offered essential considerations and best practices from one of the nation’s leading experts in abuse prevention through Insurance Board’s partnership with Praesidium.

As ministries return to fully on-site programming, reevaluating safety considerations is critical. Our expert facilitator, Ross Mitchell, discussed the need to review child abuse prevention policies for necessary updates, considerations for electronic communications and appropriate guidelines for staff and volunteers.

To contact the Insurance Board for viewing availability please call 800/437-8830.

Finally, but not of least importance, we have contracted with a partner in the Rocky Mountain Conference to bring us a workshop experience for authorized ministers that will invite them to reflect on various aspects of self-care and the challenges of burnout in a changing environment for ministry. Many of our pastors are tired, and we’re seeing an evolving trend across the nation of pastors leaving ministry entirely in search of less stressful options. I’m excited to say the same workshop will be adjusted and offered to local church lay leaders across the Conference as we seek to honor your commitment to your local church. Both of these workshops will be offered at no cost and are underwritten by the Florida Conference.

In all of this our focus will remain singular: grounded in the Gospel, we will seek to engage, empower and equip local congregations to become vital and faithful servant communities across the state of Florida. This relational focus sums up both the source of our being and our reason for being, and we hope to remain faithful to that call in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your kind attention this morning; please feel welcomed to reach out to me by phone or e-mail if you have questions, concerns, comments or a desire to serve in one of the ways I’ve alluded to here today.

God bless you all; be at peace, and be in touch, won’t you.

Retired?
If you’re retired, you can stay on top of your money matters by performing a post retirement checklist. Read this EY article from the Pension Boards-UCC for tips on staying financially ahead. Visit https://bit.ly/post_retirement_checklist #faithandfinance

Loss Control
Our Loss Control manual is here to assist you in developing a comprehensive safety program for your church property and community. In Volume 5, we specifically discuss how to minimize and mitigate risk and likely divisions of responsibility within church operations and employee management.

View our manual to learn more: https://www.insuranceboard.org/.../LCM-Volume-5

Loss Control Manual Management
Vol. 5

Annual Gathering

the right resources to uplift your ministry. Something to say but harder to grasp is that Leslie is not the Western Regional Minister any more. Calling her doesn’t mean she’ll function in ways you are accustomed to, so please feel welcomed to call any one of the professional staff. There are no major transitions in the support staff anticipated at this time, and we remain grateful for their work in the Conference office.

Our grants and awards team is busy visioning the rollout of a grant opportunity for local congregations as we encounter the potential for new ministries while re-opening and moving past the pandemic conditions that have so changed the way we do church. Watch for news in the coming months. We may also consider a second round of grant-making for churches undertaking ministries that speak to anti-racism movements and topics related to battling cultural white supremacy.

The Board has approved a communications strategy that will impact the ways in which we reach out to you with regular publications. Staff and volunteer training has yet to begin on this effort so I hesitate to say more at this time except to say we are anxious to provide timely and relevant communications to you as you connect with us in the Conference.

In 2022 we expect to form a development task force that will look at the ways we receive gifts from the generosity of churches and individuals and how we express gratitude for those gifts in an ongoing way throughout the year.

We hope to initiate a comprehensive salary and benefits study that will touch every corner of the Conference so that we can update our Conference compensation guidelines to reflect both on-the-ground realities and a challenge toward the just treatment of ministry professionals in their settings.
for the ministry of Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove upon his retirement as our Regional Conference Minister could not have been more evident. The event, which took place on Thursday evening, October 14, found Rev. Raymond and wife, Cora, sitting on a sofa in their home in North Carolina, as scores of clergy and laity joined them via screens throughout Florida.

After an intro by Conference Minister Rev. John Vertigan, noting the “power of his presence in ministry...every moment he was with us,” tributes were shared by colleagues and friends. Former Regional Minister Rev. Bill Koch spoke of his appreciation for Raymond’s ecclesiastical skills. Current Associate Conference Minister Rev. Leslie Etheredge proclaimed “I’ll win the prize for who misses you the most.” Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson noted the “spiritual depth I grew to appreciate” while on the Florida Conference staff and now as Associate General Minister for Wider Church Ministries and Operations with the national church. Raymond’s “love for the local church” and his “authenticity and commitment to the core values of the UCC” were remembered by former Conference Minister Rev. Kent Siladi. Minister for Congregational Life Neal Watkins values how Raymond “lives out his passion for ministry.”

Close friends for over 30 years – “my best friend,” he says – Rev. Wilmer Brown (L) (now a retired UCC minister who most recently served as Interim at Miami Shores Community Church) reminisced about all they have shared over the years, including Raymond’s “culture shock” living in New England when he was briefly on the staff of the Connecticut Conference before returning to his home with the Florida Conference.

Raymond responded that he was “truly humbled” by the expressions shared regarding his “amazing journey of grace and gratitude.” He confided that when the Florida Conference called him (“Why me?” he asked), he credited God’s grace. These years of ministry have blessed him, he said, thanks to all with whom he has served – and certainly not forgetting to single out Cora for all she shared on the journey. As to what is next in his life, he admitted that he is still “transitioning” but that “God still has more in store “ for him. And that’s the good news.

You can view the Zoom video HERE.

Navigating Rough Waters toward a New Horizon

This was followed by the keynote address, delivered by Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Conference Minister of the Penn Central Conference of the UCC.

The keynote address for the Gathering was delivered with vision and energy by Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, the Conference Minister for the Penn Central Conference of the UCC. The title was “Sea-Change in the Modern Church: Navigating Rough Waters toward a New Horizon.” Taking inspiration from Chapter 8 in the Gospel of Luke, she skillfully — and with frankness — examined our past, present and possible options for the future using images of ships sailing on turbulent waters. She sets the scene, posing tough questions. So in what shape is your boat and what needs attention? How floats your boat?

The following brief summary in no way does justice to experiencing her presentation live – or watching it by clicking HERE.

Rick Carson, Editor

Just as in Luke 8 — in which Jesus calms the storm — our churches over the past 18 months have been like ships “trying to stay afloat,” while we have “adapted and gone the extra mile.” As we look ahead to the horizon, “we have been pushed to take stock” and get our bearings.

Taking a broad view, the Florida Conference has remained consistent over the past 20 years, having been stable and very steady. This has been the case while church membership and attendance has decreased: we haven’t replaced ourselves, losing more individuals than we have replaced. Trends in the UCC indicate that a majority of our churches have memberships under 50, with a dramatic drop in Sunday School participation. “We are caught in a web of decline,” hoping that trust in God is still with us. Our quest for numbers drives us, but not always in the best ways. Should “thriving” be equated with numerical growth? How about we focus on the Gospel? How should we measure the effectiveness of our work? How about in lives that are restored, fed, reborn, healed and made whole?
In navigating our ships toward flourishing, remember that we are in covenant and responsible for each other in the fleet (i.e., the Conference). We need to pray with an active prayer life: “it is who we are.” We need to review our mission maps, orienting ourselves so we don’t drift, gaining a sense of who we are and how we live that out: “What is your ‘why’?” What are you giving the community? “Why were you built?” Consider feeding ministries (like that at First Congregational Church/Lake Worth), the many racial justice ministries that have been generated, your support of the migrant workers at Immokalee, being a WISE Conference. “The key is generosity.”

Consider the state of your boat. Do you fix it, sell it? What about your bylaws? What do you expect of your members? The bylaws are the framing for your boat.

What is your fuel, and what propels you forward? The hope in Christ shows that we are meant to be different. Where is the Gospel in your church? Are you spirit-centered, God-centered, Jesus-centered?

The business session began at 9am on Saturday, led by Moderator Sumner Hutchison III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami).

The morning began with a Litany of Release and show of gratitude for Rev. Dr. Raymond Hargrove for his many years of Christian ministry and service on behalf of the Florida Conference. For opening worship, Neal Watkins (Minister for Congregational Life) read from Hebrews 10:21-25, reminding us that we need to provoke one another in love and good deeds, a theme carried on by Pastor Esther Robles (First United Church of Tampa) in her sermon. Curtis Watson (Music Director, Chapel on the Hill/Indian Rocks Beach) performed an anthem and Rev. Vonshelle Beneby (member, Hope UCC/Rockledge) led in prayer. Neal then provided a voting tutorial and tested the virtual voting system.

Moderator Sumner Hutchison III (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami) issued the Call to order and quorum call at 9:45am, declaring a quorum: 54 churches represented; 125 authorized Ministers, Board of Directors members and delegates; 34 visitors and two non-voting Conference staff. This was followed by the approval of the consent agenda, standing rules, 2021 agenda and 2020 minutes. A motion was made and seconded to approve consent agenda.

The Nominating Committee’s slate was presented by Chair Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley (Hope UCC/Rockledge) with additional nominations from the floor: Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach), Nominating Committee; Dr. Cynthia Clarke (Church of the Open Door Congregational/Miami), Nominating Committee; Ada Harvey (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach), Church & Ministry SE Region. Motion to accept was approved.

The Legacy Funds report was made by Michael Downs (Naples UCC). He explained that the Endowment funds of the Conference are structured by investments, grants, development and property, per approval in October 2014. Raymond James Investments is the asset manager of our funds. Regarding the current status: allocation is 68.65% equity, 31.35% fixed income with a balance as of 9/30/2021 of $8,418,353.59. This is a return of 7.67%, which is an increase from 2020 of $603,439.67 and an increase since inception on 6/7/2017 of $2,236,806.93. The Conference budget stabilization account is $232,225.13. No properties have been gifted to the Conference this year.

Neal presented “What’s Happening in Our Conference and Beyond” (these videos may be requested through the Conference office).

Communities of Practice was created for ministers to gather in small groups to share joys, new ideas, issues and concerns; to get out of their comfort zone.

- Rev. Dr. Deb Kaiser-Cross (former Minister for Congregational Life/Naples UCC): there was a group for
women, which really helped during COVID

- Rev. Dr. John Danner (Sanibel Congregational UCC): there was a group that focused on preparing for retirement

- Rev. Leslie Etheredge (Associate Conference Minister): Communities of Practice nurture and assist pastors from all over the country, and they are facilitated by trained clergy

**ARM (Anti-Racism Ministry)** was created from conversations on racism and racial equality led by **Rev. Donna Cooney (United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine).**

  - Just as dialogue led to action in creating ARM, hopefully dialogue can lead to action in local churches
  - Contact Florida UCC to find information on how churches can have these discussions

**Sacred Conversations** is the model for congregations in working toward becoming anti-racist. The model is difficult but transformative. They are open to all and meet via Zoom every Thursday.

- Stay in touch through **Celebrate Florida.** Watch for information on learning modules for local churches, a Lenten Devotional based on sacred prayers, and a 5-6 week series of Sacred Conversations starting in January
- www.JointheMovement.org is the next initiative of the UCC (there is a video presentation from the national UCC staff)
- [A special note of appreciation to Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) and Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume for leading the previous UCC initiative of 3 Great Loves.]

**Immokalee Update** – Lupe Gonzalo (Coalition of Immokalee Workers) and Uriel Zelaya-Perez (Alliance for Fair Food)

  - Presented video discussion on fair work conditions and wages, with emphasis on how much more difficult things were during COVID
  - There will be a Zoom workshop on November 3 at 7pm with more information about the issues and plans and how churches can stay connected to these programs.

**Back Bay Mission** – Rev. James Pennington (UCC), Director

- This organization in Biloxi, MS, provides goods and services for those in poverty.
- COVID limited volunteers but looking forward to more coming down to Mississippi to help out and for deeper relationships with Florida UCC

Financials and budget were presented by Budget and Finance Chair **Rev. Michele Carter (Jensen Beach Community Church).** Changes from last year’s budget were explained as well as some recent changes reflecting discussion at the budget hearing the previous night: current income, $587,200; current expenses, $759,600; other income, $172,400; NET, $0. A motion was made on behalf of the Committee on Budget and Finance to approve the 2022 budget as presented, and it was unanimously approved.

A By-Laws revisions report came from Vice Moderator **Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)** (pertinent changes presented by the By-Laws Ad Hoc Committee are in quotes):

- Membership (Art. III, 1): “all local churches and authorized members “with standing” in Florida Conference
- Board of Directors (Art. V):
  - Standing Committees – “All Standing Committees shall strive for inclusion in their members with sensitivity to racial, generational, cultural and gender diversity, sexual orientation and lay/clergy balance.”
  - (Art. V.3) Personnel – Ensuring performance reviews are conducted “with all Conference staff, and Conducting an annual review with the Conference Minister”
- Art. V, 4) – “Committee on Ministry” (formerly Committee on Church and Ministry) – Every Regional Team shall be comprised of “six (6) members: three (3) lay people and three (3) clergy, including one (1)” specialized minister (an Authorized Minister not serving a local church) who are elected “on a rolling basis with two (2) members elected each year.” Regional team members shall serve one (1), “three (3)-“year term, “are eligible to service 2 terms”…..This committee shall “strive for inclusion in their members with sensitivity to racial, generational, cultural and gender diversity, sexual orientation and lay/clergy balance.”
- It was suggested and accepted that instead of Standing Committees coming under Board of Directors it should become Article V.
- The Legacy Funds Committee is now a single committee addressing all four areas of the previous sub-committees: Investments, Grants, Property and Development.

A motion made to accept the revisions presented by the By-Laws Ad Hoc Committee with amendments, and it was approved.

Moderator Sumner made remarks, grateful for all the hard work that was put into having this successful zoom Annual Meeting. He is also grateful for what churches have done to continue faithfully and creatively throughout the pandemic. God is Still Speaking!

Conference Minister **Rev. John Vertigan** addressed the Gathering [see his remarks on page 1].

In other business **Rev. Dr. Dawson Taylor (Naples UCC),** outgoing head of the Personnel Committee, expressed deep gratitude on behalf of the Conference to all of the staff, including Rev. John Vertigan, for their hard work, despite no increase in their compensation.

The motion to adjourn was approved unanimously 11:20am.

*With thanks to Registrar Marty Synnott (Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach) for the minutes of the business session, upon which this summary was created.*
Workshop Wednesdays

Instead of offering a series of workshops over one or two days, which is the usual way when the Gathering is in-person, Workshop Wednesdays were presented via Zoom over a series of Wednesdays, starting on October 6 and concluding with one on December 1. Here is what was offered:

Wise Church Ministry (October 6)
Rev. Lisa LeSueur (Minister of Congregational and Staff Care at Coral Gables Congregational UCC) led this workshop, seeking to identify ways in which local churches can become more intentional about incorporating mental health awareness into their ministries, the benefits that have come from increased awareness and more intentional ministries, and recommendations for starting the conversation(s) in your local church exploring what it means to become a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive Supportive and Engaged) congregation.

Liberation through Lament (October 13)
The evening vespers service was presented by Teña Nock-Hope (First United Church of Tampa) and is noted on page 1.

Anti-Racism Ministry (October 20)
Members of the Anti-Racism Ministry Team of the Florida Conference shared wisdom and experiences of how the work of anti-racism begins with relational commitment and the prophetic willingness to be fully present in the work of restorative justice and a peace that more greatly resembles the Kin-dom.

Justice, Advocacy & Action (October 27)
The conversation was facilitated by Rev. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson (First United Church of Tampa) focused about doing justice in Florida around voting rights, environmental justice, mass incarceration and the death penalty, the health care system and farm workers facing harassment and injustices.

Update from Immokalee (November 3)
This was an annual update on the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers including the ongoing Wendy’s boycott endorsed by the UCC and up-to-date information about actions we can take as a Conference to partner for farmworker justice.

Preaching an Earth-Loving Jesus in a Time of Climate Emergency (November 10)
Rev. Dr. Bob Shore-Goss (First Congregational UCC/Winter Park) explored the Earth-Loving Jesus and his kingdom of God and the spiritual ecology of Jesus’ message in opposition to empire.

Small Church is Not Less Church (November 17)
Rev. Carrie Call (Conference Minister of Penn Central Conference of the UCC) shared how we can embrace the blessings of being small churches, providing practical ideas to clarify, focus and empower the ministries of small churches.

Sacred Conversations to End Racism (December 1)
A panel-led discussion by members of the Florida Conference ARM Team will share about elements of the UCC’s Sacred Conversation to End Racism (SC2ER) curriculum, including restorative racial justice lessons and resources.

Over the past several weeks, laity and clergy throughout the Florida Conference gathered via Zoom to discuss the many ministries and issues noted above.

Thank you to all who participated and led in these discussions — you ARE the Florida Conference.

These workshops and other Annual Gathering activities were recorded and are available to view online at the Conference website (www.uccfla.org).
Dear Friends,

We are living in difficult times. We are slowly emerging from a pandemic that has tested us on many fronts. We are living in times marked by increasing incivility and violence around the world. We are living in times that need the historic boldness and courage of the United Church of Christ that confronts inequality with mutuality, respect, compassion and faithful witness in keeping with Jesus’ call to be disciples on this important journey and in keeping with our desire to create a just world for all.

That’s why I am moved to invite you to practice your philanthropy by contributing generously to the annual Friends of the Conference Appeal. In 2021 we expanded our programmatic offerings to include a nascent anti-racism ministry, a mental health ministry team (WISE), an eco-justice climate action group and a justice-action grass roots organizing group. We’ve maintained our conviction that relationships matter and are seeking to live up to our own high standard of service to local churches and authorized ministers even while reducing our ministry team by one full-time staff member. Across the Conference, your staff and Board of Directors are continually seeking to practice sound stewardship of the gifts you so faithfully share each year.

Our programming will continue in 2022 as we find our way into the new normal of a post-COVID world, and your gift this year will help us in our quest for vital local congregations. We’ll continue offering grant funding to local settings where innovation is happening and connection to the wider community is bringing good news to underserved people in cities and towns across Florida. In Florida, our faith is on the move, and I am happy to invite you to move with us as we continue the historic mission of the United Church of Christ in this place we call home. I encourage your generosity in this season of giving. Click here to make your gift today and know of our deep thanks for your partnership in creating a just world for all.

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

“Conference Call” from a Special Edition of e-Celebrate, November 16

Interested in Joining the WISE Ministry Team of the Florida Conference?

During the upcoming season, many of us are acknowledging that the emotions and circumstances of the holiday season are not necessarily joyous for all. In fact, several churches throughout the Conference offer intentional services such as “Longest Night” services or “Blue Christmas” services that make space for those grieving or hurting during Advent. As you consider those in our midst, we invite you to consider joining the WISE ministry team of the Florida Conference, which intends to meet in early December.

The WISE Ministry Team seeks to be a resource to individuals and local churches of the Florida Conference and to provide resources, helpful language, support, teaching and ideas to encourage our congregations to become more welcoming of those living with mental health challenges, to expand our inclusion of those who are living with mental health challenges, to be supportive of all who are affected by mental health conditions and to engage in ways to live our commitment to be W.I.S.E. about mental health.

To join the WISE Ministry Team or receive more information, please contact Rev. Lisa LeSueur (Coral Gables Congregational UCC) at LisaL@gablesucc.org. From e-Celebrate, November 10

Pleeeease
Send us your news
We want to share your happenings with all our Florida churches
Emails, newsletters, e-blasts are always welcome
JUST ADD US!
Send to: RickCarson1@gmail.com
In contemplating what to write for this edition of Celebrate Florida, I whined to Rick Carson — its formidable lead editor — that I didn’t really have anything new to say about what I’ve been doing on the job. I’m busy with talking with folk, attending and leading trainings, coordinating Communities of Practice, working with search committees and Committees on Ministry. That’s really nothing new, however; that’s the job that I know and love that keeps me busy…so how do I let you know of something new, different or of interest?

This was a bit of a frustrating question for me to ponder until the Spirit in her own subtle (or not) way said, “Every day is new, full of opportunities to serve, guide, grow in faith, hone your theology, meet and interact with children of God along the Jesus way.” Spirit can always gently put me in my place.

In the spirit of the season — and since we’re encouraged in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to be thankful in all circumstances — I reflected on how very thankful I am for my ministry in and with the Florida Conference. These are some of the reasons why:

Every day IS new and a wide variety of people come my way each day. Some want to know about this denomination they’ve just discovered that is open and accepting to all. I take great joy in telling them about our UCC. This happens at least once a week, sometimes more. I revel in the fact that I am blessed to be a part of it and share it with others. (I so hope you do the same!)

I’ve recently met with our three regional Committees on Ministry whose volunteers amaze me with their dedication to bringing and maintaining good and faithful authorized ministers into our Conference. Unless you’ve served in this capacity, you’d be astounded to know of the hours they put in, the education that takes place in order to do this job with integrity and the heartfelt love and support they offer to our current, retired, full time, part time clergy, chaplains and those that seek to be pastors in the United Church of Christ. These volunteers are deeply committed to this important work. I am thankful for them every day and blessed to get to work with such outstanding and dedicated individuals.

Much of the same can be said for local church Search Committees. There are dozens of hardworking volunteers all over our state who are currently developing church profiles, reading ministerial profiles (21 pages each!), listening to candidates’ sermons, interviewing pastors — doing whatever is needed to bring the best possible pastor to their church. It is an incredible responsibility that they are tasked with, yet they volunteer to do this hard work because they love their church just that much. I see their struggles and pray for them daily. It is not easy work. It’s work they must get right and they work with that pressure for months at a time. I am blessed to journey with these search committees and these awesome volunteers.

Lastly, I have been in the work force since I was 22 years old. That was a good while ago. I’ve worked with ALL kinds of people…the good, the bad and the ugly…in many walks of life. I can tell you that the leadership that makes up the Florida Conference is composed of the most outstanding people I’ve ever had the pleasure with whom to work. From the Board of Directors to our excellent office staff to our superb judicatory staff, they are top notch individuals. They amaze me each and EVERY day. I am privileged to work with these beautiful children of God. Blessed beyond measure.

So to Rick (forgive my pity party) and to all of you that took a moment to read this: if you ever think there’s nothing new or exciting going on in your life, breathe for a minute and then ask the Spirit for some guidance. If you’ll allow her, she will lead you to a place (perhaps on your knees!) of great appreciation, thankfulness and blessing where you find yourself praising God for your place in God’s kin-dom.

With humble, yet extravagant, thanks,

Leslie
I’m sure you’ve heard the scripture verse from Isaiah: “I am about to do a new thing; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (43:19, NRSV) However, one of my passions are the PROCESSES by which these new ways/visions manifest. Coming together to build on relationships and discern who God is and who God is calling us to be next can be as fulfilling as the new mission itself!

In this new window of time where it is safer to be together, I have had the opportunity to go be a part of several local church retreats. These retreats have ranged from “we just need to be together and have some fun” to “we have got to figure out how we are going to thrive in the years to come.”

It would be my honor to work with you and a leadership team from your congregation to build a time together that is meaningful, connective and directed to determine and meet your goals in the months and years to come.

Whether you have a clear idea or just a clear sense that it is time to do something!, I look forward to exploring and discerning with you and your congregation.

I hope to see you soon,
Neal

Opportunity

Back Bay Mission Trips: Service, Learning, Reflection

Mission Trips to Back Bay Mission are a unique blend of service and learning. You will have an opportunity to help the poor and marginalized on the Mississippi Gulf Coast while building up the body of Christ through your service to others.

How can you serve? There are several ways you can serve through key programs:

Housing Rehabilitation Program where you could be rehabilitating existing homes, helping to build a new home, gaining or improving construction skills and increasing affordable housing options for the MS Gulf Coast. Your group might need a cook to co-ordinate and get meals ready while serving at BBM.

Micah Day Center where you could be providing a multiple of services to our homeless guests such as washing laundry, folding laundry, engaging in conversations, cleaning showers in-between guests, and timing showers.

Client Choice Food Pantry where you walk with guests as they choose their food from the pantry and bag their food while engaging them in conversation. You could also be asked to help with stocking the shelves.

To book a trip or find out more information please look at our website or contact the volunteer coordinator at volunteeccoordinator@thebackbaymission.org or 228/432-0301. Group reservations are being taken for 2022 now! The 2023 calendar will open on January 1, 2022.
Rev. William “Bill” Main Passes Away

After several hospitalizations over the past few months, Rev. William “Bill” Main, lost his battle with kidney disease and died peacefully at home on October 26 at 87. He graduated from Andover Newton Theological School in 1958. Rev. Bill served as pastor at UCC churches in Nebraska, Indiana and North Carolina and served in the Iowa Conference/UCC. After retiring, he served as Interim Associate Minister for visitation at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach and at Church of the Isles/Indian Rocks Beach. Rev. Bill was also an annuitant visitor for the Pension Boards. He is survived by his life partner, Marty Synnott (the Florida Conference Registrar), a daughter, three grandchildren and three great-grandsons. A celebration of life service was held at COTI on November 6.

Death of Rev. Bob Davis

Rev. Bob Davis, an Interim Pastor at North Port Community UCC in the late ‘90s, passed away this fall.

The Conference Minister has reported the first honey from the hives installed at the Church House in Orlando — “Rich and dark wildflower honey as we continue to be environmentally conscious.”

There appeared to be a rash of “don’t respond” e-mails involving a number of our clergy in early November — hacked e-mail accounts and phishing messages that included the Conference Minister. Remember, if the message sounds weird that means it probably deserves the delete button.

If your congregation hosts a Boy Scout troop or holds the charter for a troop, please call Rev. John Vertigan in the Conference office (407/835-7501) to discuss possible ramifications of the Boy Scouts of America bankruptcy decision and potential liabilities for local churches.
Members of Fort Myers Congregational UCC will continue a new tradition begun last year. An Advent wreath is being created that is composed of hand tracings made by everyone in members’ households. Once the tracings were received they were included in the wreath that appeared in worship beginning on November 28 after the church was decorated on November 27.

Starting November 7 the church began its Special Christmas Project: helping those students and their babies who are in the Lee County Schools LAMP program. LAMP stands for Lee Adolescent Mothers Program whose mission statement is “To provide a nurturing academic environment that empowers and motivates students to become responsible, respectful, and productive parents in their communities.” A “sock” tree was created on which church members could hang new socks from infant to adult on the tree (or place them under the tree or in a designated box). Toiletries, new clothing or other items needed for pregnant/new mothers were also accepted.

In an attempt to prepare members and friends for Christmas, a devotional involved reading the entire Gospel of Luke – one chapter each day – beginning December 1. By Christmas Eve, 24 chapters will have been read so by Christmas morning the “who” and “why” of the day will be better appreciated.

The Hope UCC/Rockledge Christmas Village sale on Saturday, November 6, offered bargains galore of gently used or new donations. The hanging of the greens took place on the last Saturday in November on the Advent theme of “The Inn.” Each Sunday the SET (Sanctuary Enhancement Team) will decorate a large box in front of the Sanctuary in anticipation of Christmas. This is where the children’s message will be presented.

At First Congregational UCC/Orange City, Dr. Tim Peters, Director of Choral activities and members of Stetson University choir, will perform a musical ensemble on the third Sunday in Advent.

For the Advent season, Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton offered a study, Prepare the Way, by Pamela Hawkins that took place on Tuesday evening, November 23 at 6:30pm.

During the season, the church will light the campus and provide local communities with a nightly wondrous outdoor lighted display along with some fun-filled, family-friendly activities perfect for gathering on the lawn. The church is eager to welcome fellow Christians onto their property and into Church on the Hill’s spiritual home. The offerings will be diverse. On Sunday, December 5, there will be a candy cane hunt, food trucks and a live outdoor Christmas music concert. Scheduled for Saturday, December 11, are family activities, food trucks and family friendly Christmas movies (“The Star” and “The Muppet Christmas Carol”) on the lawn.

The Boca Bells Christmas Concert will take place during worship on December 19.

The United Church of Gainesville is seeking reflections from its members for the annual Advent devotional booklet. They are accepting original writings and art or favorites that remind you of the season.

On the first three Wednesdays in December, Pastor emerita Rev. Sandy Reimer will lead contemplative prayers sessions in the Sanctuary (and on Zoom) that reflect, through Scripture, meditation and prayers for the Advent spiritual journey.

The Angel Gift Market will benefit Rawlings Elementary School, with church members able to choose a gift via Sign-up Genius or take an angel from the Christmas tree in the Sanctuary foyer and drop off the unwrapped gift in the foyer by December 12.

Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey will kick off the Advent season with a “Hanging of the Greens” service on the first Sunday in Advent. The symbols of the season will be discussed, carols sung that complement the symbols and bells brought from members’ homes will “ring in the season.” An Advent wreath-making workshop will be held after worship that day. Participants will bring containers.
and wreaths will be made that can be placed on kitchen tables to light during the season.

The giving tradition of the Angel Tree at Naples UCC began in the Narthex on November 21 and will go through December 5. The angels on the tree contain a child’s name, age and a gift suggestion. Gifts are to be wrapped with the angel attached on the outside and returned to the church. The generosity benefits the babies and families in the church’s Baby Basics program. The Angel Tree is sponsored by the Women’s Fellowship.

The Advent season kicked off on Sunday afternoon, November 28, with an intergenerational celebration that included a dinner hosted by the Children’s Ministry. Symbolism of the Advent wreath was discussed and resources were provided for celebrating Advent at home.

The Alternative Gift Market will be offered for one day only, during Fellowship after worship on December 5, in response to the question, “Who really needs more stuff?” Instead is this opportunity to make a positive impact in support of Baby Basics, Church World Service, Equal Exchange, Luci Lights, People for Guatemala and Taste of Immokalee, all of whom will be represented. All gifts, donations and goods purchased benefit these NUCC Mission Partners and will impact people in need from in the community and other parts of the world.

Also on December 5 is the annual Christmas Concert featuring Dr. Becky Weese-Rumpf, Alexandra Carlson (concert pianist) and the Chamber Choir. There will be carols, Christmas cookies and surprise appearances by Santa & Mrs. Claus plus Rudolph.

Because the holidays can be more hard than happy, a special meeting is being held led by Rev. Angela Wells-Bean (Minister for Congregational Care) for those who struggle emotionally this time of year. Practical tools will be shared to help those needing support to get through the season.

St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota provided for 25 “angels” for the Salvation Army Angel Tree Program. Angel tags were on the tree in the Gathering area to be chosen. The fulfilled wishes were unwrapped, tagged and placed back under the Angel Tree. The deadline to fulfill these Christmas wishes for needy seniors was November 28. The Salvation Army will distribute the particular gifts the week before Christmas. The Hanging of the Greens took place on November 22.

UCC/Fort Lauderdale will host a holiday concert, “Jingle All the Way,” on Saturday evening, December 5, featuring the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men’s Chorus. The South Florida PRIDE Jazz Ensemble will entertain with “Welcome Back to the Holidays” on Sunday evening, December 12.

The Advent theme at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota is “Isaiah’s Vision is Our Vision,” and each Sunday congregants will listen to Isaiah’s words of hope, peace, joy and love. The church’s Worship Team selected the devotional “A Less is More Christmas,” and made it available in paper or electronic form. The catch was to engage the devotional with another person — family, friend, whomever — a covenant to engage in discussion around what is stirring in your heart.

The Angel Tree tags were available beginning on November 14 and could be shopped online (with delivery directly to the Salvation Army), in person and hand-delivered to the Salvation Army or dropped off at the church before/after worship or on weekdays. Deadline is December 3.

For its Angel Tree, the Women’s Ministry at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach is collecting monetary donations to purchase gift cards for residents of Brookwood (a residential program for at-risk girls between 13-21) and PARC (assists individuals with intellectually or developmental disabilities).

Taking advantage of its location steps away from the Gulf beach, the church has resumed “Sunset Beach Services” on Sundays at 5pm during the season of Advent — an opportunity to see the sunset, be grateful and join in fellowship with members from the church family.
The “hanging of the greens” to decorate the Sanctuary at Pilgrim Congregational Church/St. Petersburg took place on Saturday morning, November 27. Donuts and coffee were provided as an enticement to draw volunteers.

The Angel Tree custom that First Congregational UCC/Winter Park practices every year at Christmas will this year benefit children living at the Great Oaks Children’s Home (a residential foster group home for children ages 6-18 who have been removed from their homes by the court) and LGBTQ youth ages 13-24 at the Zebra Coalition (assisting with housing and providing counseling). Recipients will receive gift cards.

JupiterFIRST Church held an all-ages/kid-friendly Advent wreath-making workshop on Sunday, November 14, after worship. Also offered is a four week Wednesday morning Advent class, “Shadow & Light: A Journey into Advent” by Tsh Oxenreider.

The Giving Tree Project this Advent at Spring Hill UCC will bring smiles to 20 children at Spring Hill Elementary School. The gifts will be clothing plus each child will indicate two “wish-list” items.

Plans for Christmas decorations at the Beach Church/Pensacola Beach are being shared with the Upper Room, the church which shares the Beach Church campus. Upper Room has offered to provide decorations and do the “heavy lifting,” and their offer was gratefully accepted. The display of the PBC’s nativity scene will be on the altar, and there will be a Christmas tree in the Sanctuary. The target date for decorations to be completed is December 5 with a decorating day (“Deck the Halls”) for PBC and UR volunteers on December 2.

The church’s Compassionate Care Team will have the “Joy in a Box” for gifts for children for needy Navy Point families; the Christmas tree will have “ornaments” with kids’ requests and clothing sizes.

The theme for the season at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg is “Receive the Gift,” a continuation of the celebration of gratitude that has been part of the stewardship season and the Thanksgiving holiday. On Sundays in December, those who enjoy singing Christmas music are invited to come to church at 10:15am to sing sitting outside on the lawn before the service begins.

Labyrinth walks will continue on Wednesday mornings at 9am for deepening spiritual reflection.

Anti-racism demonstrations will also continue on Sunday afternoons from 4:30-5pm during Advent, providing an opportunity to express the gift of love for all that is celebrated at Christmas.

Book Talk is being held via Zoom on Thursday, December 16 as an opportunity to share favorite Christmas stories and books.

There will be a Winter Solstice gathering around a fire on Tuesday, December 21, as a time to share stories and readings and inspiration around the themes of darkness and light.

The United Church of Marco Island will have a caroling trolley on Sunday afternoon, December 5, which will make stops at some of the homes of church members. Carolers will partake of a meal at the church afterwards.

The Women’s Fellowship will enjoy lunch at the church on Monday, December 13, before gathering in the Sanctuary for a presentation of “Celebrate & Worship the Christ Child” – a mix of the arts featuring the handbell choir, vocal ensembles, other music and Evelyn Case’s monologue reading of “You are Special” by Max Lucado.

On Sunday mornings during Advent at Coral Gables Congregational UCC, a discussion has been scheduled about the “lost period” of Jesus’ life as an infant and young boy based on the Proto-Gospel of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. On Tuesdays at noon on Zoom, midday devotions will be devoted to the poetry of Mary Oliver and creating simple spiritual practices utilizing her visions of faith, nature and inner-reflection.

Vespers are taking place on Wednesdays at 6:30pm in the Sanctuary and online.

The German Ministry is selling Christmas Advent wreaths and the 17th German Christmas Market at the church will be open on Sunday afternoon, December 5, selling Christmas décor, baked goods and German food and mulled wine. Santa Claus (Weihnachtsmann) will also be there amidst seasonal music.

The Angel Tree is supporting the families of Lotus House in Overtown with gift cards toys and games. The agency is dedicated to improving the lives of women, children and youth.
On October 7 the Women’s Fellowship at Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte enjoyed a Bible study of “Rachel and Leah: Sisters and Rivals” from Shannon Bream’s bestseller *The Women of the Bible Speak*. A “Ladies Day Out” field trip to Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota was arranged for Thursday, October 28.

The Women’s Association at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota scheduled an information presentation on Tuesday, November 2 from a farm worker representing the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The group’s December activity will be assembling and wrapping shoeboxes for senior shut-ins in the community, filling them with suggested items like travel soaps and shampoos, hand sanitizers, socks, games and puzzles.

Corrine Kiefer did a card-making craft presentation on Wednesday, November 17, for the Women’s Fellowship at North Port Community UCC. To assist seniors through the Salvation Army for Christmas, women are invited to check out tags hanging on the Sanctuary wall and select one, make the purchase and return it (unwrapped) to the church by December 1.

For its Angel Tree, the Women’s Ministry at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach is collecting monetary donations to purchase gift cards for residents of Brookwood (a residential program for at-risk girls between 13-21) and PARC (assists individuals with intellectually or developmental disabilities).
On Saturday, October 23, 72 volunteers at Coral Gables Congregational UCC gathered over two shifts to pack 10,000 meals for the hungry through Rise Against Hunger, a national organization that helps package and distribute nutrient-rich meals to communities in need. Participants were invited to donate $10 to cover the cost of the event.

The food drive at Sanibel Congregational UCC on November 4 was to benefit F.I.S.H. and the Gladiolus Food Pantries. It was a drive-thru: put the food donations in your car’s trunk or rear, drive up to the front of the church to the friendly volunteers, who will unload the donations once the trunk or hatch is popped.

Sunday, October 17, was the kick-off at First UCC/Orlando for its Christmas Cookie Dough Sale of Otis Spunkmeyer frozen cookies as well as other desserts and snacks that require no baking. Profits from the sale go toward the church’s three year capital campaign.

In an effort to support local organic farms in the region, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota has provided its members with Internet links to well-known area farms. One idea is “CSA,” which means Community-Supported Agriculture, a partnership between a farm and its community. CSA members pay a subscription fee at the beginning of the growing season, which the farm uses to buy seeds and supplies. In return, the farm harvests “the cream of the crop” for members and delivers it weekly to a pick-up location. Fourteen interested church members had the chance to tour Blumenberry Farms on November 3 to learn more about organic farming.

During July, the Food Pantry at Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park was open nine days and served 1,020 individuals. In August 378 households were served. The numbers for September saw 1,266 clients served (451 households); small bags of individual serving foods were provided to seven assisted living residents. In recent months this year, Chapel on the Hill UCC/Indian Rocks Beach contributed $4,000 to the Food Pantry. Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach continues to provide volunteers once a month to help unload a truck of food from the US Department of Agriculture. Employees from Achieva Credit Union sent a check in September for $2,107.

North Port Community UCC holds a regular monthly food drive in partnership with the Salvation Army. Between July 2020 and July 2021, the church and the local community donated 5,599.1lbs (let’s say 5,600) of food and hygiene items.

The Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton collected over 156lbs of food in September (Food Action Awareness Month) to donate to Boca Helping Hands. For Thanksgiving, members were invited to donate $27.15, enough to provide a special meal to a family through Boca Helping Hands.

Rebecca’s Pantry at First UCC/Orlando served 87 families (263 individuals) in September. In October it was 129 families (451 individuals).

Members (like Carl, Dan, Sue and Joan) at Faith UCC/Dunedin can serve meals on Wednesday at the Homeless Emergency Project in Clearwater.

Recently after making their monthly 100 brown bag meals at UCC/ Fort Lauderdale, the Imperial Sum Court of All Florida presented a check for $5,000 to the church’s Ruth Ministry. The UCC/ Fort Lauderdale is grateful for this radical generosity and the partnership that is shared.

In December the food donation box at First Congregational UCC/Orange City will be collecting donations for Back Pack Buddies, helping feed children and families in Orange City.
At Hope UCC/Rockledge their drive through/drop off drive for the Central Brevard Sharing Center in September collected 215 items and $135. In October the numbers were 257 and $120. On Saturday, December 18, they will be holding a take-out food sale in the social hall featuring baked goods, New England clam chowder, grilled hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken.

Colors of Hunger at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach report having 177 volunteers during the third quarter who worked 524 hours serving 1,026 meals. The group is now a 501c3 public charity. On Sunday evening, November 14, the church held a “Dinner Under the Oaks,” that included cocktails and dinner ($30 per person) featuring pork tenderloin and Key Lime pie. Proceeds benefited various church ministries.

Spring Hill UCC offered a community “drive thru” Thanksgiving dinner for those in need that was available from noon-2pm on November 25. RSVPs were required.

Members at the United Church of Gainesville were invited to grab a reusable bag from the UCG shopping cart in the Courtyard on October 31, fill it with non-perishable items during the week and bring them back for Food First Sunday on November 7, which was themed “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” The food was destined for neighbors at Gainesville Community Ministries. On Wednesday, November 10, it was Break-Fast Soup-and-Salad Potluck — to break a fast — (in Reimer Hall and outside courtyard). Participants celebrated their local partners in support of the annual global project to improve food security. Those involved prepared for Break-Fast by fasting from noon on Tuesday until 6pmPM on Wednesday and were invited to share food for the event. Participants received a bundle of postcards featuring “Come to the Waters,” a block print by Diana Tonnessen inspired by the UCG courtyard fountain. The congregation continues to support to the Food for Kids program at Rawlings Elementary School, now in its 12th year, where 225 children are being served, with more on a waiting list. While unloading 225 bags recently, Jaquan, a parent and a graduate from Rawlings, said that he couldn’t believe what the church was doing and asked if he could help – and he did!

The Artisan Market at the United Church in Tallahassee on Saturday, November 6, included vendors with sales of canned and baked goods, crafts and citrus. Over $3,600 was raised. The drawing was held for the handmade quilt, “Geese, Love and Understanding,” which brought in about $2,800. A fundraiser was held that ran from October 29 through November 22 for fruit packed in gift boxes suitable for shipping. Proceeds benefited seven non-profits including Neighbors in Need and One Great Hour of Sharing.
The Mission and Benevolence Committee at Sanibel Congregational UCC invited church members to help assist the Gladiolus Food Pantry in Fort Myers provide over 1,200 families a Thanksgiving Dinner in their own homes. As in previous years, the Mission and Benevolence Committee matched member offerings up to a total of $500 so that the Food Pantry would be able to provide a turkey and all the fixings for their clients.

Spring Hill UCC organized a community drive-thru Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixings that was made available for those in need on November 25 from 12-2pm. They were prepared to provide 200 meals with any left overs delivered to homeless camps in the area.

The Thanksgiving Box Brigade at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton helped provide clients of Boca Helping Hands with everything their families needed to prepare a Thanksgiving holiday meal. For a contribution of $27.15, church members — solo or teamed up — could provide such a holiday meal. Members could also volunteer to help distribute the meals.

Faith UCC/Dunedin was part of the Community Thanksgiving service held at First Presbyterian Church/Dunedin on Thursday evening, November. A food collection and monetary offerings benefited the Dunedin Cares Food Pantry. The church also participated in a Turkey Drive for Dunedin Cares, collecting non-perishable foods and money, up to November 15.

The holiday events at the Beach Church/Pensacola Beach for families at Navy Point Elementary School were called “Sharing the Harvest.” For Thanksgiving a display was set up in the entrance way to the church with information about providing a Thanksgiving meal to a local family in need.

“An Evening of Praise and Thanksgiving” was a full evening of music at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach on Thursday evening, November 17. The concert featured the PAG Chancel and Handbell Choirs and Serata, a 10-voice men’s ensemble from the Lumina Youth Choirs in Tampa. The admission was free but attendees were asked to bring a monetary donation that will be given to One Great Hour of Sharing. Also, the church’s Piecemakers quilting group, Women On a Faith Journey and Outreach Ministry came together in November to collect donations for patients at All Children’s Hospital. Items on their wish list included coloring and activity books, mechanical pencils, crayons and colored pencils, plastic building blocks, handmade quilts, tote bags and blankets.

Rev. Booth Iburg (Eternal Hope UCC/Fort Walton Beach) regularly helps distribute meals for Catholic Charities to those in need and reports that they gave out 73 Thanksgiving meals to grateful recipients on November 24.
**UCC/New Smyrna Beach** has been dealing with decisions involving issues with its buildings, primarily the Sanctuary, which has just had a thorough professional cleaning. Needing attention are problems with the roofs, mold, termites and the a/c. And since the church has a steeple there have been bats in the belfry, a population that has been relocated elsewhere.

Reroofing the Sanctuary at **Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park** began in November to address leaks. To head off future problems the skylight is being covered. Once the issues with the roof are completed, the ceilings will be repaired where there had been spotting.

Construction took place in the Narthex of the Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall at **Sanibel Congregational UCC** to accommodate booths for the installation of new audio and visual equipment. This will expand the capability to provide livestreaming and other Internet-based services.

**Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg** has received a technology grant from the Conference which will improve the sound system in the Sanctuary and facilitate streaming of worship services.

A contract has been signed at the **United Church of Gainesville** for a four to six week project to renovate the church’s education wing. Work includes: the replacement of all interior lights with LED fixtures and new light switches and electrical outlets; new interior doors and casings; new cabinetry in one room and new flooring. The entire interior also will be painted along with the new baseboards installed with the flooring. Some outdoor lighting also will be changed and there will be a new gate leading to the north playground.

The electrical power to **Hope UCC/Rockledge** is now up to 21st century standards as FPL moved the new transformer and replaced underground cables making the building less susceptible to power outages and resulting loss of service. Still needing to be done by FPL: restoration of the grounds.

Members of the Orlando Gay Chorus and the Central Florida Sounds of Freedom recently contributed $1,161 to **First UCC/Orlando**, which will go toward the church’s capital campaign for the roof and a/c repairs.

In preparation for the grand reopening of its Sanctuary on Sunday, November 21, **Spring Hill UCC** held an inside/outside work day on November 11 to getting the Bibles and hymnals dusted and back in the pews, updating bulletin boards, cleaning the rooms in the education wing, conference room and office with weeding and mowing outside. The 85” TVs have been hung, the sound system was re-assembled and much of the furniture from Fellowship Hall has been moved back to the Sanctuary. In the Narthex a beautiful chandelier was gifted by **Jerry Thomas**, and a Thomas Kinkaid painting was donated by **Tom St Clair**. The outside door in the kitchen in Fellowship Hall has been replaced and the rug has been cleaned plus the soffit that was falling has been fixed. In addition the church has received donations towards a new air conditioner so the old one should be replaced soon.

**The Jane Murray Hall at First Congregational UCC/Orange City now has new a/c units**
First Congregational UCC/Ocala is partnering with Temple Beth Shalom (Reform Judaism) to create Ocala Tree of Life Sanctuary. Working intensely with Ausley Construction Company and Circle Square Foundation, its new edifice is scheduled for completion in mid-December, 2021.

“We’ve designed a unique building,” states Dr. Harold (Hal) W. McSwain, pastor of First Congregational UCC, “providing for the particular liturgical and traditional practices of both religions, from kosher-to-kitchens-to-Christmas-to-Hanukkah celebrations. With deep respect for each other’s faiths, our plan includes separate Jewish and Christian sanctuaries while enabling both worship rooms to open to each other’s sanctuaries for high holy days, such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Christmas and Easter—as well as for an audience of 500 or more for concerts, lectures, community events and the like.”

“All internal operations—administrative, secretarial, financial—will be shared by both congregations, and all classrooms for Little Ones and Older Ones, conference room, media center and choir room are ‘common ground’—Jewish and Christian.”

“Sounds ideal?” he muses. “Yeah…maybe…on paper…but I figure our Facility Administrator will need the hide of an alligator and the patience of Job, what with accounting to a rabbi—and a pastor—and a Temple Board—and a Church Council—and the Ocala Tree of Life Board of Directors.”

“The building features the latest ‘high-tech advances,’” says Dr. Hal, “from multiple camera positions for live-streaming and/or recording worship and performances to Dante 5.2 sound systems to enabling monitoring of events anywhere in the building, and our carpenters, welders, electricians and other workers are kicking to the vibes of hooking a powerful amplifier to the organ speakers, just newly installed. The first music piped through the system? The group’s initials are ‘L’ and ‘Z.’”

He continues, emphasizing that neither the church nor the synagogue is creating new communities of faith. “We’re just moving our communities of faith, but far, far more is our engagement in the essential Jewish principle of Tikun olam: ‘Repairing the world,’ a fundamental that our church had embraced prior to long-range discussions with synagogue leaders.”

He explains, “We will create an interfaith site welcoming progressive dialogue and cooperative interchange not just among Christians and Jews, but in league with other religious traditions. The history of the relationship among Jews and Christians grimly reminds us of capitulating to sectarian arrogance, prejudice, and violence—and we dare not forget Pogroms—and the Holocaust. Coddling our history? Our memories? Nope. We plough right through them towards shalom.”

“Our greatest hurdle?” he mused in a recent radio interview. “Trust…and respect, hand-in-hand, actually, one in the same. Oh…and a broadening sense of humor.”

“Some months back, our Joint Planning Committee speculated about plans for our first worship service together,” McSwain remembers. “‘Music? Litany? Prayers? Organ? Piano? Guitars? Hebrew? English? Latin? Greek? Discussion was lively and creative—but dialogue couldn’t fix on a common plan. And that’s when I said, ‘Look: whatever we come up with for the worship service, let’s plan on serving shrimp cocktails and pulled-pork barbeque after the worship service.’”
For about ten seconds, you could have cut the air with a knife—right up until everyone caught the instant—and howled. And in that one, simple moment, we engaged in Tikkun olam: we healed a slice of the world by repairing—or healing—ourselves and each other, bypassing long-worn distance, suspicion, fragility and distrust.”

He goes on to share, “About twice a week ever since that meeting, I get an e-mail from a church or synagogue member with the subject title, ‘A rabbi and a pastor walked into a bar...’ And in such ludicrous gestures, we bind ourselves not only to each other but to our common charter. We’re healing each other.”

First Congregational UCC and Temple Beth Shalom ask for your blessings on and your prayers for our Ocala Tree of Life Sanctuary, its covenant, its ministries, its “hopes and fears for all the years.” And for your and our seasons of Hanukkah, Advent and Christmas, we bless your churches, ministries, members, and staffs saying: Pax, salaam, e shalom

Being Secure

October was National Crime Prevention Month. Is your ministry taking the necessary steps to prepare and secure your house of worship? The right preparation could mean the difference between tragedy and protecting the safety of the families you serve. Find helpful resources at insuranceboard.org/safety-central/security-and-crime.

Cyber Security

October was National Cyber Security Awareness month. Now is a perfect time to think about preparing your leadership in preventing a security breach. Visit Insurance Board’s Safety Central for information on internet scams, phishing, social media security and more. https://www.insuranceboard.org/saf.../security-and-crime/. 

Weather Preparedness

Are you prepared for severe weather? In a matter of minutes, extreme wind can create situations that threaten your church building and cause severe damage if you are not adequately prepared. See how you can protect your roof, building exterior and vehicles. https://www.insuranceboard.org/.../2019/02/High-Winds.pdf
The special music guest at the UCC/Fort Lauderdale on Sunday, October 10, was flute soloist Marilyn Maingart, who has extensive international experience as well as being principal flutist in more than two dozen Broadway productions and having worked with notables such as Jean-Pierre Rampal, Rex Harrison, Ray Charles and James Galway. There will be a holiday concert, “Jingle All the Way,” on Saturday evening, December 5, featuring the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men’s Chorus. The South Florida PRIDE Jazz Ensemble will entertain with “Welcome Back to the Holidays” on Sunday evening, December 12.

Nashville singer/songwriter Anne E. DeChant returned to the concert stage in the Sanctuary at Faith UCC/Dunedin on Friday evening, November 5. She is a well-known and talented artist, having opened several times for Melissa Etheridge. Also, the monthly drum circle at the church takes place in the church garden with extra drums and instruments to share, as is the meditative calm of the community beat.

The annual quilt offered this year at the United Church in Tallahassee for the lucky drawing winner is “Geese, Love and Understanding,” with donations going directly to support Connection First, a non-profit program of the Tallahassee Equality Action Ministry working with teens to promote non-violent communication and restorative justice. The queen-sized quilt was created by the congregation’s Grateful Threads, with quilt blocks in a traditional “flying geese” pattern.

Diversity: The Voices of Sarasota performed on Sunday afternoon, November 21, at an outside concert at St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota. Church member Sharon Morehead sings in the Diversity choir. It was an afternoon of gratitude and music with songs by Christina Aguilera, Kool and The Gang, Bruno Mars, Sister Sledge and others.

The Beach Community Church/Pensacola Beach held a BBQ on Saturday, October 23, that featured a silent auction involving three different sizes of turtle wall hangings made by Dale and Ron Hensley from salvaged wood and driftwood. Proceeds netted about $1,500 from the BBQ and close to $450 from the auction, both of which went to the church toward its mortgage principal. Weekly oil painting classes are being offered at the church for two hours every Monday and began November 1. The classes are open to those with beginning and intermediate levels of experience. Supplies are provided and the fee for each class is $25, with all proceeds going to the church. The title of the class is “Art and Relationship with God and Self” and is taught by Becky Stuart.

The Jazz Bandits performed “What a Wonderful World” on November 14 at the United Church of Gainesville as part of the multi-week sermon series, “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood.” On November 28 during coffee time after worship in the Library, Barbara Gibbs will have a photo exhibit, “Plants and Flower Re-imaged.”

Each week Andrew Galuska, the Director of Music and Fine Arts at the Community Church of Vero Beach, presents a live program on Facebook which includes artists, musicians, historical sites and more. Recently he brought viewers an interview with Cathy

Wednesdays @ 1:00 p.m.
November 17
Poet Spotlight: Cathy Smith Bowers
Poet Laureate of North Carolina
Andrew Galuska, host
Smith Bowers, Poet Laureate of North Carolina, a poet from one of the church’s Friday concerts and Sunday Jazz Vespers. You can tune in on these exclusively on Facebook Live.

Robert Alvey, a UCC/Fort Lauderdale member recently performed as “Mark Twain” at the Jarvis Center in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC partnered with OUTshine on Saturday, October 23, for a showing of the film “Invisible: Gay Women in Southern Music.”

The movie night at Fort Myers Congregational UCC on Sunday evening, October 24, was “Monty Python and the Holy Grail.” On Friday, November 26, it was the documentary “For the Bible Tells Me So.”

Update on Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance

BY REV ALAN COE
MAYFLOWER UCC/NAPLES

The Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA) held its official groundbreaking on November 10. It was a well-attended event and marks the beginning of a new phase of the project.

The goal of the IFHA is to provide safe, secure affordable rental housing to farmworker families and others in Immokalee. This project will provide over 100 two-and-three bedroom apartments. The Florida Conference and the national setting of the UCC have donated over $200,000 toward the purchase of the property, and now the exciting phase of building begins.

The construction will take place in phases as funds become available. The IFHA is beginning a capital campaign to raise the necessary funds to complete the project. If you or your church would like to become involved in this wonderful project, you may log onto the website www.immokaleefairhousing.org or contact me at acoe@uccfla.org. I would be glad to help you and your church help make a tremendous difference in housing for farmworker families in Immokalee. This project will not only give farmworker families a safe, secure affordable place to live but the work of IFHA and other non-profit agencies working in Immokalee are seeking to change the housing landscape in the community at-large.

This project expands the UCC’s presence and involvement in Immokalee. The denomination has long supported the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Immokalee and the Fair Food Program. CIW is part of this project and has representation on the board of IFHA. United Church Homes operates a low-income elderly apartment complex, Cypress Run, in Immokalee.

For more about this project, click here
Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami organized a community-wide event on November 13 to assemble kits of clean and sanitized supplies for the safe delivery of newborns in high-risk areas of Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Donations of $10 per kit were received. The Footprints Foundation is the organization behind this project.

North Port Community UCC recently sent $800 to support its mission partner BeLikeBrit in Haiti.

Collections at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach in September realized over $7,000 for Haitian relief and more than $3,000 for Afghan refugee support.

On Saturday, October 16, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring had a Benefit Concert for Haiti featuring Carnide Ther-midor with Family & Friends, raising $1,500 in which 100% of the proceeds were enough to send 50 Haitian children to school for one semester.
Members were invited ahead of the date to e-mail photos of the beloved “saints” of their lives. They became part of a special video that was shown during the in-person service (that was also livestreamed).

The “Day of the Dead” at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg was acknowledged on Sunday, November 7. Members were invited to share about someone who had been particularly influential in their life, answering the question “Whose legacy lives on in you? Who inspires you?” During the service congregants were called forth to tell about their choices. While this is a Sunday to honor those who have in some way revealed God to us, the concept was expanded to include nature as well. The natural world is considered the self-disclosure of God, so they also honored how God is manifest for us in nature as well as in our own species.

Also recognizing All Saints Day on the first Sunday in November was Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton. Worship included a remembrance of names, a special prayer and litany, the lighting of candles and singing “For All the Saints.”

On Sunday, October 31, First Congregational UCC/Sarasota celebrated All Saints Day, recognizing its deceased saints and their contributions to the fabric, culture and history of the church. The Racial Justice Mission Group chose to lift up and honor one such saint, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Evans, whose contributions throughout his life were critically important not only to the Sarasota church but to the entire UCC denomination. In 1967, he was elected as the Secretary of the UCC, a position he held for 16 years. In 1976, he was elected to serve as the third President of the UCC, the first African American to hold that position and the first African American to hold both the positions of Secretary and President of a mainline church in the United States. He passed away in 2008 and wife, Harriet, in 2020.

At First UCC/Orlando, Rev. Lynn Blevins wrote in an e-blast to members:

“Next Sunday [November 21] we will simultaneously be celebrating the past, present and future. We celebrate our faithful members who died during the year, carrying on a past tradition of our Evangelical and Reformed ancestors in faith, Totenfest; on this present day, we join together to support one another on this occasion which is both sad and joyful as we worship and seek guidance in our mutual ministry; further, we look to the future as the Kingdom of God is realized on earth and we will join that Host of Witnesses — when we will pierce the veil and see God and hazy mysteries will come clear; when questions like ‘How do we all fit in heaven?’ will seem childish and shallow. In heaven, there is no need for or desire for questioning. In heaven there is pure joy forever and ever. That is what our Host of Witnesses are experiencing. That is what we hope to experience one day. That is why we can approach Totenfest with joy.”

From October 25-29 at the United Church of Gainesville, time was set aside for an All Saints labyrinth walk. Interested members were instructed to bring a photo or memory of a loved one for a shared altar and then stay to walk the labyrinth. On October 31, the Sunday Seminar was titled “When the Veil between Heaven and Earth is Wafer Thin.” Minister Emerita Rev. Sandy Reimer revisited Celtic and other traditions of remembering and honoring loved ones who have died. Attendees then shared ways and times when they had sensed or felt the presence of those people, perhaps in dreams, meditation or prayer.

At St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota, the congregation remembered by name all its members who had died during 2020. Members could place a photo of a friend or loved one lost on a table in the front of the Sanctuary.

All Saints Day at Coral Gables Congregational UCC commemorated those loved ones lost since November 2020. As part of the recognition, candles were lit for those who had passed away.

Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park observed the occasion on Sunday, November 7, sharing names and photos of friends and loved ones who have passed within the last year.

All Saints Sunday at UCC/Fort Lauderdale
Much Work To Do

by Rev. Donna Cooney
(United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine)
SC2ER Facilitator

Over the next few months at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota, people will be sharing testimonies in worship about what they have learned about racism from personal experience and from participation in Sacred Conversations on Race. There will also be newsletter articles from the Racial Justice Mission Group. An opportunity to build awareness is currently going through a trial run with Sacred Conversations of Race before being offered to the entire congregation. A draft of the Racial Justice Covenant is currently under way and will be presented to the congregation.

The Racial Justice Ministry at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community Church/St Pete Beach will engage in a “sacred conversation” with Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach) via Zoom on Tuesday evening, December 7. Dr. Sheila will share her experiences as a woman of color, and as a pastor, in her struggles against racism.

Today, a predominately white jury in Kenosha, Wisconsin, acquitted 18-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse of all charges. Rittenhouse, a former police youth cadet who is also white, murdered two unarmed and innocent men marching in solidarity with other protestors in Kenosha after the shooting of Jacob Blake in 2020. The jurors chose to protect and free a white supremacist over preserving the rights and safety of black bodies and racial justice. This kind of injustice is violent and tortures the soul. Rittenhouse used a semi-automatic assault rifle and purposely killed two innocent human beings and wounded another, who wanted to protest police violence.

“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. The law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted. Look at the nations and see! Be astonished! Be astonished! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told.” Habakkuk 1:1-5, 2:1-3

While the ARM ministry is indeed grateful during this season of Thanksgiving, we are also aware that there is still so much work to do. For this reason, we’d like to share these words from Rev. Dr. Velda Love, UCC Minister for Racial Justice, published November 19:


Until Justice comes, we fight on.

Racial Terrorism

in St. Augustine

History illustrations by Rev. Dr. Warren Clark (member, United Church UCC-DoC/St. Augustine and former Pastor of First United Church of Tampa)
In the summer of 2016 we asked if it was Time for Conversations on Race, Religion, Violence, Tolerance, Justice, Inequality. We have asked you to share with our Florida churches how you as a church family have, are now, or are planning to have such conversations.

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

**Time for Conversations...**

**Coral Gables Congregational UCC** collaborated on Sunday, October 24, in an afternoon of thought-provoking discussion, including live musical selections from the opera, “Fellow Travelers.” It was a lively and information debate about the Lavender Scare, McCarthyism and targeting specific groups for blame.

On Monday, October 25, 47 members from the church participated virtually with those from congregations across the county of PACT (People Acting in Community Together) for its annual meeting to hear updates about progress reducing arrests, affordable housing and community IDs and also voting on a new focus issue for the coming years.

**Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg** is one of the sponsoring organizations of the City’s proclamation honoring those who originally inhabited the land that is now called St. Petersburg.

The proclamation celebrates the important legacy of the Original Peoples and what it has to teach us today. It was read at the City Council meeting on October 14.

**Members from Good Samaritan Church/ Pinellas Park** met via Zoom on Monday, October 25, for the annual assembly of FAST (Faith & Action for Strength Today) with those from over 40 other faith communities to decide on the focus and direction of justice work in 2022.

**Faith UCC/Dunedin** was represented at the St. Pete “Bans Off Our Bodies” rally on Saturday, October 21. Pictured are Fran Mitchell, Esther Tanner, Marge Miller, Ruthann Richwine and several thousand of their closest friends. Thanks go to Lesley Kowalski for making these signs.

For the past 10 years (except last year due to COVID-19), Faith has paused during one worship service each year, in conjunction with thousands of other churches and places of faith, for the purpose of writing letters to Congress. This done as part of Bread for the World’s “Offering of Letters” on behalf of hungry children and families in our nation and around the world. The congregation recently picked up where they left off in 2019. Everything needed to write a letter and address an envelope were provided at the service, which took around 10 minutes to write a short sermon. They were collected, blessed and sent off to Washington. Online info also was provided.

**Sarasota Brady** held a gathering at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota on October 21 to talk about gun-safety efforts in the area. Brady’s weekly Bayfront rallies for gun safety began Thursday, October 28 at 4pm.
After welcoming new members at Hope UCC/Rockledge on October 17 with a cookout in their honor, a peace pole was installed at the church’s garden entrance. It was a gift to the Justice and Witness Ministry from the congregation’s oldest member, 104-year-old Ethel Osterwise. Pastor Rev. Karen Curtis-Weakley explained the peace pole’s significance and gave a blessing.

The Education and Social Action Committees at First United Church of Tampa are collaborating to learn more about an urgent issue: the climate crisis that is impacting our local communities, our nation and the world. They plan to study this issue and begin to think about practical actions that they, as a congregation, can take to address this very serious problem.

A two-part activity was planned for the month of November, first by reading the UCC publication Cathedral on Fire and participating in a Zoom discussion group on Thursday, November 11 and second participating in a book talk with the author Brooks Berndt on Saturday, November 20.

The Sunday Seminar at the United Church of Gainesville on November 21 was the All-Church Read for Fall 2021, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent by Pulitzer Prize winner Isabel Wilkerson. The book is a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America and explains how our country’s history and lives have been shaped by a hidden caste system. Church members examined the premise of the book, considering questions that deepened understanding of how caste and race are not the same but deeply embedded in our current racial, political, and social problems. The event was livestreamed on YouTube.

Windermere Union Church marked Native American Sunday with history, culture, music and an exhibit of Native American artifacts. Led by retired UCC minister Rev. David Houssel, the service was inspired by his many years living with and learning from Native Americans. Rev. David shares his knowledge and spiritual gifts through his leadership of Windermere Union’s group, Windsong.

Interested members of Fort Myers Congregational UCC met via Zoom on Thursday, October 28 in a Zoom gathering of the LIFE (Lee Interfaith for Empowerment) Team to support one another and discern where they are in their justice ministry.

On November 8, Emmanuel UCC/Sebring hosted its third “Community Conversation.” The topic was “Men’s Health & Veteran’s Affairs” that featured guest presenters [pictured] Lt. Tyrone Tyson (head of the COPS Unit of the Highlands County Sheriff’s Office), Alfred Nolton (chairs the Armed Service & Veteran’s Affairs committee of the local NAACP #5087) and Officer Jason Mulligan (part of COPS Unit) with Rev. George Miller. After their presentations there was an open-forum discussion in which the male attendees were invited to speak about their experiences while the female members of the audience participated in “active listening.” The format encouraged truths to be shared and truths to be heard, with stories that empowered the participants to move forward from the event with a clearer understanding of the work left to do in the community.
On Friday, October 22, the United Church of Christ Board gathered over Zoom for our first business meeting of the 2021-2023 biennium. This meeting followed a September retreat of the board during which we discussed the UCCB’s role as a leading institution in the landscape of the wider church and the value of our covenantal relationships with other settings of the church, including local churches, conferences, and financial ministries. The wider church has blessed the UCCB with a cohort of exceptional leaders. In addition to our officers and staff, our fall business meeting was the first opportunity for us to hear from multiple new committee chairs. Lawrence Tanner Richardson was appointed chair of the Development Committee and Onyx Kuthuru to lead the Marketing Committee.

The UCCB has set a goal for all board members to participate in the church’s annual fund this year. I updated the board on our progress toward our $20,000 goal. UCCB members have given $18,750 to the mission of the National Setting so far this year and we are on track to meet our goal.

Major actions of the board at this meeting included receiving our audited financial statements, approving a budget of approximately $20 million for operations of the National Setting in 2022, and reviewing the 4.75-percent draw on our endowment. In addition to this routine business, the board followed up on items delegated to us by General Synod 33. A special committee of UCCB members was appointed to consider the “Resolution on Protecting Workers at Churches and Other Religious Institutions.” Action on this resolution is expected of the board at its next regular meeting in March 2022.

The board also received reports from the officers of the church:

The Rev. John Dorhauer delivered remarks addressing the state of the church throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and attending to the grief that will accompany us in moving through the months ahead. He unveiled plans for a major church summit in 2022 to envision the post-pandemic church. He also spoke to the status of the expected sale of our property at 700 Prospect Avenue in Cleveland and a new lease agreement for office space. Rev. Dorhauer delivered official notice to the UCCB that he will not seek reelection to his office at General Synod 34.

Returning from sabbatical, the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson also addressed the board on Wider Church Ministries. Her remarks placed special emphasis on the importance of our ministry of accompaniment to migrant peoples and she led us in prayerful remembrance of the people of Haiti.

The Rev. Traci Blackmon delivered a report for Justice and Local Church Ministries. Rev. Blackmon has taken a leading role in the design of new space for the workforce of the National Setting and demonstrated her readiness to serve as Acting General Minister and President during Rev. Dorhauer’s upcoming sabbatical. She updated the board on our plans to take the “spirit of Amistad” from the chapel at 700 Prospect into our new home in the AECOM building.

Our meeting concluded with our annual review of the General Minister and President. The UCCB passed a resolution commending Rev. Dorhauer on his pastoral leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and blessing his sabbatical. Our prayer is that this will be a period of sustained rest and renewal for him so that when he returns to work in January 2022 he will energetically complete the race we have called him to run.
In “Across Florida” our intent is to share with you what is happening at our 90+ churches throughout the state. It is obvious from these entries that there is an exciting vibrancy evident within our congregations.

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

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

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

We’ve singled out a few of these with the following bright ideas symbol that you might want to let shine in your own church.

The Basket Social at First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen was held on Saturday, October 2. Some of the selections included “Fun at the Beach,” “Comfort Food,” “Doggie Treat” and “Taste of Italy.” Then a month later on November 6 items for sale donated by church crafters were displayed on the Parish House porch. Vendors were able to set up tables on the lawn.

The city of New Smyrna Beach has approved the request of the UCC/New Smyrna Beach for a standing permit for a monthly church fair that includes vendors paying a $35 fee. The first event was held on Saturday, October 9, from 9am-3pm.

Naples UCC has initiated a “Walk and Wonder!” event on the first and third Thursdays of the month from 8-9am. Participants gather for a walk together in nature, prayer and fellowship.

First Congregational UCC/Sarasota is excited to announce it has a new website, with thanks to Sarah Dousa, who over the last nine months built this new site that reflects the Spirit-filled life of the church. On the front page is the church’s commitment to Creation Justice, Open and Affirming and Racial Justice with pages devoted to other ministries. Appreciation is extended to Peter Burroughs for offering his expertise along the way.

Community Congregational UCC/New Port Richey held an Old Fashion Family Country Fair on Saturday, November 6, with games, face-painting, a visit by the local fire truck, hotdogs, balloons, cotton candy and more. People dressed in clothing that was worn 100 years ago was a nod to the church’s centennial celebration. On Sunday there was a special worship service followed by a free family-style chicken dinner and church tour complete with pictures of the congregation’s ministry over the past 100 years.

Joni’s Treasures, the thrift shop at First UCC/Orlando, took in $655 during September and $1,068 in October. The Otis Spunkmeyer Christmas Cookie Dough sale that ended in October raised $3,016. A silent auction began on November 21 with the winners to be announced on Sunday, December 5. Donations included gift cards, art, jewelry, appliances and electronics – all new or like new.

The Health Ministry at UCC/Fort Lauderdale has received the donation of a brochure rack containing info on various health and medical issues. It’s located in the Sanctuary lobby for easy access.

So, what did you think about the sermon? Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami is one of our churches that affords congregants the opportunity to praise, vent, inquire, whatever. Pastor Rev. Al Bunis meets after worship with his Faithful Follow-On to hear thoughts, ideas and questions about the Sunday sermon or worship.

Twenty members of the Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton walked 501 miles by the end of September, which raised $813 for the Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation fundraiser. Part of Advent activities will include rummage sales.
Across Florida

on Sunday, December 5 and Saturday, December 11 – thinking “less chaos and more Christmas” – with games and food.

The October 2 rummage sale at Spring Hill UCC netted just over $1,300. On Saturday, December 4, the church has its Christmas Bazaar and Cookie Walk, offering: crocheted, knitted and sewn items; jams, pickles, mixes, homemade breads, baked cookies and pastries; holiday decorations; home and garden items along with basket raffles. A new addition to the Bazaar this year will be the Men’s Club raffle of a 65” TV.

Members of First Congregation UCC/Orange City took up a collection for ongoing expenses of THE BRIDGE, the homeless shelter operated by the Community Center in DeLand. The church was able to provide $140 to be applied to current utility costs of that facility.

The Beach Church/Pensacola Beach held a special “Gathering of Worship and Discernment” on Saturday morning, November 13. It was a time for some worship, information sharing and visioning. The event’s theme was “The Church We Have,” focusing attention on the resources and opportunities God has provided and faithfully considering the church’s vitality and direction.

The United Church in Gainesville has a tradition called “Church on the Prairie.” On Sunday, November 14, congregants gathered at the Alachua County Conservation Trust (about 10 miles from the city) at 10am for worship with the Hogtown Pickers, a few words from clergy and a celebration of Communion. After the service there were children’s and intergenerational activities. Participants brought their lawn chairs, blankets, picnic lunches and warm hearts for the return of this wonderful annual event. Those unable to show up were provided some resources for at-home reflection.

On October 10 Emmanuel UCC/Sebring acknowledged Cuba’s Independence Day by honoring Director of Music Ari Salgueiro’s homeland. All wore white, red and blue and Hospitality served cupcakes decorated with the Cuban flag.

Pilgrim Congregational Church/St. Petersburg will have a gathering to benefit the Beth-El Mission of Wimauma on December 3. There will be a drop off designated at the church’s north parking lot for new and gently used clothing and other items such as towels and blankets.

On Saturday, December 4, the WISE Team at First United Church of Tampa invites parishioners to join a Zoom conversation with Natasha Pierre, Executive Director of the Hillsborough National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

On Sunday morning, October 24, interested congregants at Coral Gables Congregational UCC gathered to experience the use of beaded bracelets and necklaces to help us focus our minds during prayer, an ancient practice used by many different spiritual traditions. Associate Pastor Rev. Megan Smith reflected upon the practice in her own personal devotions and shared her experiences with those gathered. There was a time of practice for all those present.

PET BLESSINGS

Several congregations offered pet blessings in October. First UCC/Orlando held its ceremony on Saturday, October 2. At Spring Hill UCC there was a “virtual” blessing of pets on Sunday, October 24, with church members having provided pictures of their pets ahead of time. A few days earlier a game was offered in an e-blast in which members were challenged to match photos of pets with their “parents.” Faith UCC/Dunedin celebrated the Feast of St. Francis during worship on Sunday, October 3, that featured the showing of a special video created of photos of pet companions (living or deceased) submitted ahead of time.

On that same Sunday afternoon at Coral Gables Congregational UCC, parishioners could either bring their pets or photos of them to the church Courtyard for a brief service of blessing and gratitude. Each participant received a photo of themselves with their pet. The church’s new Best Friends Memorial garden, a special area around the statue of St. Francis in the Courtyard, has been set aside as a space to memorialize beloved pets. A plant and personalized, etched stone will be placed in memory of a member’s “best friend.”
Across Florida

**Deltona UCC** is holding a Winter Festival on Saturday, December 4, that will feature raffle prizes, food trucks and vendors. For kids there will be photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus, face painting, a bounce house and scavenger hunt.

**North Port Community UCC** will once again be holding a grief seminar, next year on Saturday, February 5, from 9am-3pm, which is open to the community. Guest speaker Ty Morgan, a grief counselor at Cornerstone of Hope in Cleveland, will concentrate on grief, pain and loss in “Tales from the Quarantine.” Pre-registration is requested for this no-fee event in which breakfast and lunch are provided. The church may be contacted at 941/426-5580.

With World AIDS Day upon us and given the rise in HIV and AIDS in the community, **Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg** has put a supply of condoms in the restrooms at the church. People are encouraged to take them, use them and share them including leaving them in public bathrooms where they may be picked up by those who need them. The condoms were provided to the church by the HIV-AIDS outreach of Empath Health/Suncoast Hospice. Also, the Emergency Management division of Pinellas County provided free PPE to churches for the holidays and the church signed up for masks, band aids and sanitizer. So much was given — including huge amounts of wipes, rubber gloves and face shields — that the church contacted the Evergreen Adult Day Care at the church, which was thrilled to have the surplus supplies.

“A rainbow over Naples UCC taken by Rev. Dr. Sharon Harris-Ewing

“Stewardship Sunday” at **Hope UCC/Rockledge** on November 21 celebrated being “Rooted in Love” – the theme of General Synod 2021. The stewardship team handed out cups with dirt and seeds for members to symbolically grow blessings and show commitment to God and to their faith community.

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

**Live or via Zoom, or other livestreaming**

“**The Parables of Jesus**” and “**COVID-19: The Good, the Bad and The Ugly**” (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)

“**Vaccines for Children**,” “**Eat Local, Grow Hope Global Seminar: How We are Supporting Women Farmers in Guatemala**,” “**Church Budget Deep Dive!**” “**Voter Suppression in Florida**,” “**Emerging Language: Describing Our Identities and Relationships**” and “**When the Veil Between Heaven and Earth is Wafer Thin**” (United Church of Gainesville)

**Gospel of Luke, “Just What Does It Mean to be Bisexual, Transgendered or Non-Binary?” and “Learning to Forgive”** (Sanibel Congregational UCC)

“**St. Andrew 101**” (St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota)

“**What Was It Like at Ground Zero**” (First United Church of Tampa)

“**The Church of Not Being Horrible,” “Discovering God’s Tracks in Everyday Life**” (in German language) (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

“**Estate Planning**” (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)

“**Our Money Story**” (Good Samaritan Church/Pinellas Park)

**The Book of Hebrews (Beach Church/Pensacola Beach)**

“**An Introduction to G.W.F. Hegel**” (Fort Myers Congregational UCC)

“**The Rise of the Maccabees: What Archaeology Reveals About Antiquity’s Last Independent Jewish Kingdom**” (Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach)

“**It’s a Wonderful Life**” (Deltona UCC)

“**Sharing Favorite Hymns, “Are You a Voice Shouting in the Wilderness?” “Treating Others with Justice and Dignity” and “How Are We Doing?”**” (UCC/Fort Lauderdale)
in the Diversity choir. It was an afternoon of gratitude and music with songs by Christina Aguilera, Kool and The Gang, Bruno Mars, Sister Sledge and others. Tickets were $15 and donations of non-perishable food items were collected for All Faiths Food Bank.

**Coral Gables Congregational UCC** held a morning adult ed class (in-person and on Zoom) on three Sundays in October on “The Bible and Homosexuality,” examining Biblical texts that are used to judge, sometimes condemn, and often marginalize the LGBTQ+ community in the church and society as a whole. On Sunday afternoon, October 10, after worship, a luncheon was served in the Courtyard in recognition of National Coming Out Day.

---

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

**Live or via Zoom, or other livestreaming**

*The Bible You Didn’t Know You Could Believe In* by Jeffrey Frantz (Spring Hill UCC)

*Danger Within: An Alice Ott Mystery* by Dusty J. Miller and *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah (First Congregational UCC/Lake Helen)

*The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi and *The Only Woman in the Room* by Marie Benedict (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota)

*How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* by Julie Lythcott-Haims (Coral Gables Congregational UCC)

*Tender Is the Land* by William Kent Kruger and *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton)

*You Are Never Alone* by Max Lucado (North Port Community UCC)

*The Women of the Bible Speak* by Shannon Bream and

How the One-Armed Sister Sweeps the House* by Cherie Jones (Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte)

*The Code Breaker* by Walter Isaacson and *Midnight Library* by Matt Haig (Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami)

*Leave the World Behind* by Alam Rumaan and *Stepping Forward: A Positive, Practical Path to Transform Our Communities and Our Lives* by Richard Harwood (Hope UCC/Rockledge)

**Coral Gables Congregational UCC** recently hosted three “meet-the-author” events. On Monday evening, September 27, it featured *New York Times*-bestselling author Lauren Goff discussing her newest work, *Matrix*. Christina Diaz Gonzalez discussed her book, *Concealed*, on Saturday evening, October 23. *Find the Helpers* author Fred Guttenberg will share on December 7 what 911 and Parkland has taught him.
Getting Involved in Disaster Response

The national UCC Disaster Response Ministry would like to expand its network of people in conferences across the country. One of the ways to expand is to develop a team of people within a conference to become involved in disaster response in their local area. Many communities in Florida have Long Term Recovery Committees that respond after disasters and are permanent organizations at a local level. These LTRCs function at a variety of levels depending on their organization, staffing and how often they are affected by disasters. There is a good chance that in most years at least one area of the state will be affected by a hurricane or other disaster.

Here are three vital things about a Long-Term Recovery Committee:

• An LTRC works to assist people in the recovery and rebuild process
• It works with homeowners — that have no other means of recovery — with the assistance of several agencies working together with donated funds and volunteers
• The LTRCs and faith-based groups are the last hope for people to get their home rebuilt

In the 20 years I have volunteered and worked as paid staff for the denomination in disaster response, I have been directly involved in the rebuild of many homes. My first experience was in Texas when I was serving a church in the town of Seguin, about 35 miles east of San Antonio. The town has periodic river flooding from two river systems that run through the town. In the flood of 2002, there were about 700 homes affected. The UCC Disaster Response Ministry office in Cleveland sent funds to the LTRC in the town, and my role was to determine which projects the UCC would assist with and decide how much of the UCC funds to put toward projects as cases came before the LTRC.

As Director of Disaster Recovery in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, my work was more involved and widespread. I was involved with the formation of LTRCs in three parishes as well as working with case managers and others to bring rebuild cases before the LTRCs for consideration. I also had the role of selecting which cases the UCC Disaster Response Ministry would accept to rebuild.

It is a very humbling and fulfilling role to be part of a long-term recovery committee. You get to help people when they need it the most, to bring their homes and their lives back to wholeness.

If you feel called to this type of volunteer ministry and are interested in learning more about or serving on a Long Term Recovery Committee in your local area, please be in contact with me at acoe@uccfla.org.
Usualy “A Pastor Reflects” piece lifts up a reflection by a clergy person in the Florida Conference. For this issue we are “heading north” to share a story about Rev. Micah Bucey, son of Pastor Rev. Dave Bucey (Fort Myers Congregational UCC). Rev. Micah is a UCC clergyperson and minister at Judson Memorial Church/New York City. As his father says, Micah is “an avid, trained writer with a degree in Playwriting from Fordham University as well as an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary (NYC) [who] calls his brand of ministry a blend of the arts with the sacred.”

Rev. Dave goes on to share:

“Late in March, 2020, he posted a prayer on social media, calling it a “Tiny Prayer”. The next day he posted another. Since folks were longing for stability and hope during the early days of the pandemic, his social media friends clamored for more. Every day for 366 days he posted a Tiny Prayer speaking to the fears and hopes of his constituents and friends alike. By Christmas 2020, he contracted COVID-19 himself. He kept up the prayers for one full year even though he was diagnosed in March 2021 with Long Haul COVID. His symptoms (shortness of breath, tinnitus, brain fog, etc.) continue to this day. Recently he started posting “Tiny Prayers” again.

With the release of the book, The Book of Tiny Prayer, he has allowed the world to see inside his heart and have a peek at his unique take on prayer. FMCUCC would love to have the invitation to his December 5 event be expanded to the entire Florida Conference.”

We note a P.S. from Pastor Dave: “But just so you don’t think it’s just Micah and me, my daughter, Jordan Harris Bucey Rebholz, is on the pastoral staff of Asylum Hill UCC in Hartford, CT. In her role as Minister of Early Life (birth to age 40) she is afforded many opportunities to share her ministerial skills to this urban church of 1,500 members.”

The UCC gene is in the Bucey blood — an “all in the family” blessing for us. God is Still Speaking.

The Book of Tiny Prayer

When New York City went into lockdown in March 2020, spiritual leader Micah Bucey found the world and himself in desperate need of prayer. While social distancing created disconnect, Bucey began a daily practice of writing a “Tiny Prayer” each morning and posting it on social media, each offering a reflection on what was going on in his own heart and in the wider world. Soon, a solitary practice became a communal one, with others engaging and sharing the prayers that touched them most, suggesting issues and topics for future prayers, and creating connection across a digital divide.

Over the course of a year filled with fear and faith, protest and possibility, Bucey composed prayers for frontline workers and activists, those lost to illness and wins for democracy, for civic leaders, celebrities, and everyday emotions. While overwhelm threatened to engulf us all, these short meditations invited a combination of attention and intention in bite-sized form that aided the reader in focusing on one issue at a time, from the rise of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, to police violence, social justice uprisings, immigrant detentions, catastrophic climate events, mass shootings, and violent right-wing insurrections.

Now, all 366 “Tiny Prayers” are collected, together forming a chronicle of a specific moment in time and modeling a form for everyone to compose their own tiny prayers to engage the everyday around them. The Book of Tiny Prayer recalls a very particular year, but its spirit is universal, inviting all to quiet themselves, name the pain and the joy around them, and recommit to the change required for collective liberation, during the worst times and far beyond.

On Zoom on December 5 at 7pm moderators Brooks Applegate and Rev. Dave Bucey will read together, grieve and remember together, process together and discuss the community-building potential of expansive co-creative, just-minded prayer together. To join the event: click here, Meeting ID, 817 2830 2797; Passcode, 407682

The Book of Tiny Prayer is available at Amazon or at Fordhampress.com (use the code TINYPRAYER30 for a 30% discount at Fordham press).

From the November 18 weekly e-blast of Fort Myers Congregational UCC
The 3 Great Loves initiative is no longer an active focus of the national church, but Celebrate Florida will continue to raise up what our local congregations are doing on behalf of creation, children and neighbors. The Conference thanks its 3 Great Loves Ambassadors – Lynn Jones (First Congregational UCC/Sarasota) and Rev. Dr. Sheila Guillaume (Union Congregational UCC/West Palm Beach) – for their stewardship over the past couple years. Keep your 3 Great Loves stories coming to us at rickcarson1@gmail.com.

“Eat Local, Grow Hope Global” began at the United Church of Gainesville on October 1 in which the church partnered with 16 local farmers to increase awareness of the importance of farmers and vendors to our quality of life while focusing on hunger in underdeveloped countries. Church members were encouraged to look for “partners” who display “Eat Local, Grow Hope Global” signs while shopping. The church also has been involved with the Community Weatherization Coalition since 2008 in which volunteers are trained as energy auditors to assist residents in saving money on their utility bills. The church hosted a volunteer training program in November.

The Spirit Keepers men’s group at First Congregational Church/Winter Park gathered on a late Saturday morning in October to transform a few “Little Free Library” boxes into works of art. Sally McArthur is spearheading the outreach project to get books in the hands of children who do not have access to them. Once the little libraries are painted and finished, Sally will find them new “homes” and arrangements will be made to set them up.

The Green Team at First Congregational UCC/Sarasota continues to cultivate a relationship with natural Sarasota. Recently it provided to interested members directions and helpful information about various local preserves that could be explored on their own. On November 4 there was a Zoom meeting when participants could discuss what they noticed and what was learned about God and ourselves.

The Benevolence Committee at Faith UCC/Dunedin presented a $500 donation in September to the Chi Chi Rodriguez Youth Foundation, which mentors kids with their studies – and golfing.

First Congregational UCC/Orange City recently collected supplies for students at Manatee Cove Elementary School. The receptionist at the school is pictured with one of the two boxes of donations church members filled. In addition to assisting youngsters in elementary school, the church was able to provide funds for ten needy students at DeLand High School to pay for uniform items required for their physical education classes.

The team of walkers from Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton who participated in the Million Mile Walk in September to benefit childhood cancer, walked over 1,100 miles and raised over $850. The funds were designated to finding a cure for Wilm’s tumor that took the life of church friend Randall.

Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach is becoming involved in an outreach program called Tutoring Angels, which is seeking church members who love children, value education and want to make a difference by serving as after-school tutors for children in grades K through 8. The program is in conjunction with Missionary Baptist Church, the host location in south St. Petersburg, on most weekdays between 3:30-6:30pm. Volunteers are part of an academic process that enriches the lives of children whose reading and academic successes are at risk. The partners in this ministry are the Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation (SPPF) and the M.A.S.T.R. Kids Program, an evidenced-based and outcome-driven math-art-science technology-reading program.

Members at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami are creating children’s comfort boxes for Start...
Off Smart. SOS is a 501c3 organization that was initiated by the Homestead Police Department in order to integrate law enforcement with social services, assisting victims of violence in the community. The church is providing the shoe boxes in which participants can build their own or use supplies that are provided for $10.

On Saturday, October 30, the United Church in Tallahassee was the location for a COVID-19 vaccine clinic that was open to the community. Free COVID testing was also available. The services were provided by the Bethel Mobile Medical Unit and clinicians from the Leon County Health Department.

On a November morning at Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg during worship, someone drove up to the church in a van and proceeded to ask if the church would accept a donation of six boxes of shoes for charity, Operation Attack. Unfortunately, Operation Attack isn’t accepting clothes and shoes because of COVID. But this wasn’t six pairs of shoes in six boxes – it was over a dozen large boxes filled with many pairs of shoes piled by the door of Fellowship Hall and then more boxes deposited by the church office. Apparently the person bringing the shoes was part of the closing of a store and wanted to make sure that all of the shoes were donated to charity. After some informal discussion among church members, it was decided that the shoes should be taken to Goodwill because they would have the capacity to deal with over 25 boxes overflowing with shoes of every kind.

As part of Coconut Grove Rebuilding Day, a team of volunteers from Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami lent support on Sunday, October 16, in making external repairs to the home of a Coconut Grove neighbor.

The Gulfgate neighborhood in Sarasota is holding a community fair on the grounds of St. Andrew UCC/Sarasota on Saturday, December 4, from 11am-3pm. The church is using this opportunity to have a booth to bring awareness to neighbors and fair-goers of the congregation’s ways of worship and service to the community and beyond. They will be handing out church brochures and pencils along with their famous beaded and rubber band bracelets.

Beatitude Healthcare started seeing patients at the UCC/New Smyrna Beach in May of 2021 every Monday from 3-5 pm. The initial services included health screenings for diabetes, high-blood pressure, primary care oversight for chronic diseases, mental health screenings and treatment and diagnosis and treatment of acute care illnesses. The initial medical kit and supplies were funded by UCCNSB and Colors of Hunger. Grants for financial assistance were sent out in May and June but so far all have been declined. Staff is one nurse practitioner who volunteers services at no cost. Additional help in setting up tables, chairs and signage is provided by Colors of Hunger staff. Prescriptions have been generously covered by Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church at Little Drug as well as utilization of free prescriptions for a select few medications at Publix pharmacy.

Care has been expanded due to the generous donations of individuals and area churches as well as Bridging the Gap. As of October 2021, Beatitude Healthcare has seen a total of 130 patients, and has a roster of 48 active patients who return for follow up care and participate in their health and wellness by complying with medications and lifestyle changes. In that period 77 prescriptions were dispensed, 87 patients with chronic or mental illnesses were treated and 28 urgent care cases were treated.

Lakewood UCC/St. Petersburg collected electronics (like computers, cell phones, radios and TVs) during October that were delivered to a local electronics recycling company where they were dismantled for their reusable components, parts and substances. Spring Hill UCC collects used computer printer cartridges for recycling.

Our Sincere Thanks...

... to unsplash www.unsplash.com and its talented artists and photographers for the many generic photos and images used in this issue. We appreciate the generosity of this free service.
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 Interim Pastor at Chapel on The Hill UCC/Seminole) Murder on the Disoriented Express: How the Actions of the Laity May Be Killing Their Congregation

Faith is a Verb: Live it to its Fullest Rev. Dr. Jerry Jones (member, Spring Hill UCC)

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.
In August the Middle School and High School Missions Team at Church on the Hill Congregational UCC/Boca Raton researched Church World Service and learned about their school kits given to impoverished schools and refugee camps. The students started making custom school bags during a Sunday School class and two weeks later placed school tools generously donated by the congregation into their home-made bags sewn by Julia Guilfu. They were able to donate 22 bags filled with school tools donated by church members. They also researched the local program Back to Basics and learned about their yearly uniform drive. On September 19 they hosted a car wash during the church service, raising over $200 which will go toward providing new school uniforms to over 21,000 disadvantaged children locally.

On Saturday, November 6, junior and senior high school youth from Miami-area churches gathered at Christ Congregational UCC/Miami for an outdoor and indoor service project as part of Youth Service Day. Florida Conference staff and Rev. Aaron Lauer ( Coral Gables Congregational UCC) participated along with CCC Pastor Rev. Cindy Thomas. Some time was set aside to enjoy a trip at Matheson Hammock Park.

The WAVE senior high group’s fall retreat at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach saw 15 youth and four adults head off for a weekend that focused on trust. Part of their time together included almost four hours stopping at roadsides, parkways and parking lots picking up trash — learning that people are NOT good at cleaning up after themselves. They picked up some pretty disgusting things so lots of gloves, wipes and hand sanitizer were used. In the end they filled over 60 bags with trash and one brave group even pulled a shopping cart out of a pond. They made a friendly competition out of who could fill the most trash bags and also find the most unusual item.

Thirty young people at Coral Gables Congregational UCC signed up for the church’s Our Whole Lives sexuality course. Guests from the community will be discussing gender identity with the class, working to foster informed, responsible and values-based decisions about sexual health and behavior.
The Middle School Together and Youth United groups at the United Church of Gainesville gathered for fellowship on Saturday evening, November 17.

November 11 was St. Martin’s Day in Germany, and the German congregation at Coral Gables Congregational UCC celebrated with a special children’s service at 5:30pm in the Sanctuary, followed by a procession of the lanterns parade and the eating of traditional Breadman pastries.

The Sunday School children and youth are supporting the Lotus House Homeless Shelter in Overtown, and every month they collect a different item that the women, children or LGBT youth need. In October it was lotions (pictured) and in November was full-size toothpaste and toothbrushes.

Parents were asked to collect new and gently used (non-scary) Halloween costumes for the children of Branches, an organization with a mission to help families break the cycle of generational poverty.

Recently after a “Time with the Children” at Fort Myers Congregational UCC, the kids collected strips of paper and left for Sunday School. From the strips the kids made a giant paper chain which stretched the entire width of the Chancel. The chain became the backdrop for a Service of Holy Communion. On World Communion Sunday, October 3, the children helped the congregation get a look at what hands joined around the world might look like. Upon entering the Sanctuary, worshippers were urged to take a slip of paper from a basket. On the strips worshippers were asked to write their own name and the names of friends and family for whom they intended to pray. The multi-colored display of hands reminded worshippers of the many people around the world sharing in the Communion Service on that day.

Looking to provide parents with some extra time for Christmas shopping or just chilling out, JupiterFIRST Church has scheduled a Parents’ Night Out on Friday, December 10, from 6-10pm. Kids preschool-5th grade will enjoy a fun night of movies and games along with a pizza dinner and snacks. Suggested donations of $10 per hour/per family will go to the church’s student ministries.

The Executive Committee of Naples UCC has voted unanimously to close the Precious Cargo Academy effective October 22. The decision was made due to difficulties finding and retaining staff and leadership and the aging physical facilities that made remaining open neither practical nor financial sense.

InSPIRITed Together at Plymouth Congregational Church/ Miami held a kid-centered evening of story, music and dancing on the Village Green on Friday evening, November 19. Families brought picnic dinners to enjoy along with the company of friends.
The youth groups at the United Church of Gainesville hosted a Halloween Carnival for the children after the Time with Children on Halloween Sunday. The kids were encouraged to wear costumes to better enjoy fun and interactive game stations.

Coral Gables Congregational UCC invited members to donate new and gently used costumes (non-scary ones!) for children and youth involved with Branches, an organization with a mission to help families break the cycle of generational poverty.

Trunk or Treat returned to Spring Hill UCC, held on Saturday evening, October 30, in the church parking lot. Church members donated lots of candy to make sure there would be enough, which was a good idea because an estimated 500 people showed up on the campus.

Demonstrating how they are part of the larger community, Pilgrim UCC/Port Charlotte – while offering a safer alternative to traditional trick-or-treating — the church held a Trunk or Treat community-wide outreach event. It took place on Sunday afternoon, October 31.
At the Trick or Treat drive-through at Hope UCC/Rockledge on Friday, October 29, 89 bags of candy were distributed.

Deltona UCC had a pumpkin patch that opened for sales on October 2. On Saturday, October 23, they held a Fall Festival that ran from 11am-4p. The event included a silent auction with gift baskets, a Christian Corner, kids’ activities, vendors and food trucks.

The pumpkin carving event at Pass-a-Grille Beach Community UCC/St. Pete Beach on Sunday, October 24, was an intergenerational fun and fellowship outdoor happening on the Pavilion enjoyed by 18 participants.

Trunk or Treat at First Congregational Church/Winter Park took place on Friday evening, October 29, with a contest for Best Trunk.

On Halloween afternoon the 6th-12th graders at Plymouth Congregational Church/Miami gathered in Edison Chapel for a spooky good time, enjoying treats and playing games to a creepy soundtrack. Costumes were optional.