



First Congregational UCC

May God's peace and presence surround you in these days. One truth the past year has taught me time and time again is that we are a people who prayerfully and lovingly seek to embrace each other in our diversity. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic of COVID 19, our church leadership has heard the diversity of our church:

- ~ Some of you reading this letter have grown to love online worship. You can participate in the service and worship when your heart guides you, others find it easier to hear and control the volume. Plus, you can skip the sermon! *(That was a joke.)*
- ~ Some of you reading this letter have grown to love the outdoor 9 a.m. worship. The beauty of creation and time of day works for you. We have heard a desire to continue this as an option.
- ~ Some hunger to return to the sanctuary to experience the 10:55 a.m. livestream service in person.
- ~ Some of you find a bit of yourself in each of the above statements or need to continue on-line due to health concerns.

We love the thoughtfulness of each perspective and want you to feel our love as you sort through the next step for yourself. The Leadership has decided that beginning on Palm Sunday, March 28th, and continuing into April, we will offer three options for worship:

Option 1: Outdoor worship at 9 a.m. at the labyrinth – with lawn chairs, masks, and social distancing.

Option 2: Online livestream at 10:55 a.m. available on Facebook, YouTube, and our Website.

Option 3: In-person attendance in the sanctuary at 10:55 a.m. for up to 100 people (25% capacity) with masks, social distancing, and no singing.

We appreciate that in our diverse church there are different responses to the options. The decision to open our sanctuary for Palm Sunday worship at 25 percent capacity was done prayerfully and aware of risks. We want to meet our diverse church in meaningful ways. We will continue to watch positivity rate and listen to the CDC for best practices. If you are feeling ill or have a temperature, please do not attend either in-person options, but worship fully on-line with us. We encourage you, if possible, to be very aware of others' personal space needs and allow extra room for each person. Please use care if you have not received a vaccine yet. We will be cleaning the sanctuary prior to March 28th and moving forward each Sunday. We will be removing hymnals, pew pads, and papers from the pews. There will be hand sanitizer stations. You will be seated by an usher. There will be offering plates at



Maundy Thursday ~ April 1
Join us for a Zoom Service at 7 p.m. as we center our hearts and open our lives to the Last Supper. This is a chance to open your heart to the part of Jesus' story and YOUR story where the shadows of life loom large. For the Zoom link, please email Pastor Wes.



Good Friday ~ April 2
Two services, at noon in the Garden of the Cross and 7 p.m. on Zoom, as we open our hearts to our God who suffers and struggles. We will open our lives to the parts of our story where there is brokenness and pain.

All are welcome to participate in these services.

the back of the sanctuary or you can always give on-line. At this time, there will not be fellowship time following either in-person worship service and ask you to not congregate to talk inside the sanctuary. **The Zoom Coffee Hour at noon will continue in April.**

We are researching improving air flow in our air conditioning units to filter out viruses. However, we do not anticipate this will be done before Palm Sunday. We will keep you up-to-date as we know air quality is important.

If you decide you would like attend in-person, in the sanctuary worship service, reservations are REQUIRED. Reservations begin on the Monday prior to the Sunday service through Thursday at noon. For example, for Sunday, March 28 you may register on **Monday, March 22 until Thursday, March 25 at noon** by emailing Pastor Wes or calling the church office. We will confirm that we have received your reservation by email or phone call. We will also create a waiting list, if necessary.

We will follow this same reservation schedule every week moving forward until further notice. **Reservations are on a first-come, first-serve basis.** Reservations can only be made for the upcoming Sunday services and cannot be made in advance for any of the following Sunday services. **Please do not try to register for in-person Easter worship at 10:55 a.m. in the sanctuary until Monday, March 29th.**

Please remember that the 9 a.m. outdoor service does **NOT** need registration; please do not call or email for that service. You are always welcome to show up with your lawn chair any Sunday for this service. Please remember that, in the event of inclement weather, this service is canceled.

Masks are mandatory for everyone ages 5 and above for admittance into the buildings and must be worn at all times.

Please arrive no more than 15 minutes prior to the start of the service. Please no handshakes or hugs! We encourage you to bow to each other to acknowledge your love.

Social distancing will be practiced so please follow the instructions of the ushers on where to sit. Ushers will also dismiss people after the postlude so as to direct traffic flow. We encourage you to exit the sanctuary and not congregate inside the building.

The Church Leadership continues to offer our love to every single person. If you would like to talk, please contact Pastor Wes or Carol Fields, moderator. Whatever choice you make, we pray you will find Holy Week this year will offer you a meaningful experience.

With great love to you all ~ ~ Wes



Worship Options:



- **Outdoor worship ~ 9 a.m.**
- **On-line worship ~ 10:55 a.m.**—Livestream on Facebook, YouTube and our website
- **Starting Palm Sunday, March 28th, In-person (in the sanctuary) ~ 10:55 a.m. Livestream.**
- **Zoom Coffee Hour at noon** will continue in April.

Worship in April



April 4th ~ Easter Sunday: We celebrate God's emphatic "Yes" to life. Please see the above for the options to celebrate Easter this year. Focus scripture is Luke 24:1-12.

April 11th ~ Walk to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35. We continue the season of Easter with this wonderful story and we will **celebrate communion together**, encountering the

risen Christ in our midst.

April 18 ~ Earth Day Sunday: We will celebrate God's creation around us as we lean in and listen to Luke 24:36-49.

April 25th ~ Our focus scripture is Acts 1:6-11. Acts is the sequel to Luke's gospel. Many scholars believe that the same community that wrote Luke, wrote Acts too. We will listen to this amazing story of Jesus' blessing before ascension.



PBS "The Black Church: This is Our Story. This is Our Song."

(Six-Week Event on Zoom in partnership with African-American Cultural Resource Center and Manasota branch of the American Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH))

Beginning on April 7, you are invited into a sacred conversation on the rich history of an institution at the heart of the African American Experience.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., will take us on a journey through time. We will learn more about key events, important people, political debates and the musical traditions that have shaped the Black Church. **We invite all to participate in this important experience. We will offer three opportunities each week – all on Zoom:**

Wednesdays at 3 p.m. ~ (April 7, 14, 21, 28, May 12 and 19)

Thursdays at 7 p.m. ~ (April 8, 15, 22, 29, May 13, and 20)

Sundays at 4 p.m. ~ (April 11, 25, 18, May 2 and 16)

Week 1- African Origins; Creation of the Black Church; Submission Theology versus Liberation Theology.

Week 2– Creation of Independent Black Church; Sexism; Abolition Movement; Slave Rebellions; Civil War; Emancipation; Spirituals; Growth of the Black Church.

Week 3– Education; Respectability Politics; Social, Economic and Political Activities; White Backlash; Black Women Empowerment; Black Theology; Ecstatic Worship.

Week 4 - The Great Migration; Social Gospel; Rise of Mega Churches; Urbane versus Informal Worship; Sexism; Whooping; Sacred versus Secular Music; Civil Rights Movement; Discipline of Nonviolence; Pan-Africanism.

Week 5 - Civil Rights Movement and Role of Black Women; Political Action; Black Muslims; White Backlash; Gospel versus Secular Music; Black Power Movement; Black Theology; Prosperity Gospel; Heterosexism.

Join the Zoom Conversation

- **Sunday Coffee Hour at Noon ~** You are **always welcome** to join in the conversation and connect with other members!
- **COLLAGE Tuesdays @ 11 a.m. ~** Collage is our LGBTQ and Ally Group. All are welcome to join our Collage group on Zoom for support and faithful discussions.
- **Tuesday Bible Study @ 6:30 p.m. ~** We meet on Zoom to discuss the Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.
- **Wednesday Bible Study @ 11 a.m. ~** We meet on Zoom to discuss the Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.
- **Wednesday @ 3 p.m. Thursday @ 7 p.m. Sunday @ 4 p.m.:** **Sacred Conversations on Race ~** PBS "The Black Church: This is Our Story. This is Our Song." *Hosted by Henry Louis Gates Jr.* Learn more about the importance of the church within the African-American community.
(Registration link available in midweek message.)
- **Thursday Service @ 1 p.m. ~ "Breathe" –** Centering our thoughts and opening our hearts to God's presence.

Week 6– Political Activism; Hip Hop; Heterosexism; Prosperity Gospel; Radical Theology; White Supremacists Violence; Police Brutality; Civic Activism.

For the link to register, please see your Midweek Message. Each week we will watch a 40-minute segment and have dialogue around what we are learning in this journey together.

You can view the whole two-part series on YouTube or stream for free on the PBS website. We encourage all people in the season of Easter to learn more about the historical importance of the church. We pray you will join us for the conversation. There is room for you and plenty of space for your friends to join us.

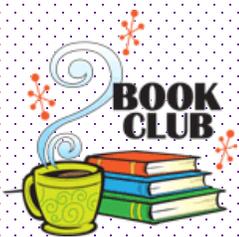


A heartfelt thank you to Bobbi Miller who will be going full-time as a social worker at Sarasota Rehab Center and has resigned her position as Office Manager. We are grateful for Bobbi's warm, welcoming presence that she shared over the last three years, her commitment to engaging social media, and the ways she shined her light with us. We wish Bobbi God's blessings in her future endeavors.

The last year has changed many ways the church functions and we continue to live into the unknown of what might be in the months to come. Because of the uncertainty, the church leadership will be taking time to assess what is needed in the

Office Manager position. **Please know there is a commitment to providing support to our pastors and leaders in this interim time with volunteers.** This is a good moment to step back, take a breath, and gain clarity of what we need as a church moving forward. If you have questions, please talk to Pastor Wes or Dick Miller, chair of the Staffing Team. We will keep you up-to-date as the process moves along.

NEW! BOOK CLUB MOVES TO IN PERSON & OUTDOORS



Tuesday Book Club @ 1 p.m., April 13 ~ *The Last Kings of Shanghai* by Jonathan Kaufman. We will be meeting in person outdoors at a location TBD. Our group is coed and would love to have new members. Contact Nancy McElroy (fnmcelroy@gmail.com) if you are interested or have any questions.

Peace and Justice Network News

Green Team News: *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle*

On March 21, we received word from the National UCC that our application to be a Creation Justice Church was accepted. The hard work of **Rev. Dr. Sarah Melcher and Barbara Smith-Bacon** was commended as a model for how other churches could engage faithfully in this process. Thank you to everyone, especially to Sarah and Barbara for all their faithful work!



You may have heard of **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle**. The order of these is very intentional and important as applied to the items we use and consume. Given our highly consumptive lifestyles, it is imperative that we

understand where our items come from and how they are made, i.e., the upstream and downstream costs and implications of everything we use. In addition, it is important to know what happens after we no longer possess the item. Plastic residue has so permeated our environment that it is now being found in human tissues. In 2019, 54 million metric

tons of electronics were thrown away. Landfills are rapidly filling up; Sarasota County recently approved increasing the height of our landfill from 100 feet to 200 feet. It will be able to be seen from the furthest reaches of Myakka State Park's wilderness area.

Reducing the amount of what we use should be a top priority for each of us. There are myriad ways to reduce our consumption of water, food, gasoline, pesticides, clothes, and more. Some ways do create hardships, and some can be a delightful challenge ourselves. Once we have reduced our consumption in every way possible, we should find ways to **reuse** each item as long as it can be repaired. Modern production systems create short term obsolescence; repairing items is not an option or very expensive compared to buying a replacement. When purchasing an item, consider how you will dispose of it. When done with an item in good condition, donate it.



Only after we have diligently reduced and reused everything possible should **recycling** be considered. Currently, too many people start by "recycling." Nearly forty years ago in Florida there was an effort to require a deposit on all single serving beverage containers. It did not pass, but recycling was required. Consumer source recycling was determined to be the least expensive and most effective way to recycle. However, consumers didn't want to be bothered, so our Sarasota government entities worked toward - and have now achieved - a single container recycling program, with effective sorting and bundling technology for specified recyclables. Is it effective? The program director admits that their responsibility ends when the transport system crosses the county line, so they have no idea.

How can your faith journey include a simpler lifestyle by Reducing, Reusing and then, as a last resort, Recycling?



At the March Church Council Meeting **Pauline Geary**, co-chair of COLLAGE (Coalition Of Laity for Lesbian And Gay Equality) brought the following Covenant Statement. We celebrate this covenant, along with our Creation Justice and Racial Justice Covenants, as words that can guide and ground our ministry in the coming years.

**OPEN and AFFIRMING COVENANT STATEMENT
First Congregational United Church of Christ (FCUCC)
Sarasota, Florida
March, 2021**

We of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Sarasota, Florida, by vote of our Church Council and ratification by our congregation became an Open and Affirming Congregation in 2001, as documented in our church bylaws. We now re-commit to God and one another our covenant with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning sisters and brothers.

As we celebrate the diversity of the people of God, we commit to remain an Open and Affirming congregation that welcomes all our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters with love and support. We will be a place in which they can be fully themselves, where their full selves are embraced and where their God-given talents are utilized in the life and work of the Church.

We honor the vision of those in our congregation who, more than 20 years ago, founded COLLAGE (Coalition of Laity for Lesbian and Gay Equality) to provide support for LGBTQ+ persons in the congregation and community. In league with COLLAGE, we will continue to reach out to and welcome LGBTQ+ persons into our church family. We will serve as a refuge from hurtful words and harmful actions and work toward eliminating social injustices too often directed against them.

This covenant statement is hereby adopted this 16th day of March, 2021, by unanimous vote of our Church Council.



Community Meals: We continue to provide a monthly community meal at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Our meal is cooked by Sandy Smith with home-baked cookies from the many bakers in our church added as a sweet treat. We need your **home-baked cookies**, and if, you are able, we could use **help in preparing our take-out meal**. Please join us on **April 27 from 4-6 p.m.** Volunteer and/or inquire for more details—Carol Hagglund at carolhagglund@gmail.com.



**PROJECT 180 PREPARES FOR STRONG VOICES
STRONG SUBJECTS LECTURE SERIES' EIGHTH SEASON**
Tickets now available for Project 180's Annual Lecture Series

In partnership with The Boxser Diversity Initiative, Project 180 presents its eighth season of the nation's only annual lecture series dedicated to prisoner reentry topics. The 2021 season addresses ***The Intersection of Trauma, Addiction, and Incarceration: Implications for Mental Health and Well-Being.***

The Strong Voices Lecture Series provides meaningful public education about prisoner reentry issues and features nationally recognized scholars, industry experts, community leaders, and those impacted by incarceration and reentry. Strong Voices is an integral part of Project 180's Mission to reintegrate formerly incarcerated citizens into community life and serves as one of the organization's major fundraisers to provide stable housing, educational programs, and resources to currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. Project 180 will host the three-part lecture series on ZOOM with opportunities for guests to engage with Project 180 residents in breakout rooms. All lectures begin at 11:30 a.m. and end at 1:00 p.m.

Event Topic: The Intersection of Trauma, Addiction, and Incarceration

When: Friday, April 2, 2020

Featuring: *John Annis, Senior Vice-President for Collaboration and Impact at the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, moderates a panel with local experts P.J. Brooks, Tom Knight, and Kristie Skoglund.*

Event Topic: In His Own Words

When: Friday, May 7, 2021

Featuring: *Jody Feinroth, formerly incarcerated citizen, shares the ways in which trauma, addiction, and incarceration have affected his life journey.*



Tickets may be secured on the Project 180 website at
www.project180reentry.org/lecture-series/

About Project 180: With office space on our church campus, Project 180 seeks to reduce recidivism by providing workforce education and financial literacy classes for inmates; an annual reentry lecture series for the public; information and referrals for formerly incarcerated individuals seeking housing, programs, and employment; and a comprehensive, whole-life residential program for men in recovery.



April Birthdays

4/1	<i>Tom Fields Beverly Laier</i>	4/17	<i>Laurie Etter Florence Jackson Barney Kavanagh Carol McCloud</i>
4/3	<i>Bruce Knight Marilyn Shipman</i>	4/20	<i>Betty Farrar</i>
4/5	<i>Bethany Harmon</i>	4/21	<i>Phillip Swain</i>
4/6	<i>Ruth Olson</i>	4/23	<i>Jim Marsey</i>
4/7	<i>Ashley Burroughs Harold Ralph</i>	4/24	<i>Gordon Quimby</i>
4/10	<i>Robin Reich Mary Jane Sparrow</i>	4/25	<i>Carol Hagglund Owen Kuhn</i>
4/12	<i>James Hunder Sara Little Diane Miller Fernando Traba</i>	4/26	<i>Scott Carrington</i>
4/13	<i>Michelle Maulucci Rich Rescigno</i>	4/27	<i>Nancy Arnzen Cynthia Woodling</i>
4/14	<i>Sally Hohenthal</i>	4/28	<i>Teri Grob</i>
		4/29	<i>Mary Jane Hamilton</i>
		4/30	<i>Dorothy Dumford</i>



April Anniversaries

4/4	<i>Joseph & Barbara Yocum</i>
4/9	<i>Harold & Barbara Ralph</i>
4/12	<i>Ed Dupree and June Wolgemuth</i>
4/15	<i>Eric & Laura VanArsdall</i>
4/18	<i>William & Judith Hansen</i>
4/22	<i>Rich & Carol Rescigno</i>
4/29	<i>William & Judith Plerhoples</i>
4/30	<i>Felix & Nancy McElroy III</i>



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC CHURCH
 1031 Euclid Ave
 Sarasota, FL 34237
www.uccsarasota.com



Altar Flowers

The 2021 Flower Chart is NOW ready for YOU!

Do you have a special occasion coming up this year? Would you like to celebrate on an upcoming Sunday service?

Each Sunday, there is an opportunity for two bouquets.

The cost is \$40 per bouquet, payable to the church. Please sign up for a by emailing admin@uccsarasota.com We are grateful for the fresh flowers every Sunday that bring the beauty of God's creation into our worship space.

STAFF

- Senior Minister.....Rev Dr. Wes Bixby
- Minister of Music.....Gregory Chestnut
- Campus ManagerMark Swain
- Media Specialist.....Douglas Kingsley
- Bookkeeper Bill Lewis
- Collector..... Gordon Quimby

OFFICERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Moderator..... Carol Fields
- Vice Moderator Jim Butterworth
- Past Moderator Warren Bacon
- Co-treasurers... Robin Reich & Michael Johnston
- Pastor Emeritus..... Dr. John Syster
- Contributing Photographer Susan Moore
- On-line Newsletter ... Carol McCloud, Wes Curry

We are an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ in the Florida Conference of the UCC.

Telephone: (941) 953-7044; Fax: (941) 952-5245

Email: admin@uccsarasota.com; Website: www.uccsarasota.com

Seeking to share God's love through worship, connections, and community service for over 65 years.