



First Congregational UCC

On November 28th, we began the season of Advent. Part of the power of Advent is that we preach, proclaim that another world is possible and actively being plotted by God. We say that what is called "reality" is *not* all there is.



We desire and direct our lives toward a bigger, bolder, braver vision of what can be. Yet, we know there are voices that would call such bigger, bolder, braver visions, "foolishness" or "naive" or "silly". Some may scoff or sneer or jeer, but we know that God is not finished yet. We can choose to let cynicism and fear guide, ground us or we can be led by the lights of the Advent candles. We can decide that hope, peace, joy, and love are true and can be trusted.

It is not easy. It won't help you trend on Twitter. The way of faithfulness is about letting God's presence be part of our lives. When we, like Mary, let God interrupt and disrupt our lives, change happens within us and around us. While others stew in comparison and competition, we lean in toward compassion and care as more powerful than others.

We need a vision toward which we can go. Isaiah offers this to us during Advent. In Advent, we are going to lean in and listen to Isaiah cast what is possible with God. To be sure, Isaiah didn't live in a time when all was well. Violence, hatred, families torn apart by exile, dismay and discouragement were felt deeply. There is much of our present day that echoes what Isaiah faced.

Yet, Isaiah offers us another way to be. I find Isaiah's poetry powerful. Isaiah gives me a direction to set my soul and life. I encourage you to read the passages from Isaiah several times each week. How does Isaiah awaken your imagination, stir your soul? What does Isaiah have to say about hope, peace, joy, and love? How does these ancient words breathe new life into our lives in 2021 and 2022?

Office Hours

Pastor Wes:

Mon.-Thurs.: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Terri Chapman:

Mon. & Thurs.: 10:00 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Mark:

Mon. - Fri.: 7 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Greg:

Tues. - Fri.: various hours



- **Outdoor worship ~ 9 a.m.** in the Oasis Center. Please bring a lawn chair if you'd like to sit outside. **Masks are encouraged.**
- **On-line worship ~ 10:55 a.m.** Livestream on Facebook, YouTube and our website.
- **In-person, in-the-sanctuary with masks, social distancing. Our choir has returned and wearing masks to lead our singing/prayer/praise.**
- **Coffee Hour in Syster Hall. At this time, Zoom Coffee Hour is on hold.**



Please remember, there is an Advent Devotional, "A Less is More Christmas," that we would love to send you either electronically or in paper version.

We pray this Advent and Christmas is a blessing to you, your family, our church, and our world.

With great love ~~ Wes



Worship in December

Every Sunday we worship at 9 a.m. in the Oasis Center, at 10:55 a.m. in-person in the sanctuary, and at 10:55 a.m. online (Facebook, YouTube, Website)



December 5th – Second Sunday of Advent ~ Candle of Peace ~ Isaiah 2:1-5. We will celebrate Holy Communion together.



December 12th – Third Sunday of Advent ~ Candle of Joy ~ Youth helping lead our 11 a.m. worship. We will read Isaiah 9:2-7.



December 19th – Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ Candle of Love ~ Choir and Brass leading worship at 11 a.m. We will read Isaiah 11:1-10. ***See page 3 for details**



December 24 – Christmas Eve ~ **THREE services.**

- ~ **5 p.m.** outdoor service *(featuring special guest instrumentalists)*
- ~ **8 p.m.** in the sanctuary in-person and online. *(featuring choir and special guest instrumentalists)*
- ~ **11 p.m.** in the sanctuary in-person only! **Quiet service of communion.** ***See page 3 for details**



December 26 - ONE Worship Service at 11 a.m. in-person and online. We will open our hearts to the poem by Maya Angelou, *Amazing Peace.*

Join the Zoom Conversation



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. ~ **HYBRID** in the Oasis Center to discuss the Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.

Wednesday @ 3 p.m. ~ Sacred Conversations on Race (SCOR)

***Zoom links available through Pastor Wes.**

Special Music

On **Sunday, December 19, at 11:00**, our choir and brass quintet will present "American Christmas" composed by Z. Randall Stroope. This choral medley of beloved carols and traditional songs includes the American revivalist song "Zion's Walls" adapted to the text "O Come All Ye Faithful", "Simple Gifts", "I Wonder As I Wander", and Alfred Burt's "Star Carol." This special Sunday will include favorite Christmas hymns accompanied by the brass and organ.



Christmas Eve at 5:00 p.m. we will celebrate on the lawn with special guest musicians **Betsy Hudson-Traba**, flute, and **Fernando Traba**, bassoon. Greg will lead us in singing the familiar carols of Christmas.

Christmas Eve at 8:00 p.m. we will worship in the sanctuary and **online** with special music beginning at 7:45 by **Meghan Jones**, violin and **Natalie Helm**, cello. Our choir will lead us in this beautiful candle light service with anthems and carols.

Christmas Eve at 11 p.m. an intimate, quiet service centering around **communion**. On the cusp of Christmas morning, we gather with reverent hush around the manger. The service will be reflective and offer moments of stillness to be in God's presence. Since this service was recently added, musician contracts signed, **special music will be YOU singing the beloved carols.**

Stewardship "Intention of Giving 2022" Update



THANK YOU to everyone who has already turned in your Intention of Giving card for 2022. We appreciate YOUR generosity so we can continue to provide meaningful ministry and God's love through mission. We encourage you, if you have not yet done so, to please turn in your Intention of Giving. You can mail your card to the church or drop it into the offering on Sunday.

We are blessed in so many ways. With grateful hearts ~ *Your Stewardship Team*

Visit Our Newly Revised Website ~ New Look/New Year

We offer our heartfelt thanks to **Sarah Dousa**, who over the last nine months built this beautiful new site that reflects the Spirit-filled life of our church. On the front page you will see links to our commitments to Creation Justice, Open and Affirming, and Racial Justice. There is a page devoted to our Oasis Ministry and one celebrating our Music Ministry. There are videos and much, much more. We appreciate the help of **Peter Burroughs** in offering his expertise along the way. We encourage you to please visit the site ~ www.uccsarasota.com



TWO WAYS TO FIND THE SUNDAY MORNING 11 a.m. BULLETIN on our Website:

1. "Worship" page by Sunday morning ~ underneath **SERVICES** information;
2. Link in the footer at the bottom of the website

Please take a few moments in the coming weeks to familiarize yourself with the new site.

We offer Sarah a round of applause and our thanksgiving for all her hard work!

Save The Date – Dr. Kathy Bullock, Artist in Residence, January 14 - 16, 2022



Dr. Kathy Bullock is an educator, scholar, speaker, singer, pianist, choral arranger, and conductor who specializes in African American music and culture, including gospel, spirituals and classical works by composers from the African diaspora. A Professor Emerita of Music from Berea College in Kentucky, she is currently on the music faculty of Bennington College in Vermont.

On Friday, **January 14 at 7:30 p.m.**, we will enjoy an evening performance with Dr. Bullock as she shares musical connections between African American culture and West African and Appalachian cultures. Through story, and performing songs of faith and hope, Dr. Bullock engages her audience with infectious joy and spirit through a variety of music. **This concert is free and open to the public.**

On Saturday, Dr. Bullock will work with our choir in a master class on the performance of African American music.

We will be blessed to **feature Dr. Bullock at the 11:00 Service on Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, January 16th.** Mark your calendars now for this special weekend.



Poinsettias - \$10 each

Place your order and dedication requests
with the office or Pastor Wes by
December 10.

CREATION JUSTICE NEWS

Holiday Season "Green Tips," from the Green Team

Americans throw away 25 percent more trash than usual between Thanksgiving and New Year's — about a million extra tons of garbage each week, according to the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group devoted to helping people to be more environmentally responsible.



Listed below are ways to celebrate the spirit of the holidays, while giving a gift to the earth:

- Use reusable gift wrap and gift bags, and recycle wrapping paper and ribbon. Repurpose unused maps, comics for kids or, for larger gifts, printed pillowcases – things you already have at home.
- Save and reuse gift wrap and ribbon, and try using fresh greenery instead of store-bought bows. Why? Americans discard an estimated 38,000 miles of ribbon annually.
- Save on gift tags by writing the names of recipients directly on the gift, or color-coding gifts by recipient.

- Tell your friends and family that you're opting out of single-use wrapping paper and gift tags this year.
- Offer more eco-friendly host/hostess gifts, e.g., reusable drawstring pouches as wine bags, or for other presents, and carrying homemade baked goods in mason jars or decorative, reusable boxes.
- Keep a list of what you used and what you saved, and share it with your Green Team!

This article was drawn from an NBC News article, which can be found here in its unedited version:
<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/want-give-present-earth-cut-down-holiday-waste-ncna1082356>

PEACE AND JUSTICE NETWORK NEWS

Peace and Justice Mission Group Message

Decades ago, my mother traveled to Alaska. They visited a small village on the Bering Sea, and went into its little church.

Behind the altar was a lovely Nativity scene. The Holy Family are in an igloo, Joseph and Mary kneeling reverently by the child, who is wrapped in furs. In the distance, great hunters are speeding across the snow toward them on dogsleds laden with gifts of walrus, seal and ivory. Above them all, a great star blazes through the Northern Lights.



All the people in the scene are indigenous Inuit.

She walked around for weeks asking: "What did Jesus look like?" She had never seen him depicted as anything other than blond, blue-eyed, and white. It was difficult for her to imagine him looking otherwise.

The great cathedrals of Peru have paintings of Jesus and the disciples as indigenous Quechua. Some African churches depict him as African.

If we are made in God's image, perhaps each of us can see ourselves mirrored in our image of God.

What do you think he looked like? ~ *Lynne Woodman*

Advent Artful Prayer



All are invited to the Artful Prayer session on **Thursday, December 9, @ 2 p.m. via Zoom**. We will be using the "**A Less is More Christmas Devotional**" for inspiration.

You can obtain the devotional from the church office, but don't need it to participate in Artful Prayer. Just bring paper, crayons/colored pencils/markers.

Contact Pastor Wes or the church office if you want the zoom link. We hope you can join us!

Little Free Library Project – Service Opportunity



The Sacred Conversations on Race group has a service opportunity to offer the entire congregation!

It has been agreed to build and maintain a little free library on the church grounds as a way of providing books promoting diversity to the public. Books will be for all ages.

Progress:

- We have a builder!
- Donations are coming in!



Our Needs:

- More donations to purchase books
- Donations of gently-used books
- A creative bookplate design for our stickers in each book
- Volunteers to maintain the library (*tidy the display/add books*). This can be as little as one week a month/or less.

If you would be interested in helping with this project or donating funds to buy supplies and books, please contact Nancy McElroy.

First UCC Women

SAVE THE DATE! ~ Tuesday, December 7, 11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall

The Women's Association invites one and all to join us in filling and wrapping our **SENIOR CHRISTMAS BOXES**, which are distributed to shut-in seniors throughout Sarasota before the holiday.

As part of the December 7th event, a \$12 lunch will be served.

Micki Robinson, a retired minister and Lauren Pastos' mother, will present a Christmas story.

Signup after 9 o'clock service with JOY KUHN or after the 11 o'clock service with CONNIE TOOPS.





Christmas Love Offering ~ Mission Team

Christmas is coming and the season of giving to those who need it most is upon us. Every year the FCUCC Mission Team asks for your help in providing for our less fortunate neighbors in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. All of the organizations we donate to with our Christmas Love Offering are local or denominational. As always, we count on your generosity to make a difference.

This year we are supporting the following organizations who work hard throughout the year helping those who need it: **All Faiths Food Bank and All Faiths Backpack program; Baby Basics and Children First; Resurrection House and Second Chance Last Opportunity; ALSO Youth, Family Promise, The Betty J. Johnson North Sarasota Public Library, SURE and the UCC Christmas Fund.**

Members of the mission team will be speaking in church during Sundays in December about **All Faiths, Baby Basics and Children First, and Family Promise.** I know you are aware of the work that SURE has done in our communities since FCUCC is very involved with this and the SURE office is located in our building. FCUCC was one of the six founding members of Resurrection House which serves as a day resource center for the homeless of Sarasota County. Second Chance serves the Newtown community with youth programs and since the pandemic it has branched out to help the community with zoom seminars for parents as well as the distribution of food and baby supplies. The donation to the Betty J. Johnson Library will go to support The African American Cultural Resource Center at the library. The UCC Christmas Fund helps pastors and church personnel with emergency needs throughout the year.

Please celebrate with us the Good Works being done by these organizations. Last year we raised over \$16,000 and we would love to increase our giving this year. As you know, prices have gone up and that affects those with limited resources the most.

There will be envelopes for your Christmas Love giving in the Narthex every Sunday or you can just send in your donation by marking **Christmas Love on the memo line.**

The Mission Team thanks you for your contribution. Your support is a blessing to our community.

~ Jan Andersen, Mission Team Chair



Sacred Conversations on Race

We continue our Sacred Conversations on Race on Wednesdays at 3 p.m.

There is **ALWAYS** space and place for you to join in this conversation. We pray that in the coming months, you will participate.

If you have questions or need a Zoom link, let Pastor Wes know.



Kings And Queens Bridge

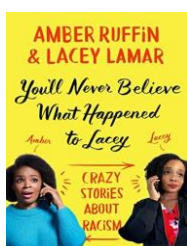
Kings and Queens Bridge resumes **Monday, December 13, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in Room 9 of the Education Building.** We welcome new players who are interested in playing contract bridge for fun.



Please contact Ethel Rudy at whether you are a new or returning player.

Ready Readers

Ready Readers is a book discussion group that meets on the second Thursday of every month at noon in the Oasis Center. Current lists of selections are available in the Syster Hall library as are several present and previously selected books.



We welcome and encourage the participation and input of new members even if you are not able to attend every meeting. For more information and further updates, contact Sandy Smith.

Please join us **Thursday, December 9, at noon in the Oasis Center.** We will be discussing "You'll Never Believe What Happened To Lacey" by Amber Ruffin & Lacey Lamar. New members are always welcomed.

Stitches of Love & Friendship



Many, many thanks to all of our wonderful knitters and contributors. A very large box of items ranging from infants to adults as well as a collection of notepads has been sent to our friends in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Those contributing were: *Pat Barkhuff, Judy Black, Marilyn Brandt, Florence Jackson, Chris Millar, Ruth Olsen, Linda Quarles and Ethel Rudy.* I apologize if I omitted anyone.

This is a very worthwhile project and the recipients are most appreciative ~ *Ethel Rudy.*



Community Meal – Stay Tuned



We continue our monthly ministry of serving and providing a hot, nutritious and balanced community meal at St. Paul Lutheran Church.

Because of the late date (December 28) we will announce our needs in the mid-week message as we get closer to the date.

Your offerings of food & fellowship are always appreciated ~ Carol Hagglund

December Birthdays



December Anniversaries



- | | | | | | |
|-------|--|-------|--|-------|--|
| 12/3 | Judith Hansen Mary Picott | 12/18 | Stephen Landers Patricia McClure | 12/2 | Stan Witteveen & Kit Leggett |
| 12/6 | Dotty Pickett | 12/19 | Douglas Fields | 12/15 | Myron & Brenda Robinson |
| 12/8 | Marsha Kindall-Smith Dorothy Markell Norma Smith | 12/20 | Bill Grubb Clara Menchinger | 12/21 | Edwin & Carl Brickner |
| 12/9 | Christy Bergsma Carol Seltzer | 12/25 | Carol Jean Miller | 12/22 | Bill & Pat Grubb |
| 12/10 | Isabel Traba | 12/26 | Michael Carone | 12/23 | Irving & Deborah Woods |
| 12/12 | Janet Kamm | 12/27 | Len Murray | 12/24 | Patrice & Rick McDaniel |
| 12/13 | Marilyn Lewis Kristi Weiland | 12/29 | Edward Carrington | 12/26 | Douglas & Carol Fields |
| 12/15 | Myron Robinson | 12/30 | Pamela Gore-Meade Felix McElroy III | 12/27 | Colonel George Francis & Rachel Taylor David & Susan Mitchell William & Susan Pallatto |
| | | 12/31 | Gary LaParl Patricia McCloskey | 12/28 | Jim & Teri Grob |
| | | | | 12/29 | Bud & Becky Rives III |
| | | | | 12/30 | Larry & Norma Smith |

In Loving Memory



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

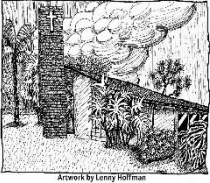
We invite and encourage you to engage this Advent devotional with someone else—family or friends or fellow church members OR ALL of the above.



This is a wonderful way to prepare our hearts for the mystery of the Christmas Season.

Available in paper and electronic form (through Pastor Wes).

Blessings to all in this journey ~ Your Worship Team



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



The 2022 Flower Chart is 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 Sunday 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
 Office AdministratorTerri Chapman
 Bookkeeper.....Pam Hendrickson
 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
 Online 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: office@uccsarasota.com; Website: www.uccsarasota.com

We are worshiping on-line via Livestreams each week at 10:55 a.m. and the service is posted to our website for streaming by 1 p.m. each Sunday afternoon.

