



First Congregational UCC

There are stories we tell ourselves every single day. These narratives can run on a loop, repeated and replayed every hour of each day in our souls. We may not always be aware of this narrative that grounds and guides us. But the story is always there. You can hear it when you say, "This always happens!" Or you mutter and mumble to yourself after you find you are standing in the slowest checkout lane, "Of course, just my luck." I believe the more we can be awake and aware of the story of our souls, the healthier we can be. I invite you to join me for the next installment of:

MAPPING YOUR LIFE: That's MY Story...and I am sticking with it.

We will meet on Thursdays in **January 2022 (6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th) from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.** The conversation is **HYBRID**, both in-person in the Oasis Center and on Zoom. ***Please RSVP with me*** for this opportunity to explore, name, and claim the stories in your life.

As we lean in and listen to the stories of our souls, we will particularly focus on the narratives you have about:

~ God
~ Others
~ Yourself

If that sounds familiar, it is because I will be basing this conversation and building on Jesus' wisdom to love with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love your neighbor (other) as yourself found in Luke 10:27. This is one of the most important verses in all of scripture and will help ground and guide our class this year.

I do pray you will begin 2022 with this opportunity to explore your relationship with the Holy, those we interact with, and with ourselves. I pray that 2022 offers you moments of healing, health, and God's holy love every day.

With great love ~~~ Wes

Office Hours

Pastor Wes:

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

Mark:

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

Greg:

Tues. - Sat.: various hours

Worship With Us



- **Outdoor worship ~ 9 a.m.** in the Oasis Center. Please bring a lawn chair if you'd like to sit outside. ***Masks are encouraged.***
- **Online 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.**

Worship in January

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)

January 2 ~ We begin a brand-new year letting the Gospel of John guide us every Sunday. On the first Sunday of 2022, we will listen to John 1:35-51. Sermon, "The New Car Smell of a New Year." We will also celebrate Holy Communion at both services.

January 9 ~ We will continue with the Gospel of John 2:1-11. We will celebrate Epiphany on this Sunday. Sermon, "Filled to Change." ***After church, Pastor Wes will share about his recent book and have copies available to purchase.***

January 16 ~ On this very special **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Weekend**, we welcome **Dr. Kathy Bullock** to lead our choir and worship service. Dr. Bullock will share parts of her story with us during worship at both services.

January 23 ~ We continue to work our way through John's gospel with 3:1-21. The sermon is, "A List of Questions".

January 30 ~ On this Annual Meeting Sunday we will listen to selected verses of John 4 and prayerfully dedicate our church to a be a well of living water in these days.

All are invited and welcome to join in worship in person or online each week.

Join the Zoom Conversation



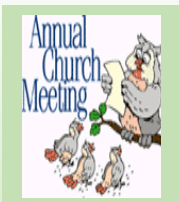
COLLAGE Tuesdays @ 11 a.m.
~ Collage is our LGBTQ and Ally Group. All are welcome to join our Collage group on Zoom for support and faithful discussions.

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.***



Annual Meeting ~ January 30th

The Annual Meeting for First Congregational UCC will be held on January 30th immediately following the worship service in the sanctuary. The Meeting will be live-cast on **YouTube and Facebook**. Please stay on-line after the postlude and we will begin the Annual Meeting as soon as possible.

If you are not able to attend in person, you can pick up a **paper ballot in the office**. This year at our Annual Meeting we will vote on:

- ✓**Racial Justice Covenant (draft on our website)**
- ✓**Nominating Report**
- ✓**2022 Budget**



Questions? Please see Moderator Carol Fields.

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.

Staff Transitions

2022 will bring TWO important staff transitions at our church. First, **Gordon Quimby** is stepping away as collector of the church. Gordon has faithfully served our church, answering your questions, counting the collection each week, and helping us be good stewards of our intention of giving. We say a heartfelt thank you to Gordon and wish him well. He will step away in mid-January but will stay connected to the church! We welcome **Sue Fields** into the position of collector. Sue is currently training with Gordon.

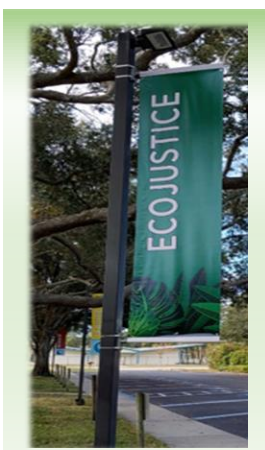
We are also saying goodbye to our administrative assistant **Terri Chapman**. Terri came to us in the middle of 2021 as a temporary position and has graciously stayed on to get us through Christmas. 2022 brings new opportunities for Terri at her position at Bee Ridge Presbyterian. We wish Terri God's blessings and our gratitude for her help over the last several months.

CREATION JUSTICE NEWS

Green Team Celebrates New Banner (Dedication January 23rd)

The Green Team is celebrating the recent hanging of the EcoJustice banner near the entrance to our sanctuary. With the support of the Peace and Justice Network, we wanted to visually symbolize our church's commitment to our Creation Justice Covenant (see <https://uccsarasota.com/vision-justice-for-all/#creation-justice>).

This covenant was ratified by a unanimous congregational vote at the Annual Meeting in January 2021. With the banner placed where all can see, visitors to our church will know immediately that First Congregational United Church of Christ seeks to promote the health and sustainability of the earth.



Recycling and Composting Seminar ~ February 17th 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. in Syster Hall

SAVE THE DATE & INVITE A FRIEND! The Green Team is hosting an informative Recycling and Composting Seminar. Featured speakers include *Wendy Crisp*, Outreach Coordinator, Sarasota County Solid Waste Program Manager; *Mary Sonia Oquendo*, Recycling Program Coordinator, Utilities Department, Manatee County; and *Tracie Troxler*, Executive Director and Founder of Sunshine Community Compost. We are excited to present this composting option, even if you live in an HOA! If you garden at all, you will love the magic black soil that composting produces.



During our outreach as part of the Creative Justice discernment process, the #1 questions asked were about recycling. It makes sense. We come from “somewhere else,” and what we learned before about recycling likely does not apply to the Sarasota or Manatee programs. Also, are you curious about the effectiveness of our local recycling and re-use programs?

Listen to these engaging speakers, and bring your recycling questions, e.g.:

- “What happens after the bin contents leave my home?”
- “How much is actually re-used or recycled, and why?”
- “How much gets thrown out, and why?”
- “Can I recycle this? (name your item) It says on it that its recyclable!”



Register now for further details. Other congregations have been invited, as well. With an eye on COVID-19, we plan to meet—masked—in person. **TO REGISTER:** Please email Barbara Smith-Bacon, bjsbacon@verizon.net, (cell: 617-835-9858) before February 1, 2022. Questions: Contact Sarah Melcher or Barbara Smith-Bacon.

Plant a Tree for Florida Arbor Day! ~ (January 21, 2022)



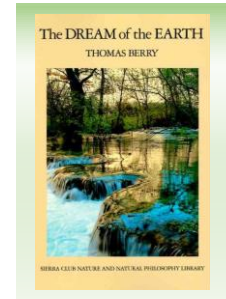
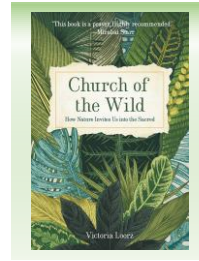
- Did you know that Florida has celebrated Arbor Day since 1886, and recognizes one of the earliest Arbor Day celebrations in the nation (the 3rd Friday in January)? Over 200 Florida communities celebrate Arbor Day, either as a stand-alone event or in conjunction with another occasion. Check with your local city officials and school department for local events. Plant a tree, if you are able!

- Or, read about trees! The first three suggestions below are spiritually-based options; and the last three are simply excellent reading:

- *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us Into the Sacred*, by Victoria Loorz

(cont'd.)

- *Reforesting Faith: What Trees Teach Us About the Nature of God and His Love for Us*, by Matthew Sleeth
- *The Dream of the Earth*, by Thomas Berry
- *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, by Suzanne Simard
- *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers (fiction)



- Finally, join us on **January 23rd**, when we celebrate Florida Arbor Day in church, and dedicate the new Ecojustice Banner outside of Syster Hall.

PEACE AND JUSTICE NETWORK NEWS

Racial Justice Mission Group Message

JESUS WAS A REFUGEE

After the birth of Jesus, the Holy Family fled violence and became refugees in Egypt. The story in Matthew 2 is not often read in churches because it disrupts our ideas of the nativity. **"When they (the Magi) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up', he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.' So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod."**

Matthew 2:13-15

Today, millions of people must still flee their homes and become refugees, forced to live for years in internment camps or to wander the world seeking to restart their lives. Almost all are people of color---brown, Black and Asian. They come from Africa (Congo, South Sudan, Somalia), from Asia (Myanmar, Bhutan), from the Middle East (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq), from the Caribbean (Haiti) and from Central and South America (Venezuela, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala).

They find themselves forcibly displaced for a variety of reasons---poverty, inequality, gang violence, economic collapse, religious persecution, drought and famine, political upheaval, war, forced conscription, government corruption and collapsed infrastructure. Though the reasons are specific in each situation, there is a single root cause, injustice in whatever form it takes---political, economic, environmental or religious.

Currently there are about 35 million refugees worldwide. Sadly, the U.S. hosts less than 12,000 of these this year. (The admission cap has now been revised upward to 62,500.) Wealthy European, Middle Eastern and Asian countries have been similarly inhospitable.

As Christians we are called to care about this human tragedy and do what we can personally and as citizens to alleviate this suffering. The Bible is very clear. Christians are to demonstrate hospitality and care for the stranger. (*cont'd.*)



"The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you. You should love the alien as yourself for you once were aliens in Egypt."
(Leviticus 19:34)

"Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was a ...stranger and you welcomed me...'" (Matthew 25: 34-36)

To love our neighbors as ourselves means to work for justice, for justice is love in action. ~ *Jim Butterworth*



From The Racial Justice Mission Group

Patterson Foundation Offers "Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas: A Walk to Respect"

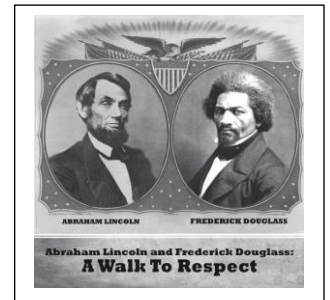
This taped one-act play by award-winning playwright, Beth Duda, with original material by celebrated spoken-word poet, Cedric Hameed illuminates the importance of human connections, active listening, and civil discourse.

Featuring (L-R) nationally known actor and historical impersonator, Michael Krebs as Abe Lincoln, award-winning actor, Joel PE King as Frederick Douglass, and Spoken-word Poet, Cedric Hameed.



In 2021 the Patterson Foundation hosted, via zoom, a wonderful dramatic presentation entitled "Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas: A Walk to Respect" that was then followed by opportunities for discussion. They are again offering community discussion groups. This event is a wonderful opportunity to learn about history and reflect on its significance.

The event is free and open to everyone! When you register for the event as directed below you will receive a link to view the play beforehand. Then on **Tuesday, January 25th @ 7:00 p.m.** you can participate in a panel discussion with the actors and creative team.



Use the QR code to register:



We strongly encourage you to engage in this unique offering which combines history, theater, and a chance to talk through difficult but meaningful topics.

Conversations on the Racial Justice Covenant



On January 9, after the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship services, the Racial Justice Mission Group will host conversations about the proposed racial justice covenant. We hope you will attend and share your thoughts and questions.

The congregation will vote on the proposed covenant at the annual meeting on January 30. **To obtain a PDF version of the draft covenant or to get a link for the 12:00 Zoom, please contact Ellen Marsey.**



Newtown Trolley Tour – January 6th

The Racial Justice Mission Group has arranged for a private tour with Newtown Alive on **January 6th from 10:00 a.m. to noon.** The cost is \$40.

To reserve a seat, please contact the church office. Checks should be made out to the church with "Trolley Tour" written on the memo line. Scholarships are available to cover the cost.

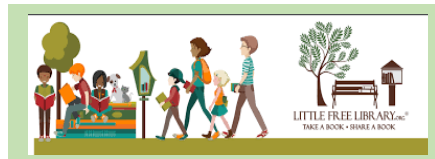
The private tours are limited to 34 people. If we have more who are interested, we will schedule a second tour. If you would like more information or are interested in a scholarship, please contact Ellen Marsey or Warren Bacon, co-chairs of the Racial Justice Mission Group.



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.



Little Free Lending Libraries:

- By sharing their books with others, children learn reading is a social act that connects them to others in meaningful ways—***the gift of sharing.***
- Even a gesture as simple as sharing your books can have a big, positive effect on those people and families who live close by. Witness this note left at one little library: "I currently live on the streets and sometimes wish I had a good book to read. Thank you for the reading!!!"—***the gift of compassion.***

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 prefer to purchase books, see Notable Children's Books - 2021 available through Association for Library Service to Children.

If you would be interested in helping with this project or donating funds to buy supplies and books, please contact Nancy McElroy at fnmcelroy@gmail.com or 941-527-7257

WE all SHOULD know That
DIVERSITY makes for a rich
 tapestry, AND WE MUST
 understand that all the
 threads of the tapestry
 are **EQUAL** in value no
 matter what their color.

~Maya Angelou

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

On December 7, there was a state-wide Criminal Justice Collaborative Meeting to serve as an "orientation" to the state-wide efforts to create a more just criminal justice system in Florida.

Affordable Housing: The new Mayor of Sarasota and Commissioner's general committee meetings are scheduled at **6 p.m., Thursday - January 28 and February 25.** Our network members are invited if they are interested in this work of housing for our community workers.

DART National Action Workshop: January 14, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., SURE is a part of DART, their national organization. More information will be forthcoming from SURE.

We are continuing to search diligently for a Lead Organizer. We are extremely grateful that the Rev. Ryan McBride continues to offer his services on a part-time basis. The Rev. Keturah Pittman was recently hired as the Director of Clergy Engagement, also on a part-time basis!

All are invited to the Artful Prayer session on **Thursday, January 11, @ 2 p.m. via Zoom**. Cindy Woodling will be leading us.

Please bring paper, crayons/colored pencils/markers. Contact Pastor Wes/church office if you want the zoom link. We hope you can join us!

First UCC Women – December’s Activity a Success!

On December 7th, the women of our church prepared and wrapped **50 shoebox gifts** for seniors receiving meals through **Sarasota Meals on Wheels**. There will be many happy faces receiving a meal and a giftbox. Thank you!



Additionally, Rev. Micki Robinson gave a very dynamic and thought-provoking talk on the musings and reactions to the pending births. Elizabeth expecting John and hearing about Mary’s news. Then Joseph’s mother’s “reactions” to Mary, the bride to be, and Mary’s bombshell news.

Be sure to join us next December and help us spread peace, joy, love and hope to our neighbors.



Thank You ~ “Angels”

A heartfelt thank you to the “Angels” who selected a **Salvation Army** tag and purchased gifts for a child or senior.



Once again, **all 70 tags** were chosen. Though we never get to meet the recipients of our gifts, our joy comes from the giving and knowing someone’s Christmas may be a little merrier this year.

First UCC Women – Save the Date ~ January 4th

On **Tuesday, January 4, 2022, 11:30 a.m.** in Fellowship Hall, the Women’s Association invites everyone to attend a program Featuring *Barbara Richards*, Director of Project 180, whose office is right on our campus. Their mission is to reintegrate formerly incarcerated citizens into community life.



Over 30,000 Florida prisoners are released annually and reenter our communities. Many wish to become law-abiding citizens and have the best intention of living a conventional life yet have few job skills, lack a formal education, and experience discrimination in housing and job markets because of their felony records. As a result, they become our local statistics—the homeless, the unemployed, the under-educated, the impoverished.

Unable to make it in the conventional world, over 76% are rearrested for a new crime within five years which contributes to victimization and drains community resources. **Project 180 seeks to break this cycle.**

Luncheon is served (\$12). Please sign up after either service, or call the church office to reserve your place.

Kings And Queens Bridge



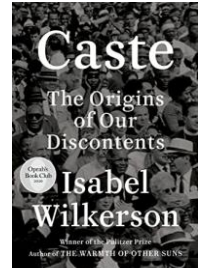
Kings and Queens Bridge resumes **Monday, January 10, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in Room 9 of the Education Building.** We welcome new players who are interested in playing contract bridge for fun.

Please contact Ethel Rudy at 941-727-0122 or email Ethel at ethelhr@verizon.net 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 at sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 340-227-5121.



Please join us **Thursday, January 16, at noon in the Oasis Center.** We will be discussing "*Caste*" by Isabel Wilkerson. New members are always welcomed.

Upcoming Elections – Mark Your Calendars!

- ✓ **March 8:** School District Milage Referendum
County Charter Referendum
Holiday Park and Tri Par Estates Elections
- ✓ **August 23:** Primary Elections
- ✓ **November 8:** General Elections



Community Meal



Community Meal

We continue our monthly ministry of serving and providing a hot, nutritious and balanced community meal at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Sandy Smith cooks our meal to share and this month we **need your homemade cookies or brownies.**

Can you help with set-up/serving/clean-up functions at St. Paul's Fellowship Hall from **4:00 – 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 25?**

We continue to wear masks. As always, your offerings of food & fellowship are always appreciated.

~ Carol Hagglund at carolhagglund@gmail.com.

January Birthdays

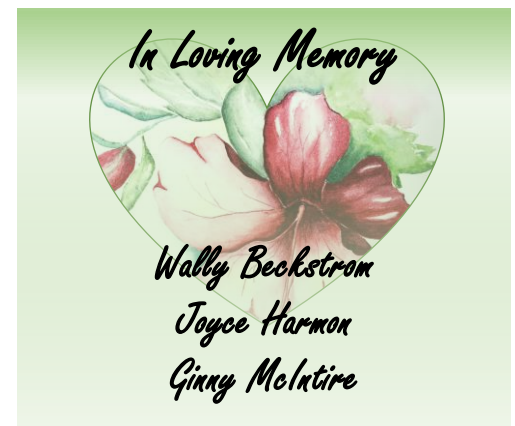


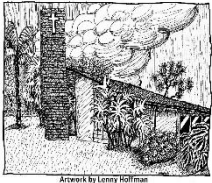
January Anniversaries



1/2	Lorraine Matthews Clarence Rogers	1/15	Elizabeth Wildhack
1/4	Mo Sherrill	1/16	Karen Barber Naya Staib
1/5	Donald Vance Jennifer Walker	1/17	Carol Brickner Katie Kleppinger
1/6	Alma Niemiller	1/18	Lynn Kuhn
1/7	Judith Black Thela Leach	1/21	Drue Murray
1/9	Steve Combs	1/23	Betty Schattschneider
1/11	Budd Friend-Jones Kenneth Geiger Mildred Huisman	1/25	Edwin Brickner
1/12	Ian Kavanagh John Ristow	1/26	Michael Dousa Sara Dousa Jim Grob
1/13	Donald Hoy Susan Moore Dorothy Reed	1/27	Jeannie Mitchell
1/14	Ray Baker John Mange Irving Woods	1/28	Linda Butler Christine Knupp
		1/29	Dawn Swain
		1/31	John Bryant Fran Stubblefield David York

1/1	Dennis & Evelyn Crooks
1/2	Tom & Sue Fields
1/2	Margo & Chris Light
1/6	Joy M. & Joseph P. Mayer
1/6	Ted & Lindsay Prospect
1/22	Stephen & Kika Landers





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
Bookkeeper.....Pam Hendrickson
Collector.....Sue Fields

OFFICERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Moderator.....Carol Fields
Vice ModeratorJim Butterworth
Past ModeratorWarren 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 worshipping 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.

