



First Congregational UCC

Dwelling In the Gospels

During the season of Lent, I invite you to dive in and dwell in the Gospels. Between now and Easter Sunday (April 9th), I encourage you to join me on a journey in reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The good news is that you can even begin this the week of March 6 and you still finish by Easter. I hear everyone thinking, “Wait, can Wes really assign me homework?”

This is simply an invitation. I understand if this Lent is not the right time for you to engage in this practice. I understand if you are in a season of stress and strain, that perhaps this Lent you need to subtract something from your life rather than add something to your life.

This Lent you may long to sit outside and listen to God’s first testament called, “Creation,” which was God’s wisdom before the Hebrew Testament or New Testament. I honor that in the world today this may feel like one more thing and just too much.

But, stay with me, if there is some curiosity at reading the Gospels during Lent, this might be the time to dare to dive in. Please know that reading the

Office Hours

Pastor Wes:

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

Sherry Glover:

Mon.-Tues.: 10:00 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Wed.-Thurs.: 10:00 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Mark:

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

Greg:

Tues. - Sat.: various hours



- **Worship ~ 9 a.m.** in the sanctuary.
- **Worship ~ 11:00 a.m. in person in the Sanctuary and livestream** on Facebook, YouTube and our website.

See our revised mask statement on Page 3 "Lenten Worship"

four gospels between now and Easter means about 3 chapters a day with catch up days...I always love days to catch up. Know that if you read ONE gospel, God's good news will meet you there.

Each day in the coming weeks I will share a Morning Meditation on Facebook and my blog. You can read the devotion as a stand-alone reflection without reading the assigned chapters.

If you'd like to see the reading plan, see the next page. One other note, especially to my friends reading the Bible in a year, we will eventually get to the other gospels in the year to come. So, don't feel the need to take this on right now. I will send you my meditations on each gospel when that reading comes up for us.

I pray that this opportunity will help you meet God, Jesus, and the Spirit as if for the first time. That by dwelling in the Word...the Word starts to dwell in you to help you edit the story you are telling yourself. That by tasting the good news of God's love, we are fed in ways that can fuel our lives for the living of these days. Wherever you are, I continue to pray God will enfold and hold you in this season of Lent. Amen.

With God's love to you all ~ Wes

Join the Zoom Conversations



COLLAGE 2nd & 4th 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 discussion.

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.

**Zoom links available through
Pastor Wes**



March 12th

Lenten Worship

~ 9 a.m. ~ In the Sanctuary

11 a.m. ~ In the Sanctuary & Livestreamed (*Facebook, YouTube, Website*)

Masks are encouraged. We reserve the two side sections of the Sanctuary for those who wish to be masked.

March 5 ~ We gather on the Second Sunday of Lent. We will celebrate holy communion and Pastor Wes will preach on Matthew 14:13-21.

March 12 ~ We continue to lean in and listen to Matthew's gospel focusing on Matthew 14:22-33 on the Third Sunday of Lent.

March 19 ~ We will turn to Matthew 15:21-28 as a way to center our worship on this Fourth Sunday of Lent.

March 26 ~ On the Fifth Sunday of Lent we turn to Matthew 16:24-28 to guide us.



April 2 ~ Palm Sunday ~ come and shout, "Hosanna!" as we begin our holiest week of the Christian Year. Our focus passage is Matthew 21:1-11.

Reading the Gospels during Lent

2/27 ~ John 1
2/28 ~ John 2-4
3/1 ~ John 5-7
3/2 ~ John 8-10
3/3 ~ John 11-13
3/4 ~ John 14-16
3/5 ~ Catch up day

3/6 ~ John 17-19
3/7 ~ John 20-21
3/8 ~ Matthew 1-3
3/9 ~ Matthew 4-6
3/10 ~ Matthew 7-9
3/11 ~ Matthew 10-12
3/12 ~ Catch up day

3/13 ~ Matthew 13-15
3/14 ~ Matthew 16-18
3/15 ~ Matthew 19-21
3/16 ~ Matthew 22-24
3/17 ~ Matthew 25-27
3/18 ~ Matthew 28; Mark 1-2
3/19 ~ Catch up day

3/20 ~ Mark 3-5
3/21 ~ Mark 6-8
3/22 ~ Mark 9-11
3/23 ~ Mark 12-14
3/24 ~ Mark 15-16; Luke 1
3/25 ~ Luke 2-4
3/26 ~ Catch up day

3/27 ~ Luke 5-7
3/28 ~ Luke 8-10
3/29 ~ Luke 11-13
3/30 ~ Luke 14-16
3/31 ~ Luke 17-19
4/1 ~ Luke 20-24



FEAST (Friends Eating & Studying Together)
Oasis Center 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Thursdays ~ March 2, 9, 16 and 23

You are invited to join as you can on selected Thursdays in March. We begin in Syster Hall with light refreshments at 10:30 a.m. Sign-up for those offerings that interest you. Among the offerings during this session of FEAST:

Artful Prayer:



Looking for creative and fun ways to add to your prayer life? Join the Artful Prayer Team (*Brenda Robinson, Donna Papenhausen, Lindsey Huddleston, Dawn Swain, and Cindy Woodling*) for a variety of fun sessions. No art experience required, just a spirit to explore God's sacred presence in your life in new ways. All supplies will be provided. **This offering is hybrid, please contact the church office for the link.**

SCOR (Sacred Conversations on Race):

Each week you will join others in discussion of important topics facing our community and country. **This offering is hybrid, please contact the church office for the link.**

- March 2 ~ "Banning Dr. Seuss?" What?!?
- March 9 ~ "Honoring Advocacy" – a prayer by Pixie Lighthouse of the Choctaw Nation
- March 16 ~ "The lie that invented racism" – TED Talk by John Biewen
- March 23 ~ "The difference between being 'not racist' and antiracist" – TED Talk by Ibram Kendi.



Gospel-ing Your Life:

As part of the invitation to read the Gospels during Lent, join Pastor Wes each week to listen for how the good news of John, Matthew, Mark and Luke shapes our stories and lives. **This event will be recorded and posted to our YouTube Channel.**



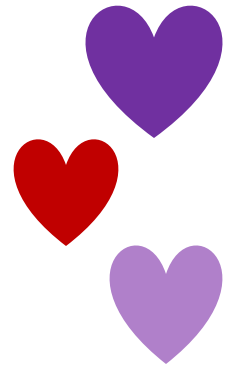
- March 2 ~ Dwelling in the Word with John
- March 9 ~ Living the Word with Matthew
- March 16 ~ Learning the Word with Mark
- March 23 ~ Infused by the Word with Luke



Easter Love Offering

The Mission Team has turned its attention to Easter and the upcoming Easter Love Offering. We have kept our covenants and our core values in mind as we made our selections.

We have chosen five UCC missions and six other missions that support the nation and the world. All have received at least a 90 rating from Charity Navigator this year.



Supporting Our UCC Missions:

One Great Hour of Sharing whose Lenten offering supports disasters and refugees is one of our UCC missions. The **Joseph Henry Evans Scholarship Fund** is to honor our Racial Justice Covenant and the **Open and Affirming Coalition for the UCC** honors our Open and Affirming Covenant. The other UCC missions are **Neighbors In Need UCC** and **Strengthen The Church**.

Missions Supporting Our Nation/World:

- **Back Bay Mission** does tireless work on the Mississippi Gulf Coast to strengthen neighborhoods and seek justice.
- The **Coalition of Immokalee Workers** does so much to advocate for farm workers and is expanding from helping those in Florida to Maryland, Tennessee, and Colorado.
- **Partners in Health** works tirelessly to provide high quality health care globally to those who need it the most.
- **Bread for the World Institute** whose mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs to end hunger in the United States and throughout the world.
- **Church World Service** is a faith-based organization that works on sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster.
- **Water Engineers for the Americas and Africa** honors our Creation Justice Covenant. They send engineers all over the world to bring clean water to those in need.

Easter is the time we send love and caring to our neighbors all over the Globe. We have researched these organizations to ensure your dollars are spent wisely. Please give generously.

Envelopes will be available in the Narthex in which to place your donations or you may send a check with Easter Love in the memo line. Thank you so much for your generosity.

*Your Mission Team,
Jan Andersen, Jan Kamm, Gretchen Friend-Jones,
Terri Crawford, Nancy Taylor*



Thinking of Joining our Church?



On **March 5th**, we will offer a light luncheon and discussion in the Oasis Center after the 11:00 a.m. service for those who would like to know more about our church. Come with your questions and meet others ~ there is no obligation to join.

Should you decide you like what you hear, and this is the church for you, we will welcome you in membership on **New Member Sunday, March 19th** at either the 9 a.m. or 11 a.m. service, whichever works best for you. A reception to meet and greet our new members will take place after the 11 a.m. service.



You are welcome to contact the church office and have a conversation with Pastor Wes at any time.

Chili Cook-off is Back ~ (*More chefs needed*) ~ March 26th



You won't want to miss this taste-testing event!

Your Fellowship and Special Events Team is recruiting chefs for this special day. Do you have a time-tested, favorite chili recipe you would like to offer? Perhaps you have a daring new chili you would like to test out!



Contact Sandy Smith (sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 340-226-5121 to text/call) to learn more and/or to volunteer.

If you would rather eat than cook and believe in giving lavish praise to the cooks, please come to support those who will be offering their chili on this fun-filled day.

Yummy!

First UCC Receives "Above & Beyond Award 2023"



The Board of **Second Chance Last Opportunity** recognized our efforts to make a difference with an **"Above & Beyond Award 2023"**. You may recall pre-Covid the Women's Association invited April Glasco to speak to us about Second Chance Last Opportunity. We have gathered supplies for their food pantry, and just this last Christmas we collected gently used clothing and more food in a special drive when they found their shelves empty.

This "thank you" is to recognize our Mission Team, Women's Association and **ALL** who contributed to this worthy cause. Thank you for continuing to reach out to those most in need.

Security Team Presentation March 5th during Birthday Sunday Fellowship



Following the 11 a.m. worship and while enjoying birthday cake and beverages, the Security Team will be presenting the results in their study of the safety and security procedures of our campus. The goal is to continue to keep our campus a safe place to gather and worship.

We encourage all members to attend. Come and be fed both literally and intellectually.

March Fellowship

Fellowship during March is sponsored by **Spiritual Education and Growth** whose members include: *Jim Crumel, Lori White, Cindy Woodling, Julia Detloff, Eric Terdal, and Lois Wilkins.*

- March 5 ~ Birthday Sunday and Security Team Presentation
- March 19th ~ Themed treats
- March 26 ~ Chili Cook-off



Neighbors Use Our Campus Labyrinth

Did you know some of our neighboring groups use our campus for events. One such neighbor is Expressive Arts Florida and in March they are offering a 4-hour session highlighting our labyrinth.

If you would like to enroll in this course or others, you can find a registration link in their on-line newsletter <https://archive.aweber.com/awlist3518449/HhRcA> or contact Cindy Woodling.



In their advertisement ~ *"We are delighted to offer this workshop in person on a beautiful campus with a labyrinth."*

SURE News

March meetings:

- ✓ Housing ~ March 4th, First Presbyterian Church, 2 p.m., Room 203
- ✓ Mental Health ~ March 6th, SURE Office, 5 p.m.



Four other areas of concern are being studied this year. If you want more information or are thinking of joining a committee, please contact the following:

- ✓ Affordable Housing ~ Tony Winer, Anthony.winer@mitchellhamline.edu, 612-720-7643
- ✓ Criminal Justice ~ Mike Kozubek, smkozubek@gmail.com, 312-919-0321
- ✓ Mental Health ~ Dorothy Murphy, jamesmurphy@comcast.net, 941-221-2257
- ✓ Restorative Practices ~ Nancy Taylor, nancy922960@gmail.com, 941-350-5776

 **Easter Lilies \$15 each**

*Please email Sherry at
admin@uccsarasota.com or
call the church office
with your order and dedication
requests by **April 1.***

*Thanks
Many Thanks*

Wes Curry

*For your 10+ years of tireless,
faithful work as editor of our
church newsletter.*

Brady News



Brady Sarasota has been working hard to urge people to reach out to their legislators to stop a bill that would allow Floridians to carry concealed weapons without purchasing permits or undergoing training. The governor has said he would sign SB 543 when it reaches his desk, but there's still time to make some calls.

Meanwhile, Brady rallies will continue at the southern end of the Sarasota Bayfront parking lot from **4 to 5 p.m. every Thursday through April 6.** Come on out; the chapter has signs for you to use and free t-shirts for those who would like to become a part of this worthy mission.

Mark your calendars, too, for the **spring wrap-up on April 13 in our own Oasis Center.** There will be food and time to share ideas for activities going forward. You do not have to be a Brady member to attend. Brady Sarasota's Council will publish a 2023-24 calendar well before the rallies resume in October.

We Can End Hunger in Our Time



This is a bold claim, but it is one that **Bread for the World** is working to achieve. Bread for the World is a Christian advocacy organization urging U.S. decision makers to do all they can to pursue a world without hunger. The mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs that can help end hunger in the U.S. and around the world.

They fulfill this mission by working with churches, campuses, and other organizations to engage people in organized advocacy and urging members of Congress to pass legislation that will help end hunger.

Church Council recently agreed First Congregational UCC will join Bread for the World in this effort and that it will be one of this year's Easter Love recipients.

You will be hearing more about this organization and in March there will be a coordinated effort called an "Offering of Letters" to encourage our congress people to renew farm bill programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and international food aid programs.

Keep your eyes and ears open for more information and opportunities.

How to Add Your Voice to Important Issues



The Peace and Justice Network is compiling a listing of email addresses of members of our congregation who would like to add their voice to ours on important issues, like Gun Safety, Voting Rights, Equality, Racism, upcoming State and Federal legislation, and other current topics. For years we have been sending suggested action messages to about 85 members, and we want to expand our list by including YOU, if you want to add your name, even if only to be made aware of the issues. You would not be required to phone or write to anyone unless you have the time and inclination! Our most recent messages involved the upcoming bill which, if passed, would allow the open carry of guns in Florida. FYI, we always include names and phone numbers of senators and representatives to call, or their addresses.

So if you want a chance to add your voice to some issues of your choice, with a phone call, an email, snail mail, or even by attending a meeting (for example: School Board, City Commission, County Commission, SURE), please send an email with your name, email address, and phone number to either Lee Brockmann (fredleebrock@aol.com) or Wes Curry (jowescurry@verizon.net).

We will be SO happy to add you to our list. In the case of meeting attendance, there will be organization leaders who will do the talking. Your job will be to fill the seats and add your support by just being there. A very important role!!

CREATION JUSTICE COVENANT NEWS

Have You Visited Our Butterfly/Pollinator Garden?



Welcome to our lovely butterfly/pollinator garden. Located at the back of the church near the Labyrinth, it is a work in progress.

We have some added new plants to explicitly attract certain butterflies such as a white Scorpion Tail which attracts the Gulf Fritillary and Gray Hairstreak. Look for the identifying white tags!

Almost a year ago we bought a healthy, Simpson's Stopper which will eventually be a showpiece in the garden. Look for the pretty small white flowers which cover this bushy tree in the Spring. Later in the fall, red berries replace the flowers.

The Green Team aims to plant all native Florida plants to attract butterflies of all sorts and other pollinators. Most of our purchases come from Sweet Bay Nursery in Parrish. Their plants are all native to Florida, and they have very helpful workers who have guided us in our purchases. It is great fun to visit the nursery and stroll around to see what new plants might be beneficial to our garden at church.

Please come by our butterfly garden some sunny day!
If you think you might want to be involved in our endeavor, contact Alleyne Kess at ampkess@gmail.com.



OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT NEWS



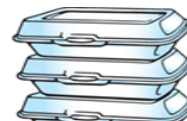
In January, COLLAGE viewed the video of our long history. We honored founding leaders as well as present ones who helped capture this video history. In February, over 40 people gathered to brainstorm ideas to support our goals. With many ideas and suggestions and a willingness to act as leaders, helpers, and advocates, we are well on our way to being more welcoming, supportive, and involved in our LGBTQ+ community. Thank you!!!



Our **COLLAGE Book Committee** is using the established criteria to determine if donated items can be included on our purple O and A library cart. Pauline Geary is the contact person for more information.

March Zoom Dates: March 14 and 28 @ 11 a.m.

March Box Luncheon: March 12 for all COLLAGE supporters in our church. Please sign up in the Narthex two weeks prior to assure your box meal is ordered.



"Guide to Being a Trans Ally" ~ Book Review by Jeannie Mitchell

Quoting from an opinion piece in the **Herald Tribune**, Darrick D. McGhee Sr., stated: "We should all remember that educating ourselves, and educating others, is the first step toward implementing change."

To that point, I recently read "**Guide to Being a Trans Ally**". It is on the new COLLAGE book cart in the church library.

Some of the informative words on the cover state: Detailed, Honest, Helpful, and Compelling. Reading this book will answer lots of questions and start to demystify people who are transgender. It is exactly what it promises. I highly recommend reading this book.

RACIAL JUSTICE COVENANT NEWS



Sacred Conversations on Race (SCOR)

In March, SCOR will be offering sessions through **FEAST** on **Thursday, March 2, 9, 16 and 23**. Please see the FEAST information on Page 4 of this newsletter.

Thanks to Jim Crumel, SCOR is currently in discussion about where we will go next. Stay tuned!

In the meantime, please know there is **ALWAYS** space and place for you to join in this conversation or you can come to listen. Truly, **ALL ARE WELCOME HERE!**

Community Meal ~ March 28th

We continue to provide a monthly community meal at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Our meal is cooked by Sandy Smith with **home-baked** items added as a sweet treat.

We need your **home-baked items (brownies and cakes)**, and if you are able, we could use **help in serving our guests**. Please volunteer with set-up/serving/clean-up functions at St. Paul's Fellowship Hall. Not only are the guests served a delicious meal and dessert, but they enjoy the time of fellowship in such a welcoming and safe space.



Please join us on **March 28th from 4-6:30 p.m.** We are thankful for all who help us continue this ministry of providing for our neighbors in their time of need.

Volunteer and/or inquire for more details: Carol Hagglund at carol.hagglund@gmail.com.

Kings And Queens Bridge ~ March 13th



Kings and Queens Bridge will play on **Monday, March 13th @ 1 p.m.** Please let me know as soon as possible if you are able and wanting to play.

New players who like to play contract bridge are warmly welcomed. We meet the second Monday of each month if we have at least eight people able to play.

Please call or email Ethel Rudy @ 941-727-0122 or loisrudy253@gmail.com.

First UCC Women's Luncheon ~ March 7th @ 11:30 a.m.

Come one, come all, to the Women's Association's lunch and program on **Tuesday, March 7th, at 11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall.**

Our very own Steve Horowitz will tell us all about "**Amazing Ancient Egypt.**" A former college professor, "Dr. Steve" will deliver Egyptian costume, Egyptian music, a PowerPoint show, and he says, "There will be audience participation."

You will not want to miss this compelling program.

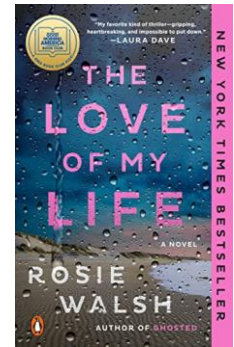
Luncheon costs \$12. Sign up after either Sunday service or at the church office at 941-953-7044.



Ready Readers ~ March 9th

We will be discussing *The Love of My Life* by Rosie Walsh. Emma loves her husband Leo and their young daughter Ruby--she'd do anything for them. But almost everything she's told them about herself is a lie. And she might have gotten away with it, if it weren't for her husband's job.

Leo is an obituary writer; Emma a well-known marine biologist. When she suffers a serious illness, Leo copes by doing what he knows best researching and writing about his wife's life. But as he starts to unravel the truth, he discovers the woman he loves doesn't really exist. Even her name isn't real. When the very darkest moments of Emma's past finally emerge, she must somehow prove to Leo that she really is the woman he always thought she was . . . But first, she must tell him about the other love of her life.



Looking ahead ~ **April 13th** we will be discussing *The Light We Carry* by Michelle Obama. Michelle Obama offers listeners a series of fresh stories and insightful reflections on change, challenge, and power, including her belief that when we light up for others, we can illuminate the richness and potential of the world around us, discovering deeper truths and new pathways for progress.

“When we are able to recognize our own light, we become empowered to use it,” writes Michelle Obama. A rewarding blend of powerful stories and profound advice that will ignite conversation, *The Light We Carry* inspires listeners to examine their own lives, identify their sources of gladness, and connect meaningfully in a turbulent world.

Toiletries for Orchard Place

Orchard Place is requesting toiletries for their residents. **Full size—shampoo, cream rinse, soap, toothbrushes, deodorant, Kleenex etc.** would be appreciated. A place in the outer office of our church will be designated for collection. Pastor Wes has offered to make the delivery.

Orchard Place is dear to us. Our church co-sponsored this HUD housing for handicapped individuals where we maintain Board representation. With those residing at Orchard Place living mostly on disability benefits of less than \$1,000 a month, Orchard Place offers affordable housing that is in short supply.

Thank you for supporting our neighbors in need.



March Birthdays



- 3/1 Bonnie Richards
Jack Stewart
- 3/2 Nancy Alger
Jeffrey Carlson
Judy Jones
Rachel Taylor
- 3/3 Wes Bixby
- 3/5 Sharon Quimby
- 3/6 Carol Rescigno
- 3/7 Toska Strong
- 3/9 Barbara Ralph
- 3/10 Lucy Hedrick
Geraldine Mattson
- 3/11 Audrey Shutters
Lori White
- 3/13 Francis Hallice
Charles Hamilton
William Moore
- 3/14 Bob Millar

- 3/16 Michael Cross
- 3/18 Don Laing
Susan Raines
- 3/19 Pat Myers
- 3/20 Maxine Althouse
Mercedes Traba
- 3/21 Sydney Starcher
- 3/23 Dannie Vance
Gwen West
- 3/24 Page McCloud
Becky Tavares
- 3/26 Judith Plerhoples
- 3/28 Harold Kuhn
- 3/29 Rowena Janssens
- 3/30 Pauline Geary
Kathy Stewart
Joseph Yocum
- 3/31 Michael Johnston

March Anniversaries



- 3/4 Barney & Nancy Kavanagh
- 3/19 Stephen & Christine Hoffman
- 3/25 Bruce & Marcia Knight

March 90+ Wise Birthdays



- 3/10 ~ Geraldine Mattson**
- 3/13 ~ William Moore**
- 3/19 ~ Pat Myers**
- 3/23 ~ Gwen West**
- 3/29 ~ Rowena Janssens**
- 3/30 ~ Katherine Stewart**

Please let Sherry in the office know if you are going to be celebrating a 90+ Wise birthday.



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



The 2023 Flower Chart is NOW ready for YOU! Do you have a special occasion coming up this year? Would you like to celebrate at 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 Manager..... Mark Swain
Media Specialist.....Douglas Kingsley
Bookkeeper..... Pam Ganshe-Boythe
Financial Manager..... Susan Fields
Office Administrator..... Sherry Glover

OFFICERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Moderator..... Nancy Morris
Vice Moderator..... Harold Mezile
Past Moderator Jim Butterworth
Co-treasurers Robin Reich & Dale Woodling
Pastor EmeritusDr. John Syster
Contributing Photographer Susan Moore
On-line Newsletter....Carol McCloud, Evelyn Crooks

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 Livestream each week at 11 a. m. and the service is posted to our website for streaming by 1 p.m. each Sunday afternoon.

