



First Congregational UCC

The Easter Story

I grew up in the magical era of mixtapes. In that time, before you could easily make a digital playlist on your phone with a few touches of a screen, I would sit for hours by the radio listening for the moment when I could record a song onto a blank cassette tape. God forbid I got called away by my mother to do a chore or had to use the restroom and risked missing the very song I was waiting hours to record. The struggle was real...and yes, my children think that I am a dinosaur when I talk about this.

Part of the power of making a mixtape was carefully curating the songs to convey just the right message. One of the ways to let someone know you liked them was to give this as a gift ~ you would let the 80s hairbands of Bon Jovi, Aerosmith, and Warrant serenade your crush with falsetto singing and guitar solos. Ah, the good old days.

Inspired by those mixtapes of my youth, in the coming weeks we are going to lean in and listen to some of the **Apostle Paul's greatest hits**. Paul is one of the most prolific writers in scripture, **over half** of the New Testament is his letters. He defined and distinguished the faith in

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 livestreamed** on Facebook, YouTube and our website.

Pastor Wes Vacation Days:

May 22 – May 29

June 14 – June 20

August 7 – August 13

October 2 – October 8

many ways that have left lasting, lingering impact. While not all his writings warm my heart (Paul can frustrate and flummox me), he also had a vision for the church that inspires and infuses me to this day.

Richard Rohr says this about Paul, “Many people don’t realize that the apostle Paul never met the historical Jesus and hardly ever quotes Jesus directly. In almost all of Paul’s preaching and writing, he refers to the Eternal Christ Mystery or the Risen Christ rather than Jesus of Nazareth before his death and resurrection. The Risen Christ (Easter Christ) is the only Jesus that Paul ever knew! This makes Paul a fitting mediator (or teacher) for the rest of us, **since the Risen/Easter Christ is the only Jesus we will ever know as well.**”

As we read Paul, remember we are reading other people’s mail. These letters were not intended for us but could be helpful to us. These letters were written in a particular time to a particular people, but also have wisdom that transcends time and meets us here and now. Always remember, Paul wasn’t trying to get his letters into the New Testament. He wasn’t writing thinking, “Oh, this is totally going to be read two thousand years from now by people in Sarasota, FL at a church where the pastor has a *fabulous* sense of humor.” Paul was trying to meet people where they were and offer thoughts on faith, which is my prayer on Sunday mornings.

As part of this sermon series, I will be providing **writing prompts in my morning meditations**. My prayer is that you will begin to record your faith, just as Paul shared his faith. Not because you are going to mail this to someone, but I would **love** it if you shared some of your thoughts with me and our church. These prompts will hopefully help you begin to express some of what dwells in your mind, heart, body, and soul.

In the coming weeks we will dive in and dwell in the words with open hearts to how God might be working in these letters still today. I look forward to us creating and curating a mixtape of Paul’s greatest hits together in the months ahead.

With God’s love to you all ~ *Pastor Wes*

Worship

9 a.m. ~ In the Sanctuary

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

NOTE: Memorial Day Weekend ~ ONE service at 11 a.m. ~ In the Sanctuary & Livestreamed (*Facebook, YouTube, Website*)

May 7th ~ Focus passage is Romans 8 ~ What Can We Say? We will celebrate communion at both services as we continue our sermon series on Paul's Greatest Hits. We are delighted to welcome Piedmont College Singers to BOTH services.

May 14th ~ Focus passage is Romans 12 ~ We will celebrate Mother's Day at both services.

May 21st ~ Focus passage is Romans 14 ~ bringing our praise and prayers to God who weaves us together as a community.

May 28th ~ Pentecost Sunday ~ wear **RED** to worship ~ **ONE service at 11 a.m.** with Rev. Dr. David Pitt preaching. Rev. Dr. Pitt is a member of our church and a retired UCC pastor who served in a variety of ministries from chaplaincy to local church. Rev. Dr. Pitt is a member of our Lay Visitation Ministry and will guide us as we celebrate the birthday of the church.



Summer Worship Schedule – Begins June 4th



8:45 a.m. ~ In the Chapel ~ Greg and Wes lead a service of interaction and prayer

11:00 a.m. ~ In the Sanctuary (with choir and traditional liturgy) Livestreamed



**Wear Orange
on
Sunday, June 4th**



COLLAGE Sponsors Mother's Day Luncheon For All ~ May 14th Syster Hall ~ After 11 am. Service

A light lunch will be served by members of COLLAGE on this Mother's Day—a tradition COLLAGE offers each year with pleasure and gratitude.



Please bring a picture of your mother or mother figure labeled with "mother's" name and your name. Each table will be invited to share a short story about their mother, grandmother, or mother folkfigure. What is the best advice you were ever given?



Please sign up in advance in the Narthex for this light-bites luncheon.

Congratulations to our Graduates



Olivia Bixby ~ Riverview High School (Florida State University)
Colin Vanarsdall ~ Sarasota High School (Univ. of Central Florida)
Ian Vanarsdall ~ Georgia Tech, bachelors, Industrial & Systems Engineering

Easter Love Update



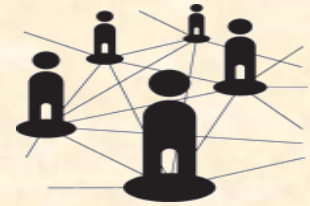
Thank you for your generous gifts for our Easter Love collection. **As of Easter Sunday, we have raised \$13,245.**

Our team will be meeting to determine the amount we can give for each of the chosen organizations. Because donations continue to come in after Easter, we will provide an update showing the organizations benefited and the amounts given.

In the meantime, please remember our Easter Love money is given to those in need all over the world. **We can and are making a difference.**

With grateful hearts,
*Your UCC Mission Team ~ Jan Andersen, Jan Kamm,
Gretchen Friend-Jones, Terri Crawford, and Nancy Taylor*

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.

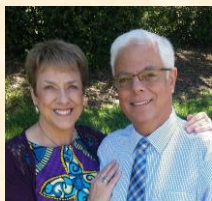
Tuesday Bible Study @ 6:30 p.m. ~ We meet on Zoom to discuss the Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.

Wednesday Bible Study @ 11 a.m. ~ HYBRID in the Oasis Center to discuss the Bible passage for the upcoming Sunday.

SCOR (Sacred Conversations on Race) 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @ 3 p.m. ~ HYBRID in the Oasis Center.

Zoom links available through Pastor Wes

Meet Our Newest Members



John Botti & Sheila Gossett

John & Sheila of Columbus, Ohio are now Venice snowbirds.

Graduates of Ohio State University, John spent 40 years in the life insurance business and Sheila was an 8th grade English teacher and elementary school counselor.

Between them, they are active church members serving as moderators, Sunday school teachers and chairs on teams.

Currently, John & Sheila are active at the Chautauqua Institution with John serving on the board of directors of the Chautauqua UCC Society for six years, three as president.



Roger Hazard & Matt Jacobs



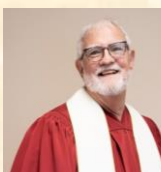
Roger's early years were in Ottawa, IL. Matt grew up in Manistee, MI. Together they moved to Sarasota from Wheaton, IL.

Roger attended Northern Illinois University and was a manager at Jewel-Osco (similar to Publix) in the Chicago metro area.

Matt attended Ferris State University and worked at Marshall Fields in Oakbrook before becoming a Midwest sales rep for Swarovski Crystal. He currently works part time at Kirkland's.

Roger and Matt enjoy volunteering for the Salvation Army. Both enjoy cruise vacations, while Roger likes gardening and Matt enjoys old Charlie Chan movies.

Scott Cooper



Scott Cooper grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey. He & his wife Pamela moved to Sun City Center in 2003.

After receiving his master's degree in business from Cornell University, he joined and worked in the family business for his entire career.

Always a lover of music, Scott has not only joined our choir but continues to sing with the South Shore Community Chorus in Sun City Center. Scott also plays tennis and a little golf.

Kelly & Lori Daniel



Kelly grew up all over Texas & Michigan while Lori came to Bradenton from Hamilton, OH. They call Bradenton home.

Kelly attended Grand Valley State Univ. & Texarkana College and worked as an OR circulating nurse for 32 years.

Lori attended State College of Florida and is currently a PE tech at a local elementary school.

Both enjoy soccer and hold Hapkido/Taekwondo black belts. Additionally, Lori loves playing drums/percussion instruments. Kelly played 8 years professional fast-pitch softball as a catcher.



Michael Keane & Sylvia Abreu

Michael & Sylvia moved to Sarasota from Miami in 2021. Michael's early years were in California and Washington.

Sylvia grew up in Sao Paulo Brazil with an American (Michigan) mother and a Brazilian father. Hence, she speaks Portuguese and English. She lived in Portland, Oregon for 29 years before her work relocated her to Miami.

Mike attended Seton Hall, Thunderbird School of Global Management and worked as a Data Privacy Consultant and is now happily retired. Sylvia continues to work as accountant and general manager of a small structural steel company.

Mike loves kayaking, swimming, walking and travel and is involved with COLLAGE and Also Youth. Sylvia enjoys bike riding, walking, travel and seeing her grandkids.



Heather Spear

Heather and husband came to Sarasota in September 2022 as snowbirds from Canton, CT. Early years were spent in Simsbury, CT.

She attended Mt. Holyoke and graduated from Univ. of Rochester. Her Master of Science in Nursing is from Yale University. She retired in 2019 from UConn Health.

Heather is working part-time as a psychiatric APRN (prescribe/psychotherapy) with outpatients at the Center for Emotional Healing in CT.

Besides volunteering at Selby Botanical Gardens, she loves gardening, reading, being outside, swimming, and walking.

Shelly Taylor



Shelly is a Florida native with a great grandfather who came to Miami in the late 1800's from Scotland as an indentured servant. Additionally, Shelly has grandparents who came to Sarasota in the 1920's.



Though Shelly (affectionately called "Fluffy" by her grandchildren) grew up in Miami, Florida her career was in Alexandria, Virginia. Shelly attended Marjorie Webster College and had a successful career as a real estate broker primarily selling historic homes in Old Town Alexandria. She also built the homes she has lived in and is currently building a new home in Venice.



Thinking of Joining our Church?



On May 7th 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.

If you decide you like what you hear, and this is the church for you, we will welcome you in membership on **New Member Sunday, May 21st** 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. On this date, we will also be celebrating our graduate, Olivia Bixby ~ a doubly joyous occasion.

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

You are cordially invited to a Graduation Celebration on May 21st for Olivia Bixby in Syster Hall after 11 a.m. service



The love of this church has shaped Olivia in so many ways. From Thursday Knights programs to Christmas pageants to Sunday School teachers ~ your presence has blessed Olivia and helped to shape her faith. We invite you to celebrate as Olivia graduates from Riverview High School.

She will be attending Florida State University beginning this June. Come and help us bless Olivia in her future endeavors.

Grief Group ~ Thursdays in May



There is room in our Easter faith for Good Fridays that persist!!! We are hosting a **grief group on Thursdays in May at 4 p.m. in the Chapel.**

This is an opportunity to share together, support one another, and offer God's love. This group is open to all whose hearts are heavy. Grief takes many forms and faces. **Please sign up by calling the church office.**

Summer Reading

Your Spiritual Education and Growth Team wants to know a **FAVORITE book** you have read **this past year.** We are looking for good fiction books. Please note, these do not need to be serious and somber. There is a prayerfulness in playfulness.

What good fiction books have warmed your heart, stirred your soul, and maybe helped you laugh out loud? You can send your title suggestions to Pastor Wes.



World Labyrinth Day, Saturday, May 6 ~ Join us at 12:45 p.m. ~ Labyrinth

Are you feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the negative events in our community? Are you losing hope for a more peaceful world?

Saturday, May 6, is World Labyrinth Day with the motto: "Walk as one at 1". What does that mean? At 1 p.m. in every time zone around the globe, people are encouraged to join their collective energy of purposeful walking on a labyrinth to bring peace to our hurting world.



Photo by Lucy Tobias

After a brief introduction and prayer beginning at 12:45 p.m., we will join as a community to walk our church labyrinth for peace. Bring a friend.

Chili Cookoff A Success!



Thank you talented chefs: **Ed Andersen, Pastor Wes Bixby, Buck Greenlaw, Mary Kukainis, Nancy Morris, Sandy Smith, Connie Toops, and Jerry Tavis!**

Congratulations to **Connie Toops** for "People's Choice"

Thank you to **Carol Fields** for clever chili entry signs, **Special Events Team** for hosting, and everyone who make it an annual event?



*Connie Toops
"People's Choice"*



May Fellowship

- May 7th** ~ Celebrate May birthdays with cake hosted by COLLAGE
- May 14th** ~ Special Mother's Day Light-Bites Luncheon for all provided by COLLAGE
- May 21st** ~ Special Graduation celebration for Olivia Bixby and Welcome for New Members provided by The Bixby Family

OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT NEWS



In our Open and Affirming Congregation, COLLAGE provides social support for LGBTQ+ persons and Allies. There are some exciting events planned for the next couple of months.

MOTHER'S DAY, May 14th ~ The entire church is invited to bring a photo for this celebration of mothers or mother figures. Please see the COLLAGE invitation on Page 4 of this newsletter for more details.



UPCOMING Events

SILVER PRIDE, June 10th ~ –COLLAGE will be hosting a table at the Sarasota Senior Center SILVER PRIDE reaching out to LGBTQ+ seniors and their Allies. The current politically hostile environment makes it more important than ever to get the word out that our church is welcoming to LGBTQ+ folks and their families.

COLLAGE LUNCHEON, June 11th ~ Mayomi Fowowe-Makinde, a Gay man born and raised in Nigeria where he lived in constant fear for his life, will be our special speaker. When he was outed by a family member, he escaped from his native country to avoid imprisonment. (It is illegal to be Gay in Nigeria and family members face 10 years of imprisonment if they know a family member is Gay and do not report it.) The presentation is open to all. **Please sign up in advance if you want a box lunch.**

We welcome any volunteers willing to work these events ~ please contact: paulinegeary@hotmail.com

RACIAL JUSTICE COVENANT NEWS



Image created by Carol Fields

Sacred Conversations on Race (SCOR)

Prompted by the very positive feedback to the hybrid format utilized for SCOR sessions during FEAST, SCOR transitioned from meeting weekly on Zoom to meeting on the **second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at 3 p.m. (HYBRID) in person at the Oasis Center or on Zoom.**

May 10th ~ "Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Mashup" ~ Talks at Google by George Takei and the Cast of Broadway's *Allegiance*.

May 24th ~ "Let's get to the root of racial injustice" ~ TED TALKS by Dr. Megan Ming Francis.

If you have any suggestions, please let Jim Crumel and Pastor Wes know. In the meantime, please know there is **ALWAYS** space and place for you to join in this conversation.

~ **ALL ARE WELCOME HERE!** ~

Celebrating Different Cultures and Voices

Since 1990 in the United States, **May has been designated as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.** This diverse group is very large and includes American citizens with ties to Japan, China, Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Samoa, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam. It also includes those Americans from South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan.



On **Sunday, May 7th**, we will celebrate the rich heritage and culture of these Americans in our worship service as an expression of our Racial Justice Covenant which says "We...commit to celebrating different cultures and voices, both in worship and in our community."

Racial Justice Mission Group,
*Warren Bacon & Lindsey Huddleston (co-chairs), Jim Crumel, Sheila Gossett,
Florence Jackson, Felix McElroy, Gregg Matthews, Lynne Woodman*



Vote-By-Mail Changes

Recent changes in Florida law now require those wishing to vote by mail to submit a request after each General Election cycle, or every two years.

Submit a request at [SarasotaVotes.gov/VoteByMail](https://www.sarasotavotes.gov/VoteByMail) or by phone (941-861-8618), in writing or in person in Sarasota, Venice or North Port.

In Manatee County, go to <https://www.votemanatee.com> or call the Elections Office at 941-741-3823.

Community Meal ~ May 23rd

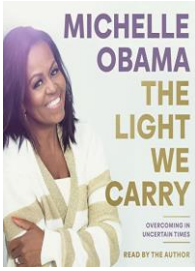
The monthly community meal that we continue to provide at St. Paul Lutheran Church feeds those who are hungry and in need of fellowship. Our guests are treated to a Sandy Smith home cooked meal. The home-baked items provided by our church family add a sweet treat that is heartily enjoyed. Our mission is to feed the hungry and offer fellowship to our guests.



Please volunteer with set-up/serving/clean-up functions at St. Paul's Fellowship Hall. We need your **home-baked items (brownies and frosted cakes—9x13 size)**. Please join us on **May 23rd from 4-6:30 p.m.** Thank you for all you do for those in need.



*RuthAnn Waid, Connie Toops,
Heather Spear, Jan Andersen*



Ready Readers ~ May 11th

Ready Readers is a book discussion group that meets on the second Thursday of every month at **noon** in the **Oasis Center**. 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.

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.

Kings And Queens Bridge ~ May 8th

Kings and Queens Bridge will play on **Monday, May 8th @ 1 p.m.**

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 email loisrudy253@gmail.com.



Artful Prayer ~ On Summer Break

Artful Prayer is on break for the summer, but you can still view videos of this past year's sessions and so some Artful Prayer on your own during the summer.

<http://youtube.com@UCCSarasota>



FREE CONCERT
May 7th ~ 2:30 p.m.
In Our Sanctuary

PIEDMONT UNIVERSITY
Singers
2023 SPRING TOUR
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC
SARASOTA
Sunday, May 7, 2023
9:00am & 11:00am Services
Concert at 2:30pm
1031 S. Euclid Ave.
Sarasota, FL 34237
ADMISSION IS FREE

First UCC Women's Luncheon ~ May 2nd @ 11:30 a.m.
(Includes a Chance to Help a Ukrainian Community)



The UCC Women invite everyone to our luncheon and program on **Tuesday, May 2nd**, entitled "**Memory Road Show**". We begin in Syster Hall at 11:30 a.m. **Luncheon costs \$12.** Please **bring a "memory" item to display**—a photo, an object you have saved, a gift you treasure—and you will have the opportunity to share its significance with all in attendance. Truly all are invited. **Signup at the back of the Sanctuary after each service or call the church office.**

We are also collecting for **Mission Project of the Florida Conference of UCC Women** to benefit a Ukrainian community. Please bring one or more of these items:

- New underwear (adult and children)
- Socks (in all sizes)
- School supplies (lined white paper, colored construction paper, pens, crayons, metric rulers, notebooks, stickers, backpacks)
- Toiletries (toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant)
- Makeup (lipstick, eyeliner, mascara)
- Feminine products (Tampons, sanitary napkins, feminine wipes)
- Diapers and baby wipes
- Clothing for infants—newborn to 12 months
- Monetary donations for transporting and shipping



My sincere thanks to all the thoughtful members of First Congregational Church family who sent me such lovely birthday cards and greetings. They came from friends I have known over the years and some whom I have yet to meet. It filled my heart with joy, and I felt God's love through them.



Thank you all!
Ruth Olson

May Birthdays



5/1	Cheryl Beller	5/16	Barbara Edelin
5/2	Charles Jarman Sue Shiffrin	5/20	Richard Sparrow
5/6	Wesley Horner Blaine Pool	5/22	Debbie Hays Carmen Landers Robert Quarles
5/9	Gina Bixby	5/26	Helaine Eckstein
5/10	Patricia Rolf	5/27	David H. Kerrigan
5/11	Bettye Smith	5/28	Virginia Cardozo Taylor Steele
5/12	Elizabeth Early Becky May	5/29	William Hansen
5/13	Garvey Clarke Sandy Smith	5/30	Ed Andersen Gregory Chestnut
5/14	Harold Mezile	5/31	Christine Millar
5/15	Gerald VanHoose		

May Anniversaries



5/1	Donald & Kate Harris
5/3	Steve & Kathy Combs
5/3	Ray & Naya Staib
5/6	Drue & Len Murray
5/7	Harold & Joy Kuhn
5/11	Rick & Jean-Marie Steele
5/16	Craig Collemer & Gary LaParl
5/23	Donald & Dannie Vance
5/25	Jim & Max Althouse
5/28	Jeff & Sarah Sands
5/30	Fernando & Betsy Traba

In Loving Memory . . .



*Joan Byrd
Rowena Janssens
Bev Laier
Gene Rump
Jan Wood
Bryan Zuerner*

Card Shower

May 90+ Wise Birthdays



5/2 ~ Charles Jarman

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



A service to celebrate the life of
Marilyn Shipman
May 6th @ 3 p.m. on Zoom only

Please contact Pastor Wes for the link.



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
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Moderator..... Nancy Morris
 Vice Moderator..... Harold Mezile
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 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.

