

December 15, 2024 ~ 11:00 a.m.

First Congregational UCC ~ Sarasota



1031 S. Euclid Ave. Sarasota, FL 34237 ~ (941) 953-7044

www.uccsarasota.com

Flowers given by: **Page and Carol McCloud**, in celebration of our church family.

PRELUDE

Piece V for oboe and piano
Greg Stead, oboe & Glenn Priest, piano

by César Franck

INVITATION to WORSHIP

adapted from Kate Bowler

One: Blessed are we when God's expansive, evolving love takes hold of our lives.

Many: Blessed are we when we follow the light of God to a place we never expected.

One: Blessed are we when, like Mary, we risk being a dwelling place for God.

Many: Blessed are we when, like Joseph, we stand with those who are pushed to the fringe and fray and are too often forgotten.

One: Blessed are we when, like the shepherds, we dance to the angels' holy hymns.

Many: Blessed are we when we live the truth that everyone belongs.

*OPENING HYMN

My Soul Cries Out with a Joyful Shout

**My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great,
and my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the one who wait.
You fixed your sight on the servant's plight, and my weakness you did not spurn,
so from east to west shall my name be blest. Could the world be about to turn?**

**Refrain: *My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn.***

**Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me,
and your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be.
Your very name puts the proud to shame, and those who would for you yearn,
you will show your might, put the strong to flight, for the world is about to turn. (Refrain)**

**From the halls of power to the fortress tower, not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears every tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more, for the food they can never earn;
there are tables spread; every mouth be fed, for the world is about to turn. (Refrain)**

**Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word that our forbears heard is the promise that holds us bound,
'Til the spear and rod be crushed by God, who is turning the world around. (Refrain)**

*OPENING PRAYER

God of carols that warm our hearts; we sing with the herald angels that *all* ye faithful are invited to Your presence found away in a manger. Let Your joy to the world continue to stir our souls. Let the question, what child *is this*, evoke and provoke new thoughts. God of carols that challenge and call us to remember that Your love is not finished in this world; help us continue to sing a weary world to rejoice this year. Help us continue to be caught up in a melody that we did not write and don't fully understand. Let Your holy

tune this year strangely warm our hearts and cause us to sing with gusto to You every day. Amen.

LIGHTING the ADVENT CANDLE of LOVE with MEDLEY of CAROLS

**Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains and the mountains in reply
echoing their joyous strains. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

**Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the
hay.**

**O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by. Yet in the dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and
fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.**

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of justice of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display God's glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

SERMON

Trees of Justice

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE and LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

OFFERING/ANTHEM

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Greg Stead, oboe

arr. John Ferguson

*DOXOLOGY/PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**What can I offer, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part; But what can I offer all my heart.**

*CLOSING HYMN

Joy to the World

**Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king; let every heart prepare
him room, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and
heaven and nature sing.**

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love.

*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Concerto for Oboe

by Cimarosa
arr. A Benjamin

ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ December 15, 2024

Christmas Cookie Extravaganza ~ Join us after the worship service~ **All are welcome!**

Thank you to *everyone* who helped us deck the halls, putting up wreaths and decorating yesterday as we continue to journey to Bethlehem!

Last Sunday, a question was asked, *why we are dimming the lights for the sermon at 11 a.m. service?* Great question!! This is a tradition going back to when Dr. John Syster and was done each week when Pastor Wes arrived. We stopped during COVID. There are several reasons we have resumed this practice. First, the lights in the chancel over the choir produce a lot of heat. This gives our amazing choir a few moments of reprieve during the service! Second, members of the choir and Worship Team agree that this helps focus the attention on the sermon. ***Please note that at 9 a.m. we do not dim the lights and Pastor Wes preaches from the aisle*** if that would be better for you. If you are finding it difficult to see with the lights off, please come talk to Pastor Wes.

Congratulations to **Kayla Taylor**, member of our church, who had her quote selected for Embracing our Differences display!! Kayla's quote is, "Cultivate kindness where weeds of hate and anger grow." **Thank you, Kayla for your inspiring words!!!!**

Christmas Love Offering ~ Every year the Mission Team has two major fundraisers—Christmas Love and Easter Love. At Christmas we concentrate our giving on local charities while the Easter focus is for national and worldwide charities. With each Love Offering we choose one organization that supports each of our three covenants. This year we have chosen: African American Studies at the Betty J. Johnson Library ~ Racial Justice Covenant; ALSO Youth ~ Open and Affirming Covenant; Sarasota Bay Estuary ~ Creation Justice Covenant. We are also supporting the following non-profit organizations who work hard to help our neighbors in need. We will be talking about some of these organizations in church during December: All Faiths Food Bank, All Faiths Backpack Program, Baby Basics, Resurrection House, Family Promise; SURE (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity; Second Chance Last Opportunity; UCC Christmas Fund. **Most of these programs have been helping those in our community whose homes were damaged from the hurricanes.** Many are adding to their programs as the needs in

our community continue to grow. Last year we raised \$16,000, and we have set our goal at \$20,000 this year. Please write your check to the church and put Christmas Love in the memo line. Blessings ~ Jan Andersen, Terri Crawford, Evelyn Crooks, Gretchen Friend-Jones, Toska Strong, Laura Taylor, Nancy Taylor

Please join us next **Sunday, December 22nd**, we will welcome brass and percussion from the Sarasota Orchestra for both the 9 am and 11 am worship services. Our choir will sing at both services for a traditional Lessons and Carols service. This worship service is sure to help prepare a place in your heart for Christ. Please plan to attend and bring a friend.

CALLING ALL BUCKET FILLERS ~ JOIN A TEAM IN 2025 ~Yes, YOU! We are blessed with so many opportunities to serve. There is joy in doing what we can to make a difference. **Won't you join us? What You Can Do:** Go to: uccsarasota.com; Select: About Us (at the top) and "Organization" from the dropdown menu; Scroll to: "Discover our Church's Organizational Structure ~ Check out the committees, groups and teams to learn more and open the "Statement on Structure" for specific tasks and meeting information. Contact a member of the Nominating Committee for more information: Carol McCloud, Harold Mezile, Nancy Morris

HOLIDAY HELP FOR FAMILY PROMISE ~ Due to the number of families displaced and/or facing damage from the storms, Family Promise currently has 200+ families to whom they are offering support. Family Promise could use gift cards from various stores (grocery, gas, Target, Walmart, VISA). We know there is a lot our church is already doing for the holidays, but if you would like to help, please buy whatever type and number of cards you would like to donate in amounts of \$10 or \$20 and return to the office in an envelope marked for Family Promise or give them to Ellen Marsey.

Drumming as a Spiritual Practice meets the first and third Tuesday in the **Chapel**. Our next meeting is on **Tues 12/17 at 3:00pm**. **New drummers are welcome;** drums are provided.

CHRISTMAS EVE ~~

4:00 p.m. ~ Pre-service music begins at **3:45** with guest musicians, **Betsy Hudson-Traba**, flute, and **Fernando Traba**, bassoon. On this holy night, we will blend poetry by soaking in God's love.

7:00 p.m. ~ Pre-service music at **6:40** with guest musicians **Natalie Helm**, cellist, and **Meghan Jones**, violinist. Our Chancel Choir will share special anthems and carols. Our children, youth and families will process the figures of the creche. With a holy hum that hovers throughout the entire service, we celebrate God's arrival in our hearts, homes, and world. **THIS SERVICE WILL BE LIVESTREAMED.**

11:00 p.m. ~ Arrive early at **10:40** to hear the beautiful pre-service music of cello, violin, and organ. Featured guest musicians from the Sarasota Orchestra are **Natalie Helm** and **Meghan Jones**. Communion will be celebrated at this service and as the seconds tick toward Midnight we join our voices in singing, "Silent Night" for all Sarasota to hear.

ONE service on December 29 at 11 a.m. ~ we will join on the *last* Sunday of 2024 and continue our Christmas Celebration. We welcome Stephen Fancher as our organist on this day.

"Unveiled Strength: Portraits of Intimacy and Vulnerability," featuring evocative works of award-winning Bradenton-based artist **Gary LaParl**, will be on display from **December 15, 2024, to January 16, 2025**, at the Lexow Gallery at Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota. This collection of portraits explores complex themes of male relationships and vulnerability, inviting viewers to engage with deep, often overlooked aspects of masculinity. The opening morning reception is Sunday, December 15, 11:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m. The evening reception is **Friday, January 10, 5-7 p.m.**

THIS WEEK

Sunday, December 15 ~ Third Sunday of Advent

9 a.m. ~ Early Service

11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online

Noon ~ Fellowship Time ~ COOKIE EXTRAVAGANZA!!

Monday, December 16

Prayer Circle at 1 p.m., Oasis and Zoom

Tuesday, December 17

Church Council meeting, 6:30 p.m., Syster Hall

Wednesday, December 18

Bible Study, 11 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom

Choir, 7 p.m., Chapel

Sunday, December 22 ~ Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ Lessons and Carols with Brass, Percussion and Choir at both services

9 a.m. ~ Early Service

11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online

Noon ~ Fellowship Time ~ Christmas Breads