

December 29, 2024 ~ 11:00 a.m.

# First Congregational UCC ~ Sarasota



# Celebrate Kwanzaa

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

[www.uccsarasota.com](http://www.uccsarasota.com)

PRELUDE

*African Noel*

arr. Aden Lewis

CELEBRATION of KWANZAA

Meaning of Kwanzaa

Barry Wells

Gift of Song

Dr. Marsha Kindall-Smith

4<sup>th</sup> Principle ~ Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)

Shavonda Griffin

\*OPENING HYMN

*The First Nowell* (vs. 1-3)

#139

**The first Nowell, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born in a manger, Emmanuel.**

**They looked above and saw a star shining in the east, beyond them far,  
And to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night.  
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born in a manger, Emmanuel.**

**And by the light of that same star three sages came from country far;  
To seek for a king was their intent and to follow the star wherever it went.  
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell, born in a manger, Emmanuel.**

\*OPENING PRAYER

**God on this last day of 2024, there is so much that we carry into the sanctuary. The pain of the past, the uncertainty of the future, the less-than-perfectness of this moment.**

*Moment of silence.*

**Let Your promise and possibility of Emmanuel find space today and every day in 2025. God of messy mangers continue to meet us in the dusty, drafty times of our life. God of diverse crowds who stood in the straw in awe, stir anew in our hearts. God of good news when the headlines only share bad news, grant us an openness to Your traces of grace. We offer You our bruises, brokenness, and boneheaded moments we'd rather forget. We offer You our human attempts to save the world.**

*Moment of silence.*

**Here we are, O God. Here You are, O God. Here we are together. May those three simple sentences be the foundation of our life every day in the year to come. Amen.**

\*RESPONSE

*See the Little Baby*

#147

**See the little baby born in a manger, on this Christmas morning, bright as the angels;  
See the little baby born in a manger, sing Noel! Sing Noel!  
There were shepherds keeping their watch over sheep as the angels sang. There were sages following the star. Sing Noel! Sing Noel!**

**See the little baby born in a manger, on this Christmas morning, bright as the angels;  
See the little baby born in a manger, sing Noel! Sing Noel!  
"Come and see," said Mary and Joseph; "Come and see what a wonderful child." Sheep and ox all gather around. Sing Noel! Sing Noel!**

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, <sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,’ ” <sup>4</sup> so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

SERMON

*Good News? Today!?*

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD’S PRAYER (NEW ZEALAND VERSION)

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever.**

OFFERING/ANTHEM

*Sing We Noel*

Goemanne

DOXOLOGY/PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**To God, all glorious heavenly Light,  
To Christ revealed in earthly night,  
To God the Spirit now we raise,  
Our joyful songs of thankful praise.**

\*CLOSING HYMN

*Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*

#129

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;  
now give heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today.  
Ox and ass before him bow, asleep within the manger now.  
Christ is born today, Christ is born today.**

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;  
now you know of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this!  
God has opened heaven’s door, and you are blessed forevermore.  
Christ was born for this, Christ was born for this.**

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;**

**now you need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save!  
Calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save, Christ was born to save.**

\*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ December 29, 2024**

**Kwanzaa Celebration TODAY** ~ please join us for homemade sweet potato pie by **local Chef Rosalind Hill**, **DJ Paul** will play music, and **Shavonda Griffin** will display her local business. **Thank you to Jim and Priscilla Crumel, Lindsey Huddleston, Lois and David Wilkins** for all their help organizing.

**Christmas Love Offering** ~ 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.** 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.

**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](http://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

**The Wayless Way Offering ~ Your Life as a Curriculum ~ NEW offering for 2025** ~ The event will be **hybrid** (in the Oasis Center and Zoom). **January 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> 4 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.** As we begin a New Year, we will listen to our lives as one way God shows up. Beginning on Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, we will gather to open our hearts to God who is moving in our lives through prayer, hymns, and scripture. Throughout the month we will learn more about Family Systems Theory (January 13<sup>th</sup>); Praying the Wayless Way (January 20<sup>th</sup>); and Listen/ Discerning God in our Lives (January 27<sup>th</sup>). Please note, while there is a thread that will connect each week, you are welcome to attend when you are able without missing a beat. **For more information and to register for the conversation, please contact Pastor Wes.**

**Year-End Contributions** ~ According to the IRS, the year a contribution can be deducted is based on the date when the donor relinquishes control of the money. That means we will be handling your contributions as follows:

	IRS Deduction Year
Checks dated December 2024 received by the Church in December 2024	2024
Checks dated December 2024, postmarked in 2024 received by the Church in January 2024	2024
Checks dated December 2024 received in offering plate January 2025 (backdated)	2025
Checks dated December 2024, postmarked in 2025 received by the Church in January 2025(backdated)	2025
Checks dated January 2025 received in offering plate December 2024 (post-dated)	2025
Checks dated December 2024 received in 2024 as a pre-payment of 2025 pledge	2024

Women's Association Program for **Tuesday, January 7, 2025** ~ **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) from Immokalee, FL.** Our presenter will be **Silvia Perez, Senior Staff Member of the CIW.** She will be ably assisted by **Giselle Ramirez, Campaign Coordinator and Translator.** Silvia's presentation will provide: 1. an overview of the formation of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in the early 1990s; 2. an account of the victories of the Campaign for Fair Food - which educates consumers on the issue of farm labor exploitation and forges alliances between farm workers and consumers in an effort to enlist the market power of major corporate buyers to help end the exploitation; 3. background information on the creation of the Food Program; 4. an update on the fight for farm worker human rights today. **All are welcome.** Come to Fellowship Hall at 11:30 am, enjoy lunch at 12 noon (\$15), and our program at 12:30. Please sign up after church service, or call the church office, 941-953-7044. We are asking for donations of printer paper and/or other office supplies for the CIW staff.

**Sacred Conversations on Race ~ January 8 and 22 at 3 p.m.** ~ hybrid and Oasis Center. On January 8 we will discuss the poem, Joy is the Justice We Give Ourselves and on January 22 we will discuss Letter from the Birmingham Jail. ALL are welcome.

**Artful Prayer ~ Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2 p.m.** ~ Oasis Center or Zoom ~ **Prayers of Gratitude for the New Year** ~ *Led by Lindsey Huddleston.* We usually have New Year's Resolutions. Let's add prayers of GRATITUDE as we begin 2025. Come and share fun, creative, and imaginative ways to inspire our sense of Thanksgiving for the blessings in our lives. This practice positively changes our mindset. For those at home on Zoom, have paper, crayons/markers, or colored pencils available. Contact Pastor Wes for the Zoom link.

"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 evening reception is Friday, January 10, 5-7 p.m.**

**January 18 ~ Bobby Jo Valentine in concert at 4 p.m. in the sanctuary.** Bobby Jo offers catching songs with good tunes and intelligent, thoughtful lyrics in the tradition of Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens and Bruce Hornsby. A free will offering to benefit ALSO Youth.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> Syster Hall @ Noon “The Church as Eco-System” Robert E. Shore-Goss and Sarah J. Melcher will speak on January 19<sup>th</sup> “The Church as Eco-System.”** We will explore the history of the land First Congregational United Church of Christ occupies, who lived there before us, how they cared for the land, and how we can live a sustainable present and future on the land the church occupies.

**ANNUAL MEETING ~ JANUARY 26<sup>TH</sup> ~ Noon ~ Sanctuary or Livestreamed** This year at our annual meeting we will vote on: *Financial Reports 2024, Budget 2025, Nominating Report (Leadership Team) 2025.* We will celebrate the work of this past year: Sacred Conversations on Race, Bible Study, Artful Prayer, Drumming, Choir, worship, new members, and the vital/vibrant Spirit that guides our church. The Annual Report will be posted on the website **January 12<sup>th</sup>.** Financials available via email or in the church office. Paper ballots are available in the office to vote beforehand. Questions? See Moderator Harold Mezile

### **THIS WEEK**

**Sunday, December 29 ~ Honoring Kwanzaa ~ ONE SERVICE ~ Stephen Fancher organist**

11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online

Noon ~ Fellowship Time ~ featuring DJ Paul and Kwanzaa food

**Wednesday, January 1, 2025 ~ Church Office Closed ~ Happy New Year!!**

**Thursday, January 2**

Choir Rehearsal, 7 p.m., Chapel

**January 4**

Young Adult Service Project, 2 p.m.

**Sunday, January 5, 2025 ~ Stephen Fancher organist**

9 a.m. ~ Worship, Chapel

11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online

Noon ~ Fellowship Time ~ Birthday Sunday