

December 31, 2023~ 11:00 a.m.  
**First Congregational UCC ~ Sarasota**



1031 S. Euclid Ave. Sarasota, FL 34237 ~ (941) 953-7044  
[www.uccsarasota.com](http://www.uccsarasota.com)

**December 31, 2023**

**11 a.m.**

Flowers given by: **Dennis and Evelyn Crooks**, celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary

PRELUDE *Mary Had a Baby* arr. Noel Rawsthorne

CELEBRATION of KWANZAA David Wilkins  
POEM *I Too* by Langston Hughes Jim Crumel

INTROIT *African Noel* arr. Aden Lewis

\*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 2023, we pause both to look backwards and forwards. As we  
rewind and review the last three hundred sixty-five days we remember moments of  
goodness and grace. We recall moments of heartbreak and soul ache. We pause to  
breathe in Your presence right here and now.**

*Pause.*

**We trust that You are our help in ages past and our hope for the year to come. We trust  
in Your unconditional love to lead us and Your unceasing grace to ground us amid the  
whipping, whirling winds of change and uncertainty today. We need You to take our  
hand, O God, in the midst of the storms. Help us prayerfully find ways to forgive, to let go  
of our white-knuckled grip on life, and to notice when the gospels of domination, pain,  
revenge, hurt and harm so shape our lives that Your good news has no manger-size place  
to rest and reside. Be with us, O God, as the second tick closer to 2024, inviting us to  
again fling open the door of our heart to Your wisdom and love as faithful ingredients to  
help us grow in the coming year. Amen.**

\*RESPONSE *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* (vs. 1 & 4) #131

**It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold;  
"Peace on the earth, good will to all, great news of joy we bring."  
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.**

**For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophet bards foretold,  
When with the ever circling years come round the age of gold;  
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling.  
And all the world send back the song which now the angels sing.**

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup> When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. <sup>44</sup> Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents <sup>[1]</sup> saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." <sup>49</sup> He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup> Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.

SERMON

*Growing in God*

PASTORAL PRAYER 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

*Brightest and Best*

Paul Sjolund

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

*In Dulci Jubilo*

arr. Wilbur Held

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ SUNDAY, December 31, 2023**

**NEW Year ~ NEW Worship experience.** Beginning on **January 7<sup>th</sup> the 9 a.m.** worship service will move to **8:45 a.m. in the chapel.** This new service will allow interaction and an intimate setting. If you have questions, please see Pastor Wes

Next Sunday, January 7, is the collection of non-perishable foods for All Faith's Food Bank. The rule of thumb for donating is, "if you would enjoy having it, they would appreciate having it." Please be sure everything has an expiration date of mid 2025 or later. There will be a basket in the narthex labeled **ALL FAITH'S FOOD BANK.** Please place your items in the basket or next to it if the basket is full. If you have any questions please contact Ellen Marsey, co-chair of the Food and Hunger Group.

**The Wayless Way ~ Your Life as a Curriculum ~ NEW offering for 2024** ~ As we begin a New Year, we will launch twice monthly conversations centering around a book with Pastor Wes weaving insights from scripture and inspiration. You do not need to attend all the sessions, but there will be a thread that will run from session to session. In January, we will focus on *Build the Life You Want* by Arthur C. Brooks and Oprah Winfrey (January 8 and 29). In February, *Hope Leans Forward* by Valerie Brown (February 12 and 26). In March, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen (March 11 and 25). In April, *No Cure for Being Human* by Kate Bowler (April 8 and 22). *The Seventh Story Podcasts* by Brian McLaren (May 13). On each of the Mondays above, we will gather at 4 p.m. and finish by 5:15 p.m. For more information, specific reading plan, and to register for the conversation, please contact Pastor Wes. The event will be hybrid (Oasis & Zoom).

To ring in the New Year on **Tuesday, January 2, 2024**, the UCC Women's Association will host Bohdana Puzyk and Katia Shevchuk from the **Ukrainian National Women's League of America** (UNWLA). Come to Fellowship Hall at 11:30 and enjoy lunch (\$12), followed by the program. The ladies from Ukraine will display show-and-tell items including embroidery and handmade Ukrainian Easter Eggs. They will also tell us about the traditions of Ukrainian Christmas. **All are welcome.** Please sign up to attend after Sunday worship or call the church office at 941-953-7044.

**Our new Core Values are: Welcome, Worship, Caring, Belonging, Justice, and Faithfulness.** After worship on January 7<sup>th</sup> in Syster Hall, as you are enjoying birthday cake, Jim Butterworth and I will lead a conversation on these Core Values. We encourage you to attend.

**Sacred Conversations on Race** continues **January 10<sup>th</sup> at 3 p.m.:** we will watch a sermon by General Minister of the UCC, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, given at the Florida Conference UCC Annual Meeting. On **January 24<sup>th</sup>** we will read and discuss, Toni Morrison's *Recitatif*. Please note, if you read the Morrison book, you need to **skip** the introduction, read the story first between two women – one black and one white – which Morrison doesn't specify in the story the race of each woman. After you experience the story, you can read the introduction for Morrison's insights into race. All are welcome! You can join either in person in the **Oasis Center or Zoom**. Please see Jim Crumel for more information.

On **Friday, January 12**, in honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr weekend, we warmly welcome **Dr. Keith Hampton** to our church for a concert at **7 p.m.** in the sanctuary. On Saturday, Dr. Hampton will work with our choir. On Sunday, **January 14<sup>th</sup> at both the 8:45 am and 11 am service**, Dr. Hampton will help lead our prayer and praise of God! This is an amazing opportunity to welcome back Dr. Hampton who will bless us. Also on **Dr. King Monday**, our church will participate in a march for unity with our neighbors. The march begins at 11 a.m. at the Robert Taylor Community Center walking one (1) mile to Dr. King Memorial Park in Sarasota. **You do need to sign up** by this Sunday. You can talk to Pastor Wes or Jim Crumel. Participation is **free**, but the witness to the world for unity is priceless! On January 14 after worship, COLLAGE will offer a conversation about ALSO Youth and reaching out to young adults in our community.

Friends of the Betty J. Johnson Library will host a M.L.K. Book Sale on **Saturday, January 20** from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 2801 Newtown Blvd. Please support our local library!

On **January 21**, SURE (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity) will host a Network Meeting for our church. This gathering in Syster Hall will offer us updates since our House Meeting in October on the work that is happening in Affordable Housing, Restorative Justice in the Schools, and Criminal Justice in our State. Please plan to attend as we look toward the **Nehemiah Action on March 18<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m.** at our church!

**Annual Meeting ~ January 28<sup>th</sup>** The Annual Meeting for First Congregational UCC will be held on **January 28<sup>th</sup> immediately following the worship service in the sanctuary**. The meeting will be livestreamed on **YouTube and Facebook**. If you are not able to attend in person, you can pick up a **paper ballot to vote in the office**. This year at our annual meeting we will vote on: Financial Reports 2023, Budget 2024 and Nominating Report. Celebrate all the ways we have shared God's love this year!! The Annual Report will be available on the website on **January 14, 2024**. Financials will be available either in church or via email from the church office. If you desire a paper copy, please contact the office. Questions? Please see Moderator Nancy Morris

## **CALENDAR**

### **Sunday, December 31**

Sunday Worship, 11 a.m., in Sanctuary and online  
Fellowship, noon, Syster Hall

### **Monday, January 1, 2024**

Church Office Closed

### **Tuesday, January 2**

First UCC Women's Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m., Syster Hall  
First UCC Women's Luncheon, 11:30 a.m., Syster Hall  
Tuesday Night Bible Study, 6:30 p.m., Zoom

### **Wednesday, January 3**

Wednesday Morning Bible Study, 11 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom  
Worship Team, 1 pm., Zoom  
Church Choir, 7 p.m., Chapel

### **Thursday, January 4**

Plymouth Harbor Circle Meeting, 2 p.m., MacNeil Chapel

### **Saturday, January 6**

Celebration of Life for **Lovette W. Haper**, 11 a.m., Sanctuary and online

### **Sunday, January 7**

Early Worship, 8:45 a.m., Chapel  
Sunday Worship, 11 a.m., in Sanctuary and online  
Fellowship, noon, Syster Hall ~ Core Values Conversation

### **90+ Wise Birthdays ~ December ~ Please help us shower with cards:**

Dotty Pickett ~ 12/6  
Clara Menchinger ~ 12/20  
Patricia McCloskey ~ 12/31  
Ellie White ~ 12/31

### **Upcoming Celebrations of Life:**

**Wes Curry** ~ Saturday, January 20 at 2 pm ~ Sanctuary