



February 2024



First Congregational UCC



On February 14, 1954, our church held the first worship service at the Women’s Club Building, which currently is where Florida Studio Theater is located.

Rev. Walter Whitney led that service. He was 73 years old, had just established a church in Ft. Lauderdale, and was eager to establish a flourishing church here in Sarasota. A small notice was placed in the local paper along with some personal invitations. Sixty-three people attended the service on that Sunday evening of Valentine’s Day.

Looking back, being founded on the day that celebrates love seems appropriate for our church. We are a people passionate about sharing God’s love for this world. We are a people persuaded that love is needed now in our world. We are a people whose purpose is to experience and embody love in our families, friends, community, neighborhoods, and around the world.

In February, we kick off a **celebration 70 years** in the making. We will honor the past ~ those who dreamed dreams and whose voices are woven into the woodwork and walls around us. We will commit to the present moment of being the church ~ with all the opportunities and obstacles of these days. We will pledge to let the light of God shine for the next 70 years!

There is much happening in February when we will honor **Black History Month**. Here are but a few of the many, many faithful experiences that the coming month holds for you:

<https://www.uccsarasota.com> ~ 941-953-7044

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
With Us*

Worship ~ 8:45 a.m. in the Chapel

Worship ~ 11:00 a.m. in person in the Sanctuary and livestreamed on YouTube and Facebook.

**Visit our website at
<https://www.uccsarasota.com>**

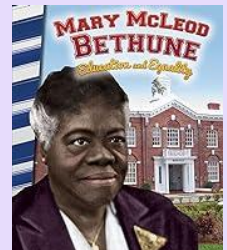
WORSHIP
8:45 in the Chapel and 11 a.m. in the Sanctuary
(Livestreamed every Sunday at 11 a.m.)

February 4th ~ We will begin the month with communion at both services. Your Worship Team is continuing to explore meaningful ways of celebrating Christ's table.

- **8:45 a.m.** ~ We will celebrate communion via intinction.
- **11 a.m.** ~ You will be invited to come forward for communion (bread cube and grape). For those who need to be served in the pew, the Worship Team will be delighted to bring the elements to you. Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 8:22-25.

February 11th ~ We will listen to the call to let our light shine.

- **8:45 a.m.** ~ Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 8:16-18.
- **11 a.m.** ~ **Priscilla Crumel, honoring Black History Month,** will bring to life the story of Mary McLeod Bethune ~ a pioneering educator and college founder. This will be an amazing Sunday!



Wednesday, February 14th ~ **Ash Wednesday** ~ **Beginning of Lent**

- **Noon** ~ We will offer a traditional Ash Wednesday service in the chapel. Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 9:12-22, Who Do **YOU** Say Jesus Is? Ashes will be available for anyone who wishes.
- **5:30 p.m.** ~ We will offer a wonderful worship opportunity in Syster Hall, which is holy ground from our worship there this summer. We will enjoy a simple soup dinner. Then, around tables, we will begin the Lenten Theme of Connecting Conversations. There will be a few hymns mixed in and ashes available at the close of the service. **Please note the 5:30 p.m. gathering is not the traditional experience, but will be worship nevertheless.**



February 18th ~ **70th Anniversary Celebration at both services.**

Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 10 ~ the 72 Disciples being sent out. **Following the 11 a.m. service there is an ALL-church potluck celebration. Please plan to attend! (See Page 4)**

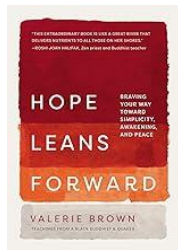


February 25th ~ We continue the season of Lent by leaning in and listening to the parable of the Good Samaritan as we continue to celebrate Black History month.

FEAST RETURNS: During February, we welcome the return of **FEAST** (**F**riends **E**ating **A**nd **S**tudying **T**ogether). We will meet on Thursday mornings beginning **February 22** (as well as **February 29**, **March 7** and **14**) at **10:30 a.m.** for coffee, fruit, and goodies. This will be a holy time of conversations that connect us. Lent this year is a time to celebrate our relationships as a church, as well as welcome new folks to share parts of their life and faith. We live in a world where isolation is a problem, this gathering will offer the holy experience of sharing stories and getting to know each other better. **Please plan to attend and bring 10 friends!!**

WAYLESS WAY BOOK CLUB

continues in February with the book, *Hope Leans Forward: Braving Your Way toward Simplicity, Awakening, and Peace* by Valerie Brown.



Rev. Brown is an ordained Buddhist teacher and Quaker who calls us to stretch in the direction of goodness, kindness, forgiveness, and vulnerability while acknowledging that fear and anxiety is all too real in our world.

The Wayless Way Book Club gathers on **February 12 and 26 at 4 p.m.** in the Oasis Center and Zoom ~ YOU are always welcome.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

In the following pages you will see many more opportunities for us to connect with each other and live our **Core Values of justice, belonging, welcome, worship, caring, and faithfulness.** These are not just words on a page, these are lights that guide and ground us as God's people in these days. As we celebrate 70 years of ministry, enter the season of Lent, live our covenants, and prayerfully seek to be the people of God in these days, it remains a **joy** to be your pastor.

With gratitude and love ~ *Wes*

Join the Zoom Conversations



COLLAGE We meet the **4th Tuesday @ 11 a.m.** ~ COLLAGE is our LGBTQIA+ 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 upcoming Sunday Bible passage.

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

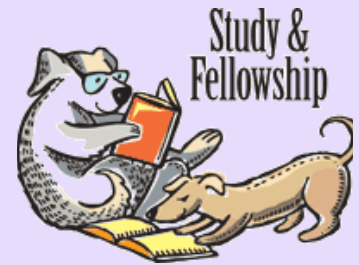
SCOR (Sacred Conversations on Race) 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @ 3 p.m. ~ **HYBRID** in the Oasis Center.

Zoom links available through Pastor Wes

The Wayless Way ~ Your Life as a Curriculum (Hybrid Oasis Center/Zoom)

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.

- **February 12th & 26th:** *Hope Leans Forward* by Valerie Brown
- **March 11th & 25th:** *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen
- **April 8th & 22nd:** *No Cure for Being Human* by Kate Bowler
- **May 13th:** *The Seventh Story* by Brian McLaren



On each of these Mondays, 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.** We have a few books to loan out and scholarships are available. I hope you will sign up with me.



Let's Celebrate, Celebrate!

~ **February 18th Special Anniversary Luncheon** ~
after the 11 a.m. service

We will be celebrating three significant events in the life of our church:

- 70 years since the founding of First Congregational UCC
- 35 years of Greg Chestnut as our Minister of Music
- 10 years of Pastor Wes Bixby as our Senior Minister



We need your help!

If you can, please bring a side dish to share.
We will provide chicken (*remember our delicious fall picnic*),
beverages, and, of course, a special cake.

Please join us for this joyous occasion!

Thinking of Joining our Church?



On **March 3rd** 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 17th** at either the 8:45 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.



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES ~



Christmas Love 2023 ~ Our Best Ever!

The Mission Team was overwhelmed by your generosity this **Christmas Love Season**. As of January 10th, we have received **\$20,117.55**.

For the first time in my four years on the committee, we were able to increase our giving where we felt it was needed most without sacrificing what we give to the other organizations. That extra money makes a huge difference to our community.



Bless you one and all for your caring and generous hearts. We are truly excited about the future of our church because of your commitment to mission.



Your Mission Team

Jan Andersen, Janet Kamm, Gretchen Friend Jones, Nancy Taylor, Terri Crawford

SURE Rally ~ February 27th @ 6 p.m. Bethlehem Bible Church (1680 18th St.)

At the rally, we will hear updates on SURE initiatives of **Affordable/Attainable Housing, Avoiding Out-of-School Suspensions** (*aka Restorative Justice Practices*), and **Civil Citations** (*to avoid arrest records, originally focusing on school-age youth.*)



As you know, SURE is **Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity**. Our church initiated this program over 20 years ago and has been joined by approximately 20 other local congregations to work for justice and to make improvements in Sarasota where needed. However, we are still suffering the effects of Covid which caused a decline in participation. We are in the process of re-building with our new lead organizer, McKenzie Grimes.

The rally is a great opportunity to generate enthusiasm for SURE and for our **Great Assembly on March 18th** at our church. Let's get things moving again, for SURE! Join us!

Food Collection for All Faiths Food Bank ~ February 4th



In just four months, we have collected **1120 lbs.** of food. The **first Sunday of each month** is the collection of non-perishable foods for the food bank.

Any items in jars and/or cans along with items that have a long shelf life like pasta, pudding, Jello etc., are appreciated. The old standby items of peanut butter, jelly and spaghetti sauce are also needed.

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 2024 or later.

There will be a basket in the narthex labeled **ALL FAITHS FOOD BANK**. Please place your items in the basket or next to it if the basket is full.

**Special thanks to Mark Swain
who delivers our donations each month!**

Thank you for your generosity in these times of increased food insecurity.
Your Food & Hunger Group



Bread for the World Offering of Letters ~ March 3rd

This year our church will join with St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Faith Lutheran Church, and St. Andrew UCC in **Bread for the World's 2024 Offering of Letters**. The Offering of Letters will focus on passing the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill sets national policies for nutrition, agriculture, conservation, and forestry. It provides nutrition assistance to millions of Americans through programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), which typically gets **the largest funding share** of any program in the Farm Bill.



The Farm Bill is scheduled to be reauthorized by Congress every five years. We will write to our representatives in Congress asking them to reauthorize the Farm Bill. We will hand deliver those letters, with the other Sarasota churches mentioned, to the offices of Representatives Greg Steube and Vern Buchanan.

Our Offering of Letters will take place March 3rd, after church, in Syster Hall.
Please mark your calendars!

**As this is the church's 70th anniversary,
it is our goal to write 70 letters.**



Prayer Shawl Ministry ~ February 21st

Calling all knitters and crocheters! The next gathering of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Group will be on **Wednesday, February 21st, from 2 – 3:30 p.m. at Lindsey Huddleston’s home.**

Contact Lindsey for address and directions (romamor@aol.com) or (630-338-9294)

Refreshments will be served.

*“A prayer shawl is a comforting and warm surrounding of the love of my church family.”
~ Gib Mitchell*

Community Meal ~ February 27th

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 on-site set-up/serving/clean-up functions at St. Paul’s Fellowship Hall. We will be providing a favorite—**strawberry shortcake**. Please contact Carol Hagglund for details.



Please join us on **February 27th from 4-6:30 p.m.** Thank you for all you do for those in need.

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

Baby Basics of Sarasota ~ *Book Donations Needed*



While Baby Basics is known for providing free diapers and kindness, they are also interested in providing children’s books to inspire parents to read to their little ones.

Our UCC Women are collecting new/gently used books aimed for ages birth to age three. You will find a book bag in the Narthex where you can place your donations. You may also bring your books to the UCC Women’s Luncheon on **February 6th.**

Thank you for making a difference!

CREATION JUSTICE NEWS



What is an Estuary? *by Lucy Tobias*

What is an estuary? It is a water passage where the tide meets a river current plus water flowing into the passage through a watershed.

Have we got one? Yep. Every time you cross over the John Ringling Bridge, you are going over part of the Sarasota Bay Estuary. Sarasota Bay as we know it today was formed some 5,000 years ago. The U.S. Congress named our bay an estuary of national significance in 1989. We live inland.

Why should we care about an estuary? The area around the bay, far inland, is a watershed. What you do in your garden, like fertilizing and using pesticides, affects an estuary. Pollution goes into the ground and trickles down through urbanized areas until it reaches the mangrove wetlands and enters Sarasota Bay estuary, then into the Gulf of Mexico through one of the Bay's four passes.

Is anyone monitoring the estuary? Yes. The Sarasota Bay Estuary program works with many partners to improve water quality and restore wildlife habitats. Sarasota Bay's value to nearby counties is estimated to be 11.8 billion dollars.

How can we help? Get involved as a volunteer. The Sarasota Bay Guardians engages people of all ages in the ongoing restoration of Sarasota Bay.

Some upcoming events:

- A full moon paddle at **Robinson Preserve** on **January 26th**
- **Myakka Headwaters Preserve** planting on **February 17th** ~ several hundred native wetland trees will be planted along the Myakka River. **Grab a shovel and go!**



OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT NEWS



February COLLAGE Meeting

~ Oasis Center ~

February 27th @ 11 a.m.

**COLLAGE EVENTS ~ Syster Hall ~ after 11 a.m. service
All are welcome!**

- ❖ **February 11th Luncheon:** Guest Speaker Gina Leigh Duncan, Chairperson of TransAction, Florida's Advisory Council, Equality Florida's Transgender Inclusion Initiative and is a national speaker specializing in LGBTQ dynamics. Point persons—John Ristow and Deb Hays.
- ❖ **March 10th Luncheon:** Guest Speaker Sarah Wertheimer, Executive Director of Embracing our Differences. (*First Congregational UCC is a sponsor of Embracing our Differences.*) Point persons—Barbara Shaver and Sara Little.
- ❖ **March 23rd Church-Wide Pet Blessing:** A collaboration between COLLAGE and the Green Team. Point persons--Cas Burleson, Sarah Melcher, and Maggie Revere. (*See related article on Page 11*).

Project Pride SRQ Thank You



"As we turn the page from 2023 to 2024, we want to sincerely thank you again for all your generous contributions, which were pivotal in the success of Project Pride SRQ's 2023. Your support signifies a collective commitment to fostering a community of diversity, equality, and love, extending beyond financial assistance. We are thrilled to recognize and express our gratitude to the sponsors who stood by us throughout this remarkable journey."—*Project Pride Board of Directors.*



**Among the many sponsors, you will find
First Congregational UCC listed. (*We are one of only two church sponsors!*)**

RACIAL JUSTICE COVENANT NEWS



Sacred Conversations on Race (SCOR) ~ February 14th & 28th

SCOR meets the **second and fourth Wednesdays at 3 p.m.**
~HYBRID~ in person at the Oasis Center or on Zoom.

~ February 14th ~

"Belonging, A Critical Piece of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion"
~ TED Talk by Carin Taylor

~ February 28th ~

"The Little Problem I Had Renting a House" ~
TED Talk by James A. White, Sr.



All are welcome! Please see Jim Crumel for more information.

MLK Jr. Walk for Unity



IN OTHER NEWS . . .



Artful Prayer ~ Thursday, February 8th 2 p.m. ~ Oasis Center or Zoom

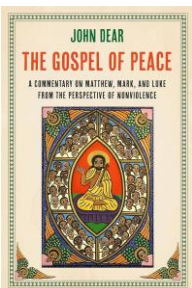
Looking for ways to renew your prayer practice in fun creative ways? Artful Prayer may be for you! No art experience required. Sessions are in person and on Zoom (**Contact church office or Pastor Wes for the zoom link.**) Supplies are provided if attending in person.



Watch the newsletter and weekly messages for specific information and supply list each month. Check out YouTube for recordings of previous sessions (*search Artful Prayer First Congregational UCC Sarasota*).

February's session is led by **Cindy Woodling** and celebrates **Valentine's Day with a focus on the heart**—as an icon, a message of love, and a vital part of life. Supplies required for zoom participants are paper, colored pencils/crayons/marker.

An Evening with Father John Dear, on his new book: *The Gospel of Peace* March 17th ~ Lakewood UCC, St. Petersburg, FL



On the afternoon of Sunday, March 17th, peacemaker, author, and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Father John Dear, will be at Lakewood UCC (St. Pete) to talk about and sign copies of his new book: *The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence*. It is the first ever commentary on the Synoptic Gospels from the perspective of active nonviolence in the tradition of Gandhi and Dr. King. This original work explores every line of the three Synoptic Gospels pointing out Jesus' practice and teachings on nonviolence, peace, and universal love. Lakewood UCC is located at 2601 54th Avenue S., St. Petersburg, FL.

Gather beforehand at **3:30 p.m.** for "Irish refreshments."

Books are currently available at a discounted price of \$25. Please contact Barbara Smith-Bacon regarding book orders or a possible study group.



<https://www.uccsarasota.com> ~ 941-953-7044

**First UCC Women's Luncheon ~ February 6th
11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall**



Please join the UCC Women's Association for their monthly lunch and program on Tuesday, February 6th at 11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall. We will hear from Lt. Col. Matthews about the **Sarasota branch of the Salvation Army.** She will explain their many life-changing programs and how we can help.

Our church boasts four individuals who serve on the Board of Advisors: Warren Bacon, Dale Woodling, Deborah Hayes, and Lynn Jones. All will be on hand to share their experiences. **Luncheon costs \$12.** Sign up after either Sunday service or call the church office at 941-953-7044. If you have any questions, please contact Lucy Hedrick, 203-561-9590 or lucy@lucyhedrick.com.

Please bring new/gently used baby books for ages birth to three for Baby Basics, Sarasota.

"All Creatures Great & Small Pet Blessing"

Save the date ~ Saturday, March 23rd from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. where Pastor Wes will be on hand throughout the event to bless your pets. Local pet rescue shelters will be here, as well as Southeastern Guide Dogs.



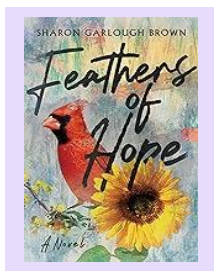
We are looking for photos of you and your pets to be included on our "UCC Members Love Our Pets" photo board which will be displayed before and during the event.

Please contact Maggie Revere at baypointgirls@comcast.net for details or how you can help!

This is a church-wide, family-friendly event hosted by COLLAGE and the Green Team. All are welcome!

Ready Readers ~ February 8th

We meet on the **second Thursday of each 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 discussion. For more information, contact Sandy Smith at sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 340-227-5121.



Feathers of Hope by Sharon Garlough Brown. "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen." (2 Corinthians 4:18) In a season of loss and change, Wren Crawford and her great-aunt, Katherine Rhodes, share the journey as companions in sorrow and hope.

But the shedding of her old life is exhausting—especially as she doesn't yet see what new life will emerge. How might art continue to provide a pathway for deepening her awareness of God's presence with her?

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT . . .



Dr. Keith Hampton, Director of Music and Organist at Saint Thomas Episcopal Church and Assistant Director of Music at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago . . .

From Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby's sermon, "Living the Promise of Baptism", (January 14th, 2024)

*"Sometimes a law is just in its words, but unjust in its application." —Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." —Luke 3:21-22*

*"We're living in a time though when so often our laws are **not** just in just their application, but also in their words. Laws that are unjust because they take the right to vote. Laws that are unjust because they discriminate based on the color of your skin or who you love, or your gender identity. We continue the work of Dr. King to stand up against those laws today." —Rev. Dr. Wes Bixby*

**To hear this section again, visit our YouTube channel @ the 45-minute mark into the service.*

February Birthdays



February Anniversaries



- | | | | |
|------|---|------|----------------------------------|
| 2/1 | Beverly Carrington | 2/13 | Terri Crawford |
| 2/2 | Roger Morris
Joanne Warman | 2/14 | Nancy Michel
Laura VanArsdall |
| 2/3 | Bud Rives
Richard Strong | 2/16 | Garvey McFarlane |
| 2/4 | Marilyn Brandt
Natasha Bryant
Dale Woodling | 2/18 | Harold Kamm |
| 2/5 | Sarah Melcher | 2/19 | Rick McDaniel |
| 2/6 | Ann Spencer | 2/20 | Karen Abel
Marlene Goldberger |
| 2/7 | Kyle Kuhn
Nydia Muniz-Smith | 2/23 | Barbara Smith-Bacon |
| 2/8 | Lindsey Huddleston | 2/24 | Warren Bacon
Jean Simpson |
| 2/10 | Carole Patterson
Roxane Schwoch | 2/25 | David Pitt |
| 2/12 | Barbara Yocum | 2/28 | Connie Schaefer |

- | | |
|------|------------------------------|
| 2/1 | Barbara Shaver & Sara Little |
| 2/16 | Mark & Dawn Swain |

90+ Wise Birthday

~ Card Shower ~



2/4 ~ Marilyn Brandt



February 17, 1961 ~ Plans proposed to build Plymouth Retirement Community.

February 7, 1962 ~ Three mortgages burned (\$35,000) to build first school building and Fellowship Hall.

February 6, 1963 ~ Endowment Fund established.

February 7, 1993 ~ Groundbreaking for Orchard Place, a 40-unit facility for those physically challenged.

February 13, 1994 ~ Jaeckel organ dedicated.



*Carrie Metzger
Chris Pickett*



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



The 2024 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 Harold Mezile
 Vice Moderator Carol McCloud
 Past Moderator Nancy Morris
 Co-treasurers Robin Reich & Roxanne Schwoch
 Pastor Emeritus Dr. John Syster
 Contributing Photographer Susan Moore
 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.

