



March 2024



First Congregational UCC

Gospel Medicine!

One of the invitations of Lent is to be aware and awake to what is grounding and guiding you in life. There are so many gospels in the world that preach and proclaim to us ~ telling us what to do and promising us fame or fortune or our best life ever! Yet, the good news of God’s unconditional and unceasing love is one that we open our minds, hearts, souls, and whole lives to every Sunday.

A wonderful invitation would be to read the Gospel of Luke from beginning to end this March as you prepare for Holy Week.

I just heard the moans and groans and the “You can’t make me.”

If that feels like too much, what if you read what I believe to be the Gospel in a nutshell ~ the **Parable of the Good Samaritan** (Luke 10:25-37) and the **Parable of the Prodigal Family** (Luke 15:11-32). For me, these two narratives represent the **Gospel Medicine to our lives**.



The Good Samaritan

In these stories we explore what a full, authentic life looks like ~ this is the lawyer’s question in Luke 10.

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 ~ 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>**

The response doesn't come from Jesus, but from the lawyer himself ~ because often behind and beneath our questions we have some sense of an answer, but we may be confused or uncertain and want confirmation from someone else. The lawyer's response is to love God fully ~ from the top of our heads to our pinkie toes **AND** let that love loose on your neighbor.

This provokes Jesus telling us a parable where neighborliness has nothing to do with your address or the person who lives next door. Neighborliness has everything to do with how we reach out to others, especially those on the fringe and fray; those lost and lonely and left out; those sitting by a pool of their own tears. It isn't just our beliefs, but how our values take on flesh ~ just as God took on flesh and breath and bone. Just as Jesus dined with the outcasts, the nobodies by societal standards but somebodies by God's standards! There is so much more to this parable too. What if you got out your Bible and read it. If you have questions, let's talk!



The other Gospel within the Gospel is of the Prodigal Family (*Yes, I know usually it is just the son who is called this, but it really is the whole family who has an outlandishness to them*). This parable provokes our own emotions around family, siblings, parents, people who have dropped the ball on responsibility and left us hanging, and people who try to advise and fix and save us when we didn't ask for their help.

There is so much in the parable that is worth exploring to see what is awakened in your awareness right here and now. Again, if you have questions about this parable, let's talk! Or better yet, come to the **Wayless Way Book Club** on **March 11th and 25th** when we will discuss the classic, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri J.M. Nouwen.

The more we explore the Gospel story as singing to our story, the more that **Good News** is not just information for our heads, but transformation for our hearts and whole lives.

I will preach on both parables, but there is more in these words than one sermon or a lifetime of sermons could fully explore or exhaust. I pray you are finding ways to connect with Your divine dustiness this Lent. I pray you are finding ways to reach out with neighborliness, especially to people you are not sure you love or can love you.

I pray God is granting you a holy Lent as we prepare for our Holiest Week, March 24-31.

God's blessings and love ~ *Wes*

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



*Please note that on Palm Sunday, March 24,
and Easter Sunday, March 31,
the 8:45 a.m. service will be at 9:00 a.m.
in the Sanctuary*

March 3 ~ Beyond Binary part 1 ~ focusing on Luke 10 ~ the narrative of Mary and Martha. We will celebrate communion at both the 8:45 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services.

March 10 ~ Beyond Binary part 2 ~ focusing on the Parable of the Prodigal Family ~ Luke 15.

March 17 ~ Endowment Sunday ~ Beyond Binary part 3 ~ focusing on the Rich Man and Lazarus ~ Luke 16.

March 24 ~ Palm Sunday ~ We will wave our palm branches high and shout, "Hosanna!" as we enter our Holiest Week. The choir will sing at both the 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services with brass quartet from the Sarasota Opera Orchestra. We will center our hearts and souls to prepare for each of the services this week.



March 28 ~ Maundy Thursday ~ 6 p.m. in Syster Hall ~ We gather around tables, just as Jesus and the disciples did, to tell the story of God's presence in our lives. We will sing, celebrate communion, and ground ourselves in the narrative of how Jesus' closest friends denied, deserted, and betrayed him.

March 29 ~ Good Friday ~ noon in the Sanctuary and online ~ We gather beneath the cross of Jesus to acknowledge our brokenness and woundedness ~ both individually and collectively. Our choir will sing during the service, and we will move from the Sanctuary out to the Memorial Garden of the Cross at the close of the service.



He is Risen

March 31 ~ Easter Sunday ~ Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Join our amazing choir at both 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., along with brass quartet and percussion from Sarasota Orchestra, as we share in the mystery and marvel of new life that pours forth from the empty tomb. We celebrate how God's light of love shines in our lives every day!

First Congregational United Church of Christ
A Creation Justice, Open & Affirming, Racial Justice Church
1031 S. Euclid Ave. Sarasota, FL 34237
941-953-7044 ~ www.uccsarasota.com

February 21, 2024

Dear Church Family,

May God's love and Shalom surround you.

On Tuesday, February 20th, the Church Council received this letter from Greg Chestnut:

Many of you know that I was diagnosed with Severe Aplastic Anemia in January of 2023. For over a year now I have been upheld and strengthened by your faithful prayers as I have been learning to function with the limitations and requirements of this disease.

However, I feel that it is time to step down from my role as your Minister of Music. I am in the process of applying for permanent disability effective April 1, 2024.

I cannot begin to express what a gift it has been to serve this church for the past 35 years. There are so many milestones that are easy to measure such as the acquisition of the organ, the expansion of our choirs, and the building of the Chapel & Music Center. But my most profound gratefulness centers around the people, who throughout the generations have supported and shared my vision for our music ministry. To serve a church with such diversity and acceptance as ours is indeed a rare privilege. Your commitment to living out our core values has been an inspiration to me. I could never ask for or imagine a staff to be more supportive; and the friendship, collaboration, and leadership of Pastor Wes is a unique relationship that I cherish. The faithfulness, the talents, the care, and the fun that our choir contributes each week has brought me such joy and has nourished my growth spiritually and as a musician over these many years.

I pray that First Congregational UCC will build upon the musical foundation that we have laid together. May carefully planned worship be celebrated and welcoming in a variety of ways; may we continue to be a home for guest musicians in our community; and may our choir members and our church family strengthen the bonds of friendship that have been woven into the fabric of this place for future generations.

In God's love, *Greg*

I know reading these words causes so many emotions and thoughts to surface and swirl within each one of us. I invite us into a time of prayer:



God, how can we say thanks for Greg? For the ways he has shined and shared his light with us for 35 years! For his love, care, thoughtfulness, faithfulness, openness, sense of humor, and music ministry that moves our souls, and his presence. How can we honor such faithfulness?

We pray for Greg as he continues to live with his illness. We pray for strength and most of all, O God, Your presence to enfold and hold Greg. May Greg continue to know our love for him every minute of every day. With heartfelt gratitude for all the gifts Greg has and will continue to share, we pray for Your guidance and grace. Amen.

I realize and recognize that there are questions you may have right now. My door is wide open if you wish to talk. **Here are important facts:**

1. **This is Greg's church** and will continue to be in the years to come. Greg is moving from the organ bench to the pew, so welcome him warmly to sit alongside you in April.
2. We will thank Greg with a wonderful party on **April 7th at both services.**
3. Your Moderators and Staffing Team are working faithfully to find an interim Music Minister. Once all the details are finalized, we will introduce the person. Our intention is to have the interim here on April 7th as we hand off the baton. The interim will lead the church choir, handbell choir, and play on Sunday mornings.
4. We will form a Search Team that will be guided by our core values, three covenants, and by continuing the vital and vibrant music ministry Greg has built over 35 years.
5. We will host listening sessions in the Spring as part of the search process.

We are asking you to continue to pray for Greg, plan to attend the celebration on April 7th, and pray for our church as we enter this time of transition. We trust in God, our help in ages past and hope for years to come; we trust in our precious Lord who takes our hand; we trust in the sweet, sweet Spirit who will help us sing our way into the future.

With God's love and Shalom ~ *Wes*



~ SAVE THE DATE ~

April 7th (after each service)

A Celebration of Greg Chestnut

**35 Years as Minister of Music
1989 - 2024**

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Greg Chestnut's First Service Details

January 8, 1989

Prelude: *"Trumpet Voluntary"* ~John Stanley

Processional Hymn: *"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"* ~Coronation

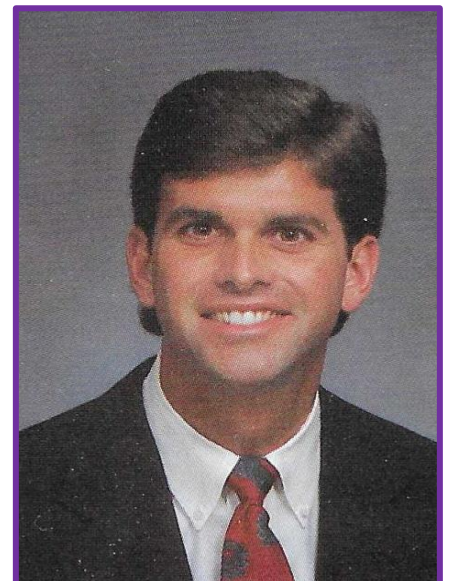
Anthem: *"Brightest and Best"* ~Paul Sjolund

Offertory: *"Upon My Loving God"* ~Johann Nikolaus Hanff

Sermon Hymn: *"O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing"* ~Azmon

Hymn of Preparation: *"Now Thank We All Our God"* ~Nun Danket

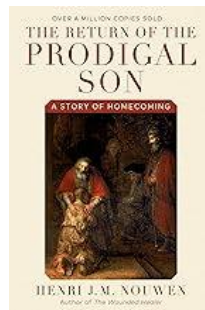
Postlude: *"The Hornpipe"* ~G. F. Handel



FEAST CONTINUES: During March, we continue **FEAST** (**F**riends **E**ating **A**nd **S**tudying **T**ogether). We will meet on Thursday mornings, **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 March with the book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen. We will gather on March 11th and 25th at 4 p.m. in the Oasis Center and Zoom ~ YOU are always welcome.

“A chance encounter with a reproduction of Rembrandt’s The Return of the Prodigal Son catapulted Henri Nouwen on an unforgettable spiritual adventure. Here he shares the deeply personal and resonant meditation that led him to discover the place within where God has chosen to dwell.”



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, with Pastor Wes we will launch twice monthly conversations centering on books 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.

- **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.





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.




Easter Lilies **\$10**

Please email Pastor Wes or call the church office with your order and dedication requests by **March 24th**.



SET YOUR CLOCKS **Ahead!**

March 10th

SURE's Great Assembly ~ Monday, March 18th @ 6:30 p.m. Hosted by First Congregational UCC

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.

We are delighted to **host** the annual gathering for justice! **We need to pack the Sanctuary for this event.** Invite your neighbors. All you need do is sit and listen. The following Sarasota business community and commissioners have been invited to commit to work on affordable housing:

- William Russell, CEO Sarasota Housing Authority*
- Jon Thaxton, Gulf Coast Community Foundation*
- Scott Eller, CASL*
- Kevin Stiff, CEO Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness*
- Heather Kasten, CEO Sarasota Chamber of Commerce*
- Mike Moran, County Commissioner*
- Mark Smith, County Commissioner*
- Debbie Trice, City Commissioner*

Affordable Housing?



Voter Info from our Peace and Justice Network *Are You Sure You're Registered?*

Voting procedures in many states have changed! **NOW** is the time to check your **REGISTRATION** for whatever state you vote in! Do it online. Websites below. *(If you vote by mail, you can check on the same site to see that your vote is counted!)*

- ✓ **Be sure you're still registered! (Vote-by Mail MUST be renewed this year!)**
 - ~ Sarasota: sarasotavotes.gov
 - ~ Manatee: votemanatee.com
 - ~ Any state, any county: vote.gov.
- ✓ **New Florida voters:** vote.gov or your county website
- ✓ **National Voting Dates** for your calendar:
 - Vote-by-mail ballots will be sent out:** September 26th ~ October 3rd
 - Deadline to register to vote:** October 7th *(Don't wait! Register now!)*
 - Early voting:** October 26th ~ November 2nd
 - Deadline to mail your Vote-by-Mail ballot:** October 24th
 - Election Day:** November 5th
- ✓ **Note:** Paper copies of Voter Registration for Florida voters, as well as applications to Vote-by-Mail in both Sarasota and Manatee County, are provided for you in Syster Hall. County addresses are on the back of the Voter Registration form—**thanks to Lee Brockmann.**
- ✓ **IMPORTANT:** Check, too, to see what ID is required if you plan to **vote at the polls** on Election Day, especially if you are a new voter in your state.



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES ~



*"A prayer shawl is a blessing from my church family whom I love very dearly."
~ Gregg Matthews*

Prayer Shawl Ministry ~ March 12th

Calling all knitters and crocheters!
The next gathering of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Group will be on
Tuesday, March 12th,
from 2 – 3:30 p.m. at Florence Jackson's home.

Text Florence at 941-356-4160 or email
faj5110@gmail.com for directions and gate code.

Refreshments will be served.

Easter Love Offering



The Mission Team has turned its attention to Easter and the upcoming Easter Love Offering. We kept our covenants and our core values in mind as we made our selections.

We have chosen six UCC missions and six other missions that support the nation and the world. All have received at least a 94 rating from Charity Navigator this year.

Supporting Our UCC Missions:

One Great Hour of Sharing whose Lenten offering supports disasters and refugees is one of our UCC missions. The **Joseph Henry Evans Scholarship Fund** is to honor Joseph Evans, the first black president of the UCC, and gives scholarships to black students. The **Open and Affirming Coalition for the UCC** helps churches become welcoming and supports those churches who already are. **Neighbors In Need** gives grants to churches for environmental justice, online ministry, and advocacy initiatives. **Strengthen The Church** works on leadership development, establishing new churches and youth ministry. **"Join the Movement" UCC Racial Justice** is working to raise \$8 million over the next three years. Half of the money will be used for supporting racial justice now and half to put in an endowment fund for future work.

Missions Supporting Our Nation/World:

- **Back Bay Mission** does tireless work on the Mississippi Gulf Coast to strengthen neighborhoods and seek justice.
- The **Coalition of Immokalee Workers** does so much to advocate for farm workers and has expanded their role in Fair Trade and human rights.
- **Partners in Health** works tirelessly to provide high quality health care globally to those who need it the most.
- **Bread for the World Institute** whose mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs to end hunger in the United States and throughout the world.
- **Church World Service** is a faith-based organization that works on sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster.
- **Water Engineers for the Americas and Africa** honors our Creation Justice Covenant. They send engineers all over the world to bring clean water to those in need.

Easter is the time we send love and caring to our neighbors all over the Globe. We have researched these organizations to ensure your dollars are spent wisely. Please give generously.

Envelopes in which to place your donations will be available in the Narthex, or you may send a **check with Easter Love in the memo line**. Thank you so much for your generosity.

*Your Mission Team,
Jan Andersen, Terri Crawford, Evelyn Crooks, Gretchen Friend-Jones,
John Ristow, Toska Strong, Nancy Taylor*





Hunger Walk March 24th (before church)



**Team with us and walk to End Summer Hunger!
All Faiths Food Bank**

Peace & Justice along with The Food and Hunger Group are supporting this effort. Choose a one mile or 5k (about 3 miles) walk. The \$25 signup fee includes a t-shirt.

The walk starts at 8:15 a.m. at Nathan Benderson Park.

The event is being held on Palm Sunday, but participants, who choose the one-mile walk should be able to make it to church in time for the 11 a.m. worship. Walkers will be recognized during announcements so wear your t-shirts and be ready to stand and wave your palm branches.



Please register using the link below and **notify Barbara Smith-Bacon or Ellen Marsey** that you have done so. A meeting place and time will be arranged.

<https://allfaithsfoodbank.givecloud.co/product/CASHKICKOFF2024/walk-to-end-summer-hunger>

Food Collection for All Faiths Food Bank ~ March 3rd



In just five months, we have collected **1250 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.

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 *(Join us in Syster Hall)*

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.

Goal: 70 Letters for our 70th Anniversary



Shop Once & Help Both ~ April 7th *(Save the date)* All Faiths Food Bank *(Baskets in the Narthex)* Second Chance Last Opportunity *(Lucy's SUV trunk)*

Lucy Hedrick will be in the parking lot with her SUV trunk open for donations to SCLO. Please provide:

cases of water
canned beans
packages of meat
canned vegetables

Hawaiian punch
paper towels
frozen vegetables
toothbrushes

yellow rice
toilet paper
personal hygiene items



Community Meal ~ March 25th

The monthly community meal that we continue to provide at St. Paul's 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 cookies this month.** Please contact Carol Hagglund for details.

Please join us on **March 25th 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.

CREATION JUSTICE NEWS

Healthy, Happy Pets

February was *Responsible Pet Owners Month, Spay/Neuter Awareness Month, National Cat Health Month, and National Prevent a Litter Month!* Yes, all four! Here, to honor these vital endeavors to ensure our beloved animals' health and happiness, are reminders:

If you're considering adding a new pet to the family, please adopt rather than buy a pet from an online retailer or pet store. By adopting from an animal shelter or rescue group, you are ensuring that you are not supporting and endorsing the inhumane commercial breeding facilities (puppy mills) that supply pet stores and sell pets online. As an extra bonus, you are doing your part to fight pet overpopulation and save homeless animals from euthanasia.

Please keep your cats indoors. Here is why this is important:

Keeps Wildlife Safe

Fewer Diseases and Parasites

Safe from Car Accidents

Safe from Wildlife and Stray Animals

No Cat Fights

No Lost Cats

Safe from Other People

Control Their Diet

Longer Lifespan



When cat owners spay or neuter their feline companions, it helps curb the population growth. Millions of feral (wild) and unwanted domestic cats are born each year, leading to overcrowded shelters and often grim outcomes like abandonment or euthanasia. The most egregious human practice with cats is to let unneutered cats roam outside, which leads to the tragedy of millions of feral cats breeding, fighting, and starving to death.

OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT NEWS

MARCH COLLAGE EVENTS ~ Syster Hall ~ after 11 a.m. service

All are welcome!

March 10th Luncheon: Our guest speaker will be Ben Jewell-Plocher (he, him), Learning and Engagement Director from Embracing Our Differences, immediately following the 11:00 service. **Embracing Our Differences** is a non-profit organization that uses the power of art and education to celebrate the diversity of humanity. Come learn more about this amazing organization and why our church is a proud sponsor.



You may have seen advertisements for their **outdoor exhibit at Bayfront Park** which is from January 21st ~ April 14th. You will see all three of our covenants (*Racial Justice, Creation Justice, and Open and Affirming*) represented. We hope you can join us. Sign-up sheets for lunch will be in the Narthex. You may also email: sarajlittle@me.com. (See field trip opportunity information on page 12.)

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 16.)

COLLAGE sponsored an informative presentation on transgender issues by **Equality Florida** staff—Jules Rayne and Gina Duncan.
2-11-24



Did you know? Pastor Wes was recently the featured speaker at **"You Are Not Alone,"** a 4-week program sponsored by Samaritan Counseling Services of the Gulf Coast. The program topic—"A Path to Community for LGBTQIA+ Individuals & Affirming Churches of the Gulf Coast."

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.



Priscilla as Mary McLeod Bethune

~ **March 13th** ~

"How Racial Bias Works and How to Disrupt It"
~ TED Talk by Jennifer L. Eberhardt

~ **March 27th** ~

"A Tale of Two Americas, and the Mini-Mart Where They Collided" ~
TED Talk by Anand Giridharadas

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

IN OTHER NEWS . . .

Embracing Our Differences Field Trip April 3rd



The Racial Justice Mission Group invites you to a free docent-led tour of **Embracing Our Differences** at **Bayfront Park** on **Wednesday, April 3rd from 1:30 ~ 2:30 p.m.**

Our church is a co-sponsor of Billboard #30. For those who do not want to drive, the **church bus will load at 11:45 a.m. (leaving church at noon) and returning at 3 p.m.**

Lunch options are O'Leary's Restaurant on site or bringing your picnic lunch.

Register by March 25th for the tour and *(if desired)* the bus by texting or calling Sheila Gossett at 614-769-4013. For more information text or call Lindsey Huddleston (630-338-9294)

First UCC Women's Luncheon ~ March 5th

Offering a new and very special way to pray, the First UCC Women's Association has invited author and teacher Sybil MacBeth to show us how to **"Pray in Color."**



Join us on **Tuesday, March 5, 11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall** for doodling with pen and markers on paper. We will learn a versatile and meditative prayer practice that includes praying for others and addressing the daily stresses of life and work. Absolutely no artistic ability is necessary. **Luncheon costs \$12.** Sign up after either Sunday service or call the church office at 941-953-7044.

*Sybil MacBeth is the author of the series of books called *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God* and a practical guide called *The Season of the Nativity: Confessions and Practices of an Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany Extremist*. Her lifelong love of prayer and fifteen years of teaching experience as a community college mathematics professor prepared her for the workshops and retreats she leads throughout the United States and Canada.*

Besides wrestling with prayer, Sybil loves to dance, sing, doodle, read, and play pickleball. She and her husband Andy moved to Sarasota in 2020 and spent 10 months in Jerusalem in 2022. Check out her website and blog at prayingincolor.com.

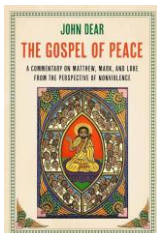
Artful Prayer ~ Thursday, March 14th 2 p.m. ~ Oasis Center or Zoom



Artful prayer will focus on **creating Small Sacred Spaces**. Rev. Donna Papenhausen will lead us in creating and blessing our **own tabletop altar** to use as a focus for personal prayer time. You will need to have a base (*placement, scarf, some other surface.*) You will assemble your own special elements from nature, photos, souvenirs, or other items that bring to mind people, place or situations you wish to hold in sacred space. Have ready paper and pen to create a blessing prayer.

You may join in person or on Zoom. Contact Pastor Wes for the Zoom link.

An Evening with Father John Dear, on his new book: *The Gospel of Peace* Sunday, March 17th @ 4 p.m. ~ Lakewood UCC, St. Petersburg, FL



Peacemaker, author, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Father John Dear, will be at Lakewood UCC (south 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.**

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.

"All Creatures Great & Small Pet Blessing"
Saturday, March 23rd, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
(Rain or Shine)

Bring your leashed or contained pets to be blessed by Pastor Wes on the lawn of our church. Cremains also blessed.

Meet and learn more about The Sarasota Humane Society, Satchel's Last Resort Pet Rescue and Sanctuary, Southeastern Guide Dogs, Dog Perfect, and Meals on Wheels Pet Love Program. ALSO Youth will be offering cold drinks and information.

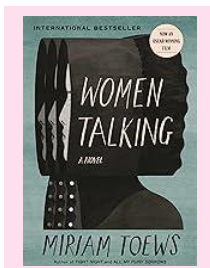


Have your picture taken with your pet, with your phone or camera by helpful church volunteers. Please bring donations of dry cat and dog food for the Meals on Wheels Pet Love Program to help struggling pet owners. We are looking for photos of you and your pets to be included on our "UCC Members Love 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!**

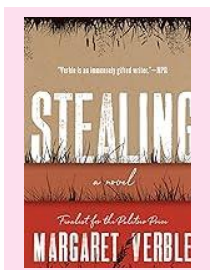
Ready Readers ~ March 14th & April 11th

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.



March 14th

Women Talking by Miriam Toews. One evening, eight Mennonite women climb into a hayloft to conduct a secret meeting. For the past two years, each of these women, and more than a hundred other girls in their colony, has been repeatedly violated in the night by demons coming to punish them for their sins. Now that the women have learned they were in fact drugged and attacked by a group of men from their own community, they are determined to protect themselves and their daughters from future harm.



April 11th

Stealing by Margaret Verble. "This powerful novel should join classics like Ernest J. Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Helena Maria Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*."—*New York Times Book Review*

A gripping, gut-punch of a novel about a Cherokee child removed from her family and sent to a Christian boarding school in the 1950s—an ambitious, eye-opening reckoning of history and small-town prejudices from Pulitzer Prize finalist Margaret Verble.

March Birthdays



March Anniversaries



3/1 Jack Stewart
 3/2 Nancy Alger
 Jeffrey Carlson
 Judy Jones
 Rachel Taylor
 3/3 Wes Bixby
 3/5 Sharon Quimby
 3/6 Carol Rescigno
 3/7 Toska Strong
 3/9 Barbara Ralph
 3/10 Lucy Hedrick
 Geraldine Mattson
 3/11 Audrey Shutters
 Lori White
 3/13 Frank Hallice
 Charles Hamilton
 3/14 Bob Millar

3/16 Michael Cross
 3/18 Scott Cooper
 Don Laing
 Susan Raines
 3/19 Katherine Taylor
 3/20 Maxine Althouse
 Mercedes Traba
 3/21 Sydney Starcher
 3/23 Dannie Vance
 Gwen West
 3/24 Page McCloud
 Becky Tavares
 3/26 Judith Plerhoples
 3/30 Pauline Geary
 Katherine Stewart
 Joseph Yocum
 3/31 Michael Johnston

3/4 ~ Barney & Nancy Kavanagh
 3/19 ~ Stephen & Christine Hoffman
 3/25 ~ Bruce & Marcia Knight

90+ Wise Birthday Card Shower



3/10 ~ Geraldine Mattson
 3/23 ~ Gwen West
 3/30 ~ Katherine Stewart



Bill Grubb



1989 ~ Greg Chestnut becomes our Minister of Music.

1990 ~ Thursday Knights founded (combining Bible study, recreation, dinner, and choir/worship skills training for our children.)

1993 ~ Jaeckel organ arrives in pieces, installed & tuned. *Greg Chestnut is beyond thrilled.*

2000 ~ Reed Chapel and Music Center is dedicated. *Greg has an office with a view!*

2001 ~ Hook-Hastings 1878 organ is restored/installed in Reed Chapel. *Greg plays this for our Chapel services.*

2003 ~ 50th anniversary celebration includes organ recital by Olivier Latry, principal organist of Notre Dame, Paris.



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
 Bookkeeper Pam Ganshe-Boythe
 Financial Clerk Heidie Heath
 Office Administrator..... Sherry Glover

OFFICERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Moderator..... Harold Mezile
 Vice Moderator.....Carol McCloud
 Past Moderator Nancy Morris
 Co-treasurers Robin Reich & Roxanne Schwoch
 Pastor EmeritusDr. John Syster
 Contributing Photographer Susan Moore
 Newsletter Carol McCloud, Susan Moore

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.

