



April 2024



First Congregational UCC

Thank You!! We Love You!!



We enter the month of April with a bittersweet moment of saying an enthusiastic, heartfelt, “**Thank you!! We love you!!**” to Greg Chestnut.

For 35 years, Greg has faithfully led our church choir, handbells, and Thursday Nights children’s programming. Greg has truly embodied his role as our Minister of Music.

For the past 10 years, I have had the privilege of partnering with Greg to create worship that is meaningful. Words cannot quite give voice to the gratitude and grief I carry with me as we prepare for Greg to go on permanent disability.

Please remember that we are not saying, “Good-bye” to Greg. Greg will continue to be a member of First Congregational UCC, and we will continue to pour our prayers and love into Greg’s life. We look forward to Greg sharing and shining his light in ways beyond the organ bench.

Please remember, April 7th is the day to honor Greg. This will be Greg’s last official time directing the choir and being our Minister of Music. We will laugh, cry, and try to surround Greg with God’s love that we know never lets us go.

Please know the Staffing Team and Church Council have been hard at work considering gifts for Greg. We are inviting you to bring cards filled with your heartfelt thoughts and prayers for Greg as he begins a new chapter.

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.



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>**

By vote of the Church Council, we have established a **Search Team** for the next **settled Music Minister**. Please pray for the following people:



- Lori White ~ Chair*
- Jane Hunder & Jeff Smith ~ Music & Fine Arts Representatives*
- Linda Pursley ~ Staffing Representative*
- Peggye Mezile ~ Worship Representative*
- Gregg Matthews ~ Member at Large*
- Diane Miller ~ Member at Large*
- Pastor Wes & Nancy Morris, Ex-Officio*

Please pray for our **Section Leaders in the choir: James Mayer, Lauren Patsos, Susan Raines, and Rob Quarles**. Susan, Rob, and Lauren have sung with Greg for many years. The Section Leaders will be an important part of the Search process as will several others in the church who bring tremendous expertise in the field of music. We are blessed by so many talented and generous people.

YOU will also have opportunities to share your thoughts in listening sessions being set up by the Search Team. These will be during choir rehearsals, after church, and Zoom sessions for our friends leaving to head north in the coming days. I encourage you to watch the Midweek Message, church bulletin and Sunday morning announcements for these opportunities!!

Please pray for our interims who will provide music and lead our choir. Our prayer was for one interim; that is not going to be our experience. We will be blessed on April 14th by Stephen Fancher. As of this writing, we are working out details with musicians to help bridge the gap in the months to come. Because organists/choir directors are in high demand, we have hit several dead ends. **I ask for your prayers (and patience) during the days and weeks to come.** This is a new chapter in our church's 70-year history, one we will be writing one paragraph at a time. Rest assured, when we have the names of those leading us in music ministry, we will publish and provide them to the church.

I recognize that our music ministry is always named as a reason people join our church. Our music ministry adds indescribable value each Sunday. Our music ministry blesses us in numerous ways. **Please hold our church in prayer.**

This is an important time to live our values of: **worship, welcome, belonging, caring, justice, and faithfulness**. It is for a time such as this our values can provide us with solid ground amid the shifting sands and uncertainty of the days ahead. **I hold you in prayer. I pray for Greg.** I send God's love to each of you.



With love ~ *Wes*

WORSHIP

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

April 7 ~ We will honor Greg's music ministry at both services. Greg will share his reflections and we will surround Greg with prayers and God's love!! A reception will follow both services. Please bring a card with heartfelt words to honor Greg. ~ *Gifts will be given by the church to celebrate Greg's service.*

April 14 ~ **Worship begins at 10:55 a.m. for 70-Year Celebration of our Church Video.** We welcome Stephen Fancher to our church as our guest choir director and organist today. Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 24:36-49 at both services. We will celebrate Holy Communion.

April 21 ~ **Earth Day** ~ Our Green Team, Rev. Dr. Sarah Melcher, and Pastor Wes will collaborate to celebrate our Creation Justice Covenant. All are welcome to participate in this holy annual event. We welcome back Stephen Fancher as guest choir director and organist on this day.

April 28 ~ Pastor Wes will preach on Luke 19:1-10, Zaccheus of "wee-little man" fame and we will ponder the ways we are searching for Christ in our lives every day. Stephen Fancher is our guest choir director and organist on this day.

Handbells Invitation **Thursday, April 4th ~ 6 p.m.** **Chapel**



You are invited to be part of the **resuming of our Handbell Choir**. We are looking for people of all levels. We especially welcome beginners who want to learn more.

This is a short-term commitment of just a few weeks with a planned performance on Mother's Day.

Please see Pastor Wes for more information.

The Wayless Way ~ Your Life as a Curriculum (Oasis Center/Zoom) **April 8th & April 22nd** **4 p.m. ~ Oasis Center**

The Wayless Way Book Club invites you to read ~ ***No Cure for Being Human*** by Kate Bowler. There are several copies of this book available on eBay and Amazon at a discounted rate!!



All are welcome. Contact Pastor Wes with any questions.

April 7, 2024
(after both services)

A Celebration of Greg Chestnut

Minister of Music

*A 35-Year Blessing
1989 ~ 2024*

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*

Second Annual Chili Cook-off ~ *(Chefs needed)* ~ April 21st

You won't want to miss this taste-testing event!



Your Fellowship and Special Events Team is recruiting chefs for this special day. Do you have a time-tested, favorite chili recipe you would like to offer? Perhaps you have a daring new chili you would like to test out!



Contact Sandy Smith (sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 340-226-5121 to text/call) to learn more and/or to volunteer.

If you would rather eat than cook and believe in giving lavish praise to the cooks, please come to support those who will be offering their chili on this fun-filled day.

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES ~ LOVE in ACTION

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 seminary 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 create 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 for your donations are available in the Narthex, the pews, or you may send a **check with Easter Love in the memo line** to the church. 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



Giving Challenge of 2024



Presented by
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SARASOTA COUNTY

**“THE PATTERSON FOUNDATION WILL MATCH 1:1
Donations of \$25 - \$100
Per person, Per organization
No cap on the number of individual matches
from unique donors a nonprofit organization can receive”**

Noon Tuesday, April 9th ~ Noon Wednesday, April 10th

Several organizations our church supports will be participating in this day of giving.

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity!

Please consider participating and supporting some/all the following organizations:



*All Faiths Food Bank
Baby Basics of Sarasota
Equality Florida
Family Promise of Sarasota-Manatee
PFLAG
Project 180
Resurrection House
Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity (SURE)*

Click on this link or go to www.givingchallenge.org, look up the organization and follow the step-by-step instructions.

**Need assistance in making an online contribution?
Come to the Oasis Center ~ April 9th ~ Noon until 3:00 p.m.**



Assistance

Student Scholarship Applications ~ Due April 30th

First Congregational UCC student scholarship applications are **due April 30th**. Applications are available through the church office via the **Spiritual Education and Growth Team**.

All applications and supporting materials must be returned to the church office **by April 30th** for consideration. Email: admin@uccsarasota.com.





"A prayer shawl makes me feel protected and covered by God."

*~ Sallye J. Johnson
(Lois Wilkins' Mother)*

Prayer Shawl Ministry ~ April 9th

Calling all knitters and crocheters!

The next gathering of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Group will be on **Tuesday, April 9th, from 1:30 – 3:00 p.m. at Chris Millar's house in Englewood.**

Contact Chris at crm4264@yahoo.com for directions.

Refreshments will be served.

Community Meal ~ April 22nd

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 preparing our take-out meals while renovations are ongoing at St. Paul's. **We will be providing desert cookies this month—homemade would be extra special. We need your cookies no later than 4 p.m.**

Please join us on **April 22nd from 4-6:30 p.m.** to assemble the meals. Thank you for all you do for those in need. Volunteer and/or inquire for more details: Carol Hagglund at carol.hagglund@gmail.com.

Shop Once & Help Both ~ April 7th

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 **Second Chance Last Opportunity.**

Please provide:

**cases of water
canned beans
packages of meat**

**Hawaiian punch
paper towels
frozen vegetables**

**yellow rice
toilet paper
personal hygiene items**



Food Collection for All Faiths Food Bank ~ April 7th



In just six months, we have collected **1380 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.

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

CREATION JUSTICE NEWS

World Water Day



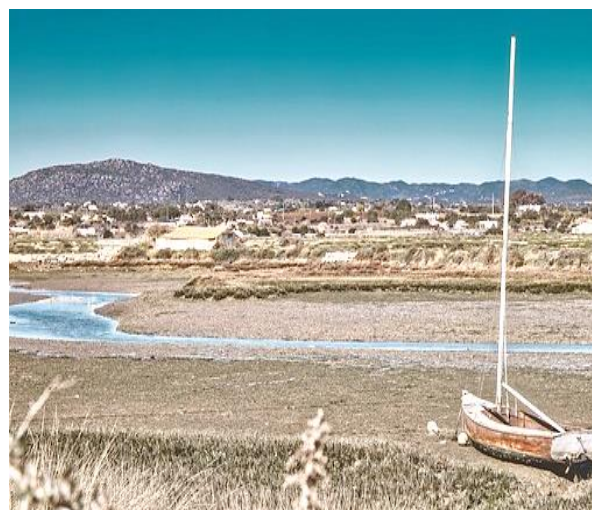
Those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to get clean water from our tap as often as we like take it for granted. But those who **must fight for better water quality** know how important water is to every aspect of life. People cannot survive without clean water, and neither can ecosystems. Water is crucial for the survival of humans and the planet.

It goes far beyond mere drinking water. Water "is vital for reducing the global burden of disease and improving the health, welfare, and productivity of populations," according to **UN Water**. It is also a critical part of preventing and adapting to climate change, and an essential part of infrastructure.

Yet global water statistics are sobering. According to the **United Nations Development Program:**

- At least 18 billion people globally use a fecal contaminated drinking source.
- Water scarcity affects more than 40% of the world's people, and this figure is projected to rise.
- Floods and other water-related disasters make up 70% of all deaths caused by natural disasters.

Improving global water quality requires a combination of actions at local, national, and international levels. Key actions needed to improve global water quality include investing in infrastructure, reducing pollution sources, protecting watersheds, promoting sustainable agriculture, and raising public awareness.



OPEN & AFFIRMING NEWS



COLLAGE Photo Frame

Thank you to **COLLAGE ALLY Sheila Gossett** for designing and creating this fabulous photo frame for use at Pride Events.



Folks who stop by our table will have the opportunity to have their photo taken as a remembrance of PRIDE each year. While they are visiting our table our volunteers will be able to share information about our Open and Affirming Covenant.

Considering Matthew Shepard

Sunday, April 14th ~ 7 p.m.
Church of the Palms
(3224 Bee Ridge Road)

Evening Choral Artists presents a performance of **Considering Matthew Shepard**, in partnership with Embracing Our Differences and Project Pride.

Advance discounted tickets at \$35 will be available for purchase from COLLAGE members in front of Syster Hall on Sundays until the tickets are gone.



Note: No COLLAGE luncheon on April 14th.

RACIAL JUSTICE COVENANT NEWS



Sacred Conversations on Race (SCOR) ~ April 10th & 24th

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



April 10th

"Life with God from the Renovare Institute" podcast
(Sho Baraka interview about George Washington Carver)

April 24th

"He Saw That It Was Good" ~ by Sho Baraka (book discussion)

All are welcome to join in the conversations.

IN OTHER NEWS . . .

First UCC Women's Luncheon ~ April 2nd



There's a Place for You!

Please join the UCC Women for their monthly lunch and program on **Tuesday, April 2nd at 11:30 a.m. in Syster Hall.** We will hear from yoga instructor Michelle Winton, who will enlighten and lead us in chair yoga before lunch. Please wear comfortable clothing and footwear.

We ask each attendee to **bring a child size umbrella to benefit SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT, INC., or "S.A.S."** Children living in poverty are much more likely to stay home from school if it's raining because they don't have umbrellas. Otherwise, they are teased for arriving soaking wet.

Luncheon costs \$12. Sign up after either Sunday service or call the church office at 941-953-7044. Questions? Call Lucy Hedrick, 203-561-9590 or lucy@lucyhedrick.com.



Knitting Group ~ Chair Needed

Since the retirement of Ethel Rudy, we are looking for a **new chair** for the knitting group. We have supplies for anyone who would like to gather with fellow knitters and prepare hats, mittens, and scarves for the Native American residents of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Questions? Call Nancy Morris at 941-374-7932.



Artful Prayer ~ Thursday, April 11th 2 p.m. ~ Oasis Center or Zoom



The April 11th Artful Prayer gathering will be led by local artist and teacher Judy Levine. Judy will guide us in making **Prayer Boxes.**

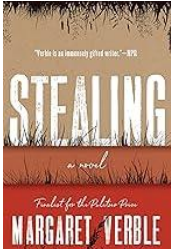
Though you may use anything for a prayer box, it is the routine of praying to God that offer peace and comfort. Having a special place in which to place these prayers—priceless!

After moving from New Jersey, Judy founded the Association of Florida Teaching Artists (AFTA). She frequently leads jewelry-making workshops, photography, and other art classes in the local area. A pioneer at the Lifelong Learning Academy, Judy is now a sought-after docent at the Sarasota Art Museum.

Come join in the fun either in person or on Zoom. Contact Pastor Wes for the Zoom link.

Ready Readers ~ April 11th & May 9th

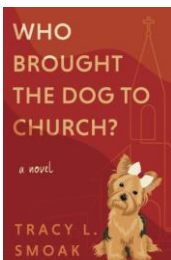
We meet on the **second Thursday of each month at noon in the Oasis Center**. We welcome and encourage the participation and input of new members even if you are not able to attend every discussion. For more information, contact Sandy Smith at sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 340-227-5121.



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.



May 9th

In **Who Brought the Dog to Church?**, Tracy L. Smoak has done something remarkable—she's woven serious topics such as death, immigration, and domestic violence, with the laugh-out-loud antics of a bunch of small town church ladies to produce a funny, heartwarming, and thought-provoking tale. The relationships between Betty, Letitia, Ida Lou, and Elizabeth are darling! Fun connections and revelations sprinkled throughout the book make it a page-turner not to be missed, and the whole story wraps up in a wonderfully satisfying and sweet conclusion. This book gives readers hope for abundant joy, even during pain, and, most of all, points us to the unfailing love of the Savior."—*Heather Norman Smith*

Brady News

Brady Sarasota Bayfront Rallies: Remember that all are invited to join us at Brady Sarasota's Bayfront rallies on **Thursdays from 4 – 5 p.m.** at the southern end of the Bayfront parking lot in front of O'Leary's and the park. **This season's final rally will be on April 4th**; then they'll start up again in the fall.



Police Representative/Postcards to Legislators: On **April 11th**, we'll meet at **4 p.m.** in our church's **Oasis Center** to hear from a representative of the Police Department about local gun-related topics and write postcards to our legislators urging them to back safe-gun measures. **We'll have pizza or sandwiches and, again, all are welcome.**



Orange Ringling Bridge Lights: Our biggest news is that the City Commission has agreed to turn the Ringling Bridge lights orange from **June 8th - 10th** for **Gun Violence Awareness Month**. We are asking everyone to join us at Hart's Landing (southwest corner of the bridge) on **June 8th at 8 p.m.** to witness the lighting, which should happen about a half hour after sunset. We'll have more about this event as June approaches.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT . . .



*Gib Mitchell Sighting ~
Looking Oh So Good!*



*Before!
Pastor Wes ~ Giving it his all and then some!*



After!



*Wes' birthday ~ Greg gets
a word in edgewise . . . finally!*

April Birthdays



April Anniversaries



4/1 Tom Fields

4/3 Bruce Knight

4/4 Lynn Ives

4/5 Bethany Harmon

4/6 Ruth Olson

4/7 Ashley Burroughs

4/8 Jan Weston

4/10 Robin Reich
Mary Jane Sparrow

4/12 James Hunder
Sara Little
Diane Miller
Fernando Traba

4/13 Rich Rescigno

4/17 Laurie Etter
Florence Jackson
Barney Kavanagh
Carol McCloud

4/19 Leslie Petzing

4/20 Betty Farrar
Bernadette Gottschalk
Edward Hebert

4/21 Phillip Swain

4/23 Jim Marsey

4/24 Gordon Quimby

4/25 Carol Hagglund

4/27 Nancy Arzen
Cindy Woodling

4/28 Teri Grob

4/29 Mary Jane Hamilton
Loren Kolpin

4/30 Dorothy Dumford

4/4 ~ Joseph & Barbara Yocum

4/12 ~ Ed Dupree & June Wolgemuth

4/18 ~ William & Judith Hansen

4/22 ~ Rich & Carol Rescigno

4/29 ~ William & Judith Plerhoples

4/30 ~ Felix & Nancy McElroy III

90+ Wise Birthdays



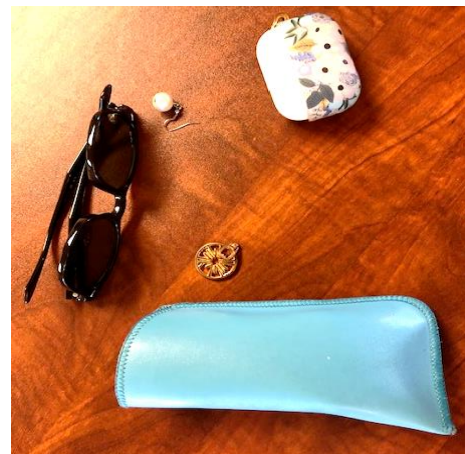
4/6 ~ Ruth Olson

4/17 ~ Florence Jackson

4/30 ~ Dorothy Dumford

We miss you!

*We are waiting for you
in the outer office.*





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



The 2024 Flower Chart is ready for YOU!
 Do you have a special occasion you would 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 Interims
 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
 NewsletterCarol 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: admin@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.

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