

## Church of the Isles- United Church of Christ Monthly Newsletter



### Stumbling Towards Thanksgiving: Congregational Pandemic Prayer

God, in this hard year, we're stumbling towards Thanksgiving.

There has been lots to trip us up; a pandemic, economic meltdowns, social isolation, injustice on so many fronts: #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and the ongoing call for justice for indigenous peoples.

Not to mention hurricanes, forest fires and climate change...and this is not even including the everyday sorrows that haven't let up for one minute!

We wouldn't wish this year on anyone!

And so on this Thanksgiving, we stumble on the words, and we need to take some deep breaths now to pause and consider what we are thankful for... [ pause ]

We do have things to be thankful for. Thank you for life, for bringing us here this far. Thank you for those who have sacrificed to help others; health care and essential workers, teachers, and everyone who has toiled overtime to make a difference.

Thank you for your provision; the good earth has yielded up its bounty, and there is food in grocery stores, even if we sometimes do have to line up for it.

Thank you that this fall season still delights: the taste of the crisp delicious apple, the gold of grain pouring out of the combine, the fragrance of the damp leaves, the sound of geese honking their way south, the feel of cool wind and the sun still warm on our skin.

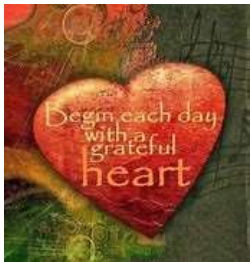
God of hope, we need your help to get through the coming year.

Help us find a vaccine: we need it soon, we need it for everyone, and we need it to work.



In the meantime, help our communities pull together; forgive us when we are irritated and judgmental of the choices other people are making.  
 Give us all patience as we wash our hands for the millionth time,  
 as we mask up, as we make hard choices not to mingle and socialize in person.  
 On this Thanksgiving day, we set our eyes on Christmas,  
 The world is waiting desperately for an angelic message of good tidings of great joy for all  
 people. We are waiting for you to be born again,  
 born again in this pandemic year, born again in our hearts, in our world.  
 We know you are coming, and so on Thanksgiving we pray with thanksgiving. Amen

## FROM THE PASTOR



Dear Friends,

It continues to feel like Groundhog Day, doesn't it? September was filled with some of the usual experiences of each month in COVID times—worship online, with wonderful responses and participation by readers, children's sermon folks, and musicians; wonderful volunteers involving us in outreach and mission, even while separated—disaster relief buckets and food drives; and we continue with our Zoom spiritual group and planning meetings. We also had a beautiful outdoor service with sweet conversation and time that was over too soon, but that nurtured our souls. We also have had the clutch of fear as we had two more members become ill with COVID, but thankfully, they are recovering.

As we continue on this challenging pilgrimage of the COVID 19 pandemic, plan our vote, endure the heartache and exhaustion of continuing systemic racism, and injustices in word and deed in our society, we **press on** to remain people of hope and faith!

I love this prayer from Carol Penner that is on the front of the newsletter, for it holds in tension the truth of our pain and the necessity of our thanksgiving. Having



hearts filled with gratitude is a hallmark of the spiritual journey and the result of realizing what the Scripture calls “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” We are blessed then, to be a blessing, to bring the love and compassion of God to all.

I pray that this month will bring awareness of your profound belonging to the family of God, and that when we see one another again, we will feel the blessing ever more profoundly. With love and thanks, Shelly

## Note from our Moderator

At the intersection of preparing clean-up buckets for Church World Service (CWS) and working in the church Garden of Memories, I ran into Covid-19. So, I have been away insolated for a few weeks and likely will be away from church activities for a few more weeks. The upside to this is that I have had a Congregational dinner all to myself. So many of you generously left yummy, easy to prepare food on a table outside my door. On those days, I was too fatigued to prepare food. Church saved my hungry belly. On those days when isolation was becoming too great an emotional burden, church save my starving soul. And I knew that there were others who carried on the work of COTI, lifting that work from my aching, exhausted shoulders.

While in the hospital I had nurses from many countries and faith backgrounds and had wonderful conversations about healing prayer with many of them. I observed that those who volunteer to serve Covid patients have a comfortable relationship with their Spiritual Being. Their ministrations were a life-saving blessing. Is there a way our churches can honor the work they do so tirelessly? Could there be a way to provide some type of care to patients who have no family on the other end of a cell phone? I was reminded first-hand that God is in this healing intersection. Can we bring Church there as well? Jan Kreuger, Moderator



## COTI Outreach

Throughout this pandemic COTI continually tries to think of ways we can Be the Church without being in the Church. We continue to prepare and send out meatball sub lunches to Pinellas Hope (**NEXT DATE IS TUES. NOVEMBER 10**), a mission for which we have been recognized (again) by Catholic Charities, the organization that runs the shelter. We still have not been able to meet personally with “our Miracle girls”, but we try to keep in touch to let them know that we look forward to seeing them as soon as safely possible. Our Communion Service/Food Drives have been greatly appreciated by both the Beach Community and the Good Samaritan Food Pantries. We are very blessed to have such generous and faithful volunteers to make all of this happen.

But there is more that we can do to help those directly affected by this pandemic. Here are four things we would like to do during the months of November and December.

- (1) Jan and I have been discussing some way we can let those on the front line like nurses and EMTs, among others and let them know that they are appreciated and recognized for their caring and sacrifice, and we thought about COOKIES! After all, COTI is the official IRB Cookie Church and boy do we know how to make cookies. Since there will not be a Christmas Bazaar or a Tour of Homes this year, we need an outlet for our traditional November cookie baking! We have not ironed out all the details yet, but we can still start the baking and fill up the freezer. Starting Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, we will have our usual containers available for you to take home and fill up. For those who do not feel comfortable coming into the church, we will have containers in a bin outside the main door near the office (along with sanitizing wipes to use after opening and closing the bin). Watch for details for returning the filled containers in Shelly’s weekly news updates.
- (2) As you have heard and read, schools everywhere are having a very difficult time trying to provide a steady, safe and caring learning environment for their students. With all the extras needed to make this happen, often the schools are not able to keep up with the demand. We have two teachers among our members: Mindy P. is



an early learning teacher at the school connected with Anona Methodist Church, and Alicia I. teaches at Boca Ciega High School in St. Pete. We have reached out to them to see what they could use that we could help provide. Here is what they said:

- Alicia: "What I need at my school are snacks for kids - individual packages of crackers, chips, cookies, etc. Lunch was normally at 10:15 and now it is at 1:30. Many of the kids do not have food at home or money to bring for snacks and they are hungry until lunch. A few things would really help."
- Mindy: "We have trouble getting Lysol spray (everything that enters the classroom must be sprayed prior to entry). We go thru a can a week. But if I had a wish list 😊 I would ask for books (ours are held together with a lot of tape). Each child must have their own personal supplies now, nothing can be shared. We do occasionally provide those items for kids who come without. Markers, play doh, 8-pack of crayons, stickers & more stickers." Book suggestions: "Any books for young children are good, these topics are great – emotions, colors or shapes, pets, family, community helpers, faith, holidays, science (ocean, rocks, dinosaurs, etc). Short simple stories are best." "One of the best gifts *teachers* personally receive are gift cards for coffee or lunch."

If you prefer not to go in and out of stores, you can always shop online or make a monetary donation. We have shoppers willing to help. A check to COTI with School Supplies on the memo line would be great. We would like to have these items ready to give to our wonderful, nurturing, dedicated teachers on November 15<sup>th</sup>.

- (3) Last year many of us worked with Hazel M., to make sure children in her families at Healthy Start Pinellas had a beautiful Christmas. We went over and above, and the kids and moms were blown away. This year we would like to participate again, but with a few changes. There will only be 18 families, and each Wish List will be two items only. Last year we had the Wish Lists on an Angel Tree, but we are still working out the details on just how to do this during a pandemic. Hazel is hoping to have everything worked out by November 8<sup>th</sup>. If you are not planning to be "in" church but would like to participate, please let me know.



(4) A message from Hazel Merihew with another opportunity to help. “ We were thinking that a diaper drive, especially for sizes 4, 5, and 6, would be so helpful for our low-income families. Wipes are also helpful. We would also love some boppy pillows. In the past, another organization sewed and stuffed them by hand. I wonder if anyone at the church has a talent and love for creating items like this. The boppy pillows are wonderful for new moms, especially those who would like to breastfeed. These items would be much appreciated, as many of our families who were already struggling have experienced a loss of income related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Another message from Hazel: Warm greetings to the Church of the Isles. This year, I hope you and your family may be able to assist the Healthy Start Coalition, Parents as Teachers Plus Program with our Christmas gift-giving program. The mission of the Healthy Start Coalition of Pinellas, Inc. is to promote and support healthy pregnancies, babies and families by providing services and facilitating access to community resources. In the previous fiscal year, 93% of pregnant women and 97% of newborns in Pinellas County were screened by the Healthy Start Coalition. Within the Healthy Start Coalition, the **Parents as Teachers Plus Program (PAT+)** offers home-visiting services to high-risk families in Pinellas County. PAT+ focuses services on pregnant women and families with infants up to age 3 who experience high risk-factors. We help families recovering from substance-involvement, teen mothers, low-income families and more. Families receiving PAT+ services may remain in the program until the target child turns three years of age. The PAT+ team is certified in the Parents as Teachers two-year foundational curriculum that focuses on prenatal care through the child’s third year of life. PAT+ provides services that include home visits, care coordination, developmental assessments, support groups, contraception and health screening, family strengthening, and parent skills training as well as substance abuse recovery and



relapse prevention support. We strive to improve child development, strengthen family relationships, support parent/child attachment, promote positive birth outcomes, and reduce substance use in parents. I, Hazel Merihew, began working with the PAT+ Program in June 2018 and I am passionate about the families I serve. This year, I would be honored if the members of the Church of the Isles would assist with gift-giving for the families on my caseload. Should you choose to donate, I will be hand-writing all of your thank you notes to ensure you are recognized for your efforts. If you are interested in donating, please provide me with your name, phone number, and some details about what type of commitment you would like to make; for example, are you willing to adopt a family of 4 children, 3 children, 2 children, or 1 child? The larger families are challenging to find sponsors for, so you may be able to team up with a friend and be a blessing to a large family. If you choose to donate, I will supply you with a wish-list from the family and I will be available to answer any questions about the family, as these are families directly on my caseload. You may wrap your gifts if you would like to, but this is not required. Please have gifts ready by Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup> so that I have ample time to deliver to my caseload before Christmas. Phone: (478) 955 1680 / Email: [Hmerihew@healthystartpinellas.org](mailto:Hmerihew@healthystartpinellas.org)

Last year we had two wonderful Christmas Parties, one with our Miracles Outreach girls at their new facility, and one with the residents at Pinellas Hope. We were able to provide gifts and goodies galore, thanks to your generosity and volunteering. We hope we can do something this year, but we are still trying to figure out COVID Christmas!! Stay tuned....

WOW! Lots of opportunities to Be the Church. With much gratitude and awe for what we can do to share what we have with those who need a helping hand.

Marty Synnott ([martysynnott@yahoo.com](mailto:martysynnott@yahoo.com); 727-249-3011)



PS: We are still trying to figure out how or if we can safely have our Thanksgiving Dinner. Please let me know if you have any ideas. We will keep working on it!

**VOTE!!!! Be the Change on November 3<sup>rd</sup> !!!!**



**Special Thanks is in order!**

- ❖ SPECIAL THANKS TO all of you for the Clergy Appreciation Day surprises! Wow! So many sweet cards, gift card, chocolate, plants, texts, calls, and emails! Thank you so very much! Your love is deeply appreciated!
- ❖ SPECIAL THANKS TO Shirley Hand, Winston Culler, and Susan Gilbert for their hard work in helping us facilitate our virtual hymn sing! Thanks to ALL of you for sending in your favorite requests! We plan to do it again soon!
- ❖ SPECIAL THANKS TO the Office & Thrift Store Volunteers, the Deacons and the Church Council! You are deeply appreciated for your hard work!







## Joys and Celebrations

**Our two churches work with many impressive community partners, assisting them in a variety of ways with their important missions. SO Proud of our two churches whose missions and ministries continue to serve our communities!**

- ❖ **Here's a way you can help Trinity: vote for Barbara!** Congratulations to the founder of the Red Tent Initiative which helps incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women in St. Petersburg, Barbara Rhode. Barbara was selected as one of ten women across the United States to be a L'Oreal of Paris' Woman of Worth. The next level is to choose one woman from among the ten to receive a \$25,000 award for her project. This will be done by nationwide vote. You (anyone can vote!) can help by voting for Barbara every day from now- November 27. Thanks!! Link to vote: <https://www.lorealparisusa.com/women-of-worth.aspx#page>
- ❖ **From Church of the Isles: Congratulations to Sophia Renee who was awarded the Angel Award for her volunteer work and advocacy for those served by Pinellas Hope,** a program administered by Catholic Charities to assist with dignity and compassion those experiencing homelessness, offering resources with dignity and compassion. Pinellas Hope provides shelter, meals, clothing, adult education, medical respite, assistance with transitional housing, and more. Sophia was selected from among 200 honorees in multiple counties to receive this special recognition. COTI's Pinellas Hope team prepares meals for the guests once a month and helps Sophia with the Christmas party every year and made over 200 masks for the staff and guests. Sophia reports that PH was the only shelter in our area that did not have a COVID outbreak among their staff and guests!



Here are a couple of pictures of Sophia and her award!



**Book Group is back , Thursday November 19<sup>th</sup> @ 4 PM**

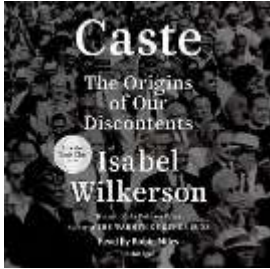


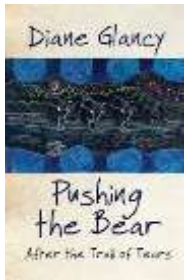
If you are not a regular participant in our monthly Book Group but would like to join for a particular book discussion, please let me know and I will add you to our Zoom invite list. OR, if you do not have Zoom access, we can include you through via your phone. Either way, do not miss out on joining us for the reading and discussing of these fascinating, highly recommended books.

❖ **November 19** – *Caste: The origins of our discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson - Non-Fiction

- “The Pulitzer Prize-winning, bestselling author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions.”

❖ **January 28, 2021-** *Pushing the Bear* by Diane Glancy - Historic Fiction





- This memoir "chronicles M.J.'s perilous childhood during the turbulent rise and fall of Haiti's President-Priest—a time of nightly shootings, home invasions, robberies, and the burning of former regime members in neighborhood streets. Haiti's rich culture and breathtaking beauty are contrasted not only with the terror in Port-au-Prince's streets, but also with the turmoil inside M.J.'s own home. Her father's hot-blooded nature and unpredictable moods amplify her fevered need to escape a homeland where random violence and bloodshed are commonplace."

You will find copies of these books, along with books we have read over the past several months, on a special shelf in the Taylor Library. We will have a great time and welcome anyone who wants to read or just sit, enjoy the refreshments, and listen to the discussion. For more information, questions, or a ride please contact Marty Synnott (727-595-3190, [martysynnott@yahoo.com](mailto:martysynnott@yahoo.com)).

ALL ARE WELCOME  HAPPY READING

### COTI Prayer concerns

- ❖ Claire H., broken back after a fall
- ❖ Larry K., Covid
- ❖ Susan A., Diane Gu.'s cousin, in critical condition after a cycling accident
- ❖ Diane Gu., recovering from cancer surgery
- ❖ Jan K., recovering at home from Covid
- ❖ Marla B.'s sister Ruth, health concerns
- ❖ Church members having scans, tests, awaiting surgeries
- ❖ All those grieving losses of loved ones from COVID, other illnesses, accidents, racism, and violence
- ❖ Our nation and the world





GOD, IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYERS. STRENGTHEN OUR WILLING HANDS AND FEET, AND HEARTS TO ACT IN WAYS THAT LEAD TO THE JUSTICE FOR WHICH WE PRAY. AMEN.

## Deacons Meeting October Recap

10/12/2020 via Zoom at 5:30pm. (summary of the minutes by Rebecca! THX, Rebecca! 😊)

- ❖ Attending Members: Pastor Shelly, Linda Smith, Guy and Melody Hawkins, Alexander Fuller and Rebecca Bacon. Absent from the meeting: Lucy Berger, Nancy Etrz
- ❖ The virtual Hymn sing will be held October 18<sup>th</sup> honoring members top requests.
- ❖ Pastor Shelly will be sending out surveys, online and snail mail, in order to collect parishioners' feedback regarding returning back to worship in person.
- ❖ The next worship service is proposed to be held on November 8<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am inside the sanctuary. Deacons will help prepare the sanctuary (week of November 2<sup>nd</sup>) for social distancing, labeling pews and guiding parishioners to their seats on the day of the service. Masks are required; there will be no singing and no coffee hour. The music and the sermon will be put online for those who do not attend in person worship. Parishioners are welcome to socialize outside if comfortable while keeping social distance. The main sanctuary doors (to outside) will be used primarily in order to maintain social distance.
- ❖ We shall continue to check in with families who have been dealing with health issues including Covid19 to offer support. What can we do to support teachers in our community as well as teachers in our congregation? Supplies? Cards? Etc. Pastor Shelly will check in with teachers to see how we can help.
- ❖ Next meeting: November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 5:30pm. Meeting concluded at 6:15pm.



## Council Meeting Recap

- ❖ Attending: Kathleen Addison, Clerk; Jan Kreuger, Moderator; Janice Sell Bell, Vice-Moderator; Linda Smith, Deacons; Marty Synnott, Outreach; Barb Templin, Treasurer; Jeannie Waller, Resource Coordinator; Leslie Notaro, at-large member.  
Absent: Pastor Shelly Wilson
- ❖ Call to Order: Jan Kreuger, 12:38 PM      Spiritual Focus: led by Janice Sell-Bell
- ❖ Old Business: **Report given by Jan** regarding the status of Chapel on the Hill UCC and their potential building sale and move. Discussion included their use of part of our memorial garden for cremains, and possible installation of their Tree of Life (memorials). Sandy Tarrant of Chapel on the Hill has been invited to speak October 4 on Beirut and the plight of the Palestinians and emergency supplies will be gathered to help in the wake of the recent explosion.
- ❖ Pastor Appreciation Day is October 11. Pastor Shelly's first service was October 1, 2019. Plans are to gather gifts of appreciation from COTI and Trinity.
- ❖ **Heritage Fund Report** given by Janice Sell Bell.
- ❖ **Barb Templin gave a treasurer report** indicating that COTI was in the black for this month. Thrift store business is increasing. Motion made, seconded, and passed to adopt the treasurer's report as presented.
- ❖ **Deacon report given by Linda Smith.** Change recommended for the proposed time for the outdoor communion service in September and October. 6:30 PM is the new time.
- ❖ **Outreach report given by Marty Synnott.** Pinellas Hope going well with monthly lunches. Miracles Outreach girls received COTI's Christmas package. Emergency supplies for Church World Service's work in Beirut will be gathered. Decision will come in the new year regarding Greenfest 2021. All vendors for this year have been refunded due to the covid-caused cancellation. Sing-a-long Messiah scheduled for November 2020 has been cancelled. Discussion about an altered form of the community Thanksgiving Dinner.



- ❖ Discussion about church building reopening: (summary)
  - Individual churches have a variety of different policies, open and indoors, not open, open and outdoors, combinations of approaches and timing
  - UCC national and Florida Conference have sent reopening guidelines
  - Deacons can help facilitate the service
  - Many folks believe the sanctuary would be safe for reopening due to its spaciousness and our small group of worshipers.
- ❖ **Resource Coordinator Report given by Jeannie Waller.** She requested the Council create a parking lot policy. Discussion followed.
- ❖ Meeting adjourned by Jan at 2:20 PM
- ❖ **Respectfully submitted (in its entirety) by Kathleen Addison, Clerk**  
**THANKS, KATHLEEN!** (The full version of Kathleen's minutes are available in the church office.)

## COTI Financial July Recap

- ❖ **Income:**      \$14,025.78
- ❖ **Expenses:**    \$14,756.07



## Tentative Plan for November 8<sup>th</sup>

Our Church Council, Deacons, and I are watching the virus numbers carefully and working hard to discern if there is any reliable and safe path forward for reopening for in-person worship in some form or fashion on November 8 (outside or inside) at our usual time of 9:00 AM. You received the online Survey and I hope you filled it out and returned it so that we may gauge what your comfort level and opinions are regarding these important matters. As always, we urge everyone to re-enter or not at your own comfort level. Online worship will continue even when we do reopen, in order to accommodate everyone's needs. Please plan to join us as you feel able.



**Beach Community Food Pantry @ Calvary Episcopal Church IRB** needs the following **items for their food pantry:**  
Any food that you can possibly share for humans and pets alike are more than welcomed. We thank you in advance!



**Deadline for submissions for the October Newsletter is NO LATER than Friday, November 20, 2020. If items are not received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month they may not be included in the newsletter.**

One of the many IRB sunsets! A true blessing of beauty!

**Church of the Isles United Church of Christ**

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- Rev. Bill Main, Associate for Visitation (727) 291-3663
- Jan Kreuger, Co-Moderator (314) 562-4585
- Marty Synnott, Co-Moderator (727) 249-3011
- Beach Community Thrift Store (727) 444-0339