

Dear friends,

It is hard to believe that Advent is just around the corner, but here we are, ready to celebrate the first Sunday of Advent on November 28. Once again, we enter this season of watchfulness, yearning to recognize the coming of Christ, knowing that God often enters our lives in the times and places we least expect.

The church is humming with activity as we approach this busy season. In particular, I want to share two updates with you:

- The Pastor Nominating Committee that you elected on October 3 has been working diligently. They received training in their task from Executive Presbyter Melana Scruggs on October 26, and elected a moderator, Frank Frey; and a secretary, Steve Knopik. They organized for the work ahead and are well on their way to meeting their first milestone, having completed the Mission Information Form (MIF) that will advertise and describe this position to interested candidates. The session was pleased to approve the MIF at its November 16 meeting. That form will now go to the Peace River Presbytery's Committee on Ministry for consideration at its December 14 meeting. Once the MIF is approved by the Committee on Ministry, it will be posted on our denomination's website and begin to make its way in the world. Please do be praying for our search committee as they engage this work of discernment: Michael Fingerle, Frank Frey, Steve Knopik, David Landers, Carrie Mills, Janet Olshewsky, and Kay Steinman.
- In other encouraging news, on November 14 a gathering of prospective new members met for lunch after church. You will be seeing their faces and names in the coming weeks, but what a remarkable group of people they are. Already we are blessed by their rich experiences and vital faith. And it was unique to my experience to have four of those households make financial pledges to support the work of the church before ever they came to their first new members' gathering!

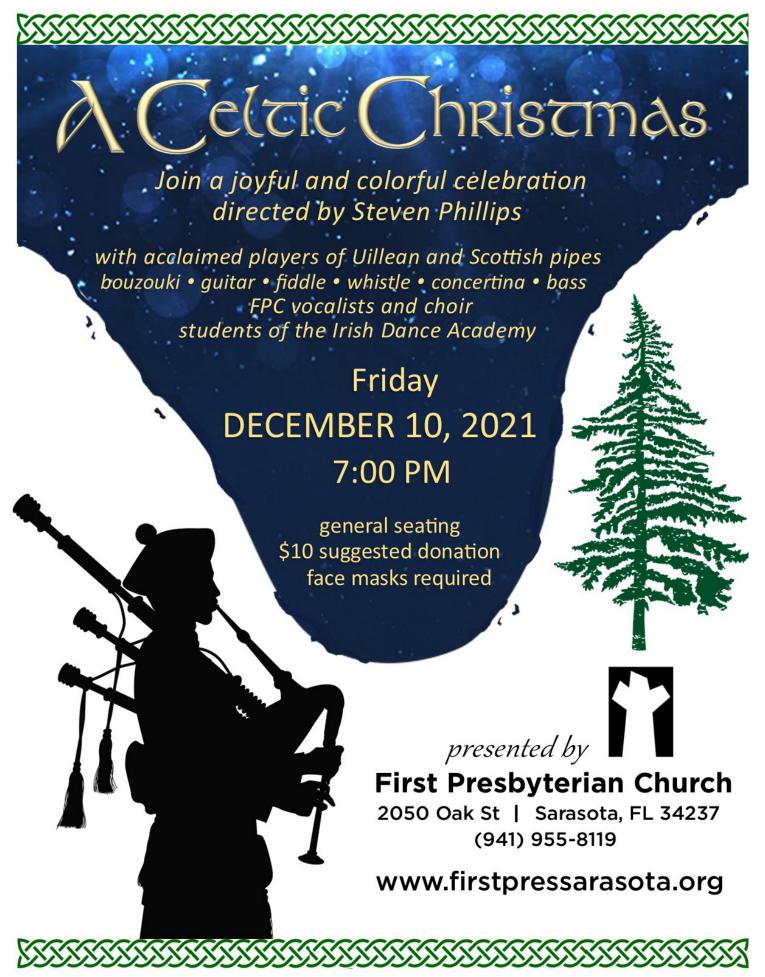
As we move into the final weeks of the year and make plans for the year to come, it would be so helpful to know of the support of each member of this congregation. Many of you have submitted your pledges and a remarkable 60% of those pledges are increases over the prior year. Your faithfulness witnesses powerfully to your trust in God and love for each other. Thank you for the encouragement you offer to all of us.

As we keep watch together for the light that shines in the darkness, may we all know the joy of service in God's name.

Grace and peace to you in these holy days,

Don't miss the Intergenerational Advent Workshop on Sunday, November 28 at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall / Courtyard.





• Update on Our Stewardship Campaign

by Craig Gesell, Co-Moderator Business Affairs



- Ephesians 4:11, 12

We had a good start to our Stewardship Campaign with over 100 families turning in their pledges by commitment Sunday, October 3rd. Thank you to the many members and friends who have pledged such generous support!

However, with many of our seasonal members not yet back in Sarasota, and others

who have not yet returned to our in-person services, the last several weeks of pledges have flattened out. At the time of this article, we have collected about 87% of the pledges we had received eight weeks into last year's campaign. A follow-up letter has just been mailed, and we will begin reaching out to members by phone in the weeks to come.

Below is a graphical representation of our 2022 pledges as compared to 2021. Our total budget for pledges in 2021 was just over \$778,000 (and just over 1 million in 2020).



If you haven't yet pledged your commitment to the coming year's mission and ministry, we would be so grateful to hear from you. This will be an exciting and pivotal year in the life of this congregation, as we anticipate welcoming a new pastor. Will you help us to make up the ground we still need to cover?

If you have any questions about the process of pledging, our Finance Manager, Lisa Garcia, can be reached at (941) 955-8119.

2022 Offering Envelopes

Beginning Sunday, December 5, through Sunday, December 19, there will be a table set up for you to pick up your 2022 offering envelopes. To save on the cost of mailing, please make every effort to pick up your envelopes.

Contributions for 2021

The end of 2021 is quickly approaching, and the last day to receive contributions to be credited towards this year is **Friday, December 31**. Please bring your donations to the church office or put them in the mail; they must be postmarked no later than December 31.



Presbyterian Women

Your financial support to PW is important. If you normally give when we meet together, then it is easy to forget to mail in your PW pledge. Please send in your pledge

this month so that we can make our yearend mission donations and you can take the charitable contribution on your tax return. Make your check payable to Presbyterian Women and either mail it to the church office or drop it off in the church office while you are on campus. If you have any questions, please contact our PW treasurer, Mary Webb, at (941) 758-6035.

On **Tuesday, December 7** at 11:30 a.m., all women of the church are invited to lunch at MADE Restaurant for a time of fellowship, The restaurant is located at 1990 Main Street #112, Sarasota in Courthouse Centre.

Good News of Great Joy Christmas Joy Offering

The PC(USA) offers you the chance to bring Good News of Great Joy to the poor in circumstance or spirit. Your gifts to this special offering will be distributed to retired ministers and missionaries in need and our Presbyterian racial-ethnic colleges. We will be receiving the Joy Offering on **Sunday, December 19**.





In the past, our congregation has been extremely generous in providing thoughtful gifts for students in need from Brentwood Elementary school (BES), their siblings and parents. We have received stars from our Blessing Trees, shopped for gift suggestions received from the families, and celebrated together at a spectacular dinner in the FPC Fellowship Hall. Due to lingering COVID-19 concerns, this year we will continue to express our love and care to these students and their families by sharing gift cards. We will still . . .

- Provide gifts for BES students and their siblings (fifty children total) from families in need—in the form of *two \$30 gift cards each!* (Target or Walmart, suggested)
- Bless their parents with two to four \$50 grocery gift cards! (Publix, Winn-Dixie, Target or Walmart, suggested)
- Joyfully receive *checks* to support this project and Brentwood Elementary School—made out to FPC with "BES Christmas" in the memo line.

Please deliver your gift cards and/or checks to the church office by December 12.

Your support is needed to reach our goal of one hundred \$30 gift cards for the children and forty to eighty \$50 gift cards for groceries for the whole family. Thank you in advance for your generosity. You will be a blessing for these families in need!



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The Foundation of First Presbyterian Church

by Beth Byron-Reasoner, trustee

Year-end Tax Planning Benefits You and The Foundation for the First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc.

As the end of the calendar year approaches, thoughtful planning can benefit both you and First Presbyterian Church. Gifts to the church's Foundation made before December 31, 2021 can reduce income and estate taxes while providing long-term financial support for the missions and ministries of the First Presbyterian Church. When contemplating year-end giving, please consider making a gift to the Foundation using any of the following methods, or by another manner chosen by you.

- 1. A gift of cash, appreciated securities, or other selected assets to the Foundation for First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc. this year or over a period of years. Gifts of securities which would cause recognition of long-term capital gain (generally those held for more than one year) can be especially beneficial to both the donor and the church by avoiding the payment of capital gains tax. In 2021, taxpayers who itemize may be able to deduct up to 100% of their adjusted gross income (AGI) for cash gifts to qualifying charitable organizations.
- 2. Direction to your IRA custodian to make a direct contribution from your IRA to the Foundation for First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc. (if you are required to receive distribution under the SECURE Act and limited to \$100,000 to charity). This can count towards your required minimum distribution for the year of the gift. We recommend you check with your tax advisor if you are unsure of your distribution status.
- 3. Establishing a charitable remainder trust that will pay a specified percentage to you or another person, or both, for your lifetime(s), then paying the remainder to the Foundation for First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc. at your death(s).
- 4. Establishing a charitable lead trust to pay a specified percentage to the Foundation for First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc. for a period of years, then paying the remainder to a person or persons selected by you.

5. Establishing a donor advised fund at a participating brokerage firm, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County or at Gulf Coast Community Foundation from which you can request transfers to the Foundation for First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Inc.

To make a transfer of securities directly from your broker to the Foundation or the church, please contact the church's finance manager, Lisa Garcia, at (941) 955-8119 in the church office for assistance.

Presently, the Foundation has a balance of \$1,321,472 as of October 31 divided among its five funds. Your gift to the Foundation can be directed to any or all five of the designated endowment funds:

- (1) General Endowment
- (2) Property Endowment
- (3) Mission and Ministry Endowment
- (4) Scholarship Endowment
- (5) Temporary Fund for Designated Gifts

If you do not designate a fund, your gift will be included in the General Endowment.

If you have further questions about making a gift to the Foundation or if you are interested to learn about becoming a member of the board, please contact any of the Foundation's board of trustees: Betsy Marshall, Michelle Young, Ric Saba, Rich Paul, Michael Brown or Beth Byron-Reasoner.

Adult Education Class: "Spiritual and Moral Issues in American Fiction" Continues Sunday, December 5

This in-person Sunday morning class taught by Dr. John Parks at 10:00 a.m., in room 223, continues December 5, 12, and 19.



As serious literature, good stories offer what Mathew Arnold called a "criticism of life." As such, stories invite readers to a reflection upon our condition in the world. This often entails grappling with spiritual and moral issues such as innocence and guilt, loyalty and betrayal, choice and fate, meaning and emptiness, hope and despair. Our exploration is prompted by reading stories by Edgar Allen Poe, Stephen Crane, Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Raymond Carver. We may find that these stories offer a diagnosis of our condition and a challenge to our beliefs.

Come for stimulating interaction with these timeless themes. Stories to be discussed are posted on News@First and provided as printed hand-outs in the class and the church office one week prior to discussion.

Adult Education Zoom Class "Advent: The Season of Hope and Expectation"



This learning opportunity for adults begins **Tuesday, November 23 at 11:30 a.m.** and continues each Tuesday through December 28 via Zoom.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, the Church celebrates Advent. This season gets its name from the Latin term adventus, meaning "coming." It is a season when the Church prepares for Christmas Day—the great celebration of God, the Savior, coming to us in Jesus Christ. In this time of waiting and anticipation, we will focus on what Advent brings as Christ comes. The class will discuss together the rich biblical and theological terms centering on the message we proclaim as we tell the world of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Join with others to engage in the wonder of preparing for Christ's coming. All are welcome! The class will be led by Elaine Barnett, a member of FPC, an elder and a Certified Christian Educator. You can sign up for the class by emailing Elaine at ewbarnet@me.com.

November 23 - Advent Hope November 30 - Advent Peace December 7 - Advent Joy December 14 - Advent Love December 21 - Christmas Savior December 28 - Epiphany Light

· Christmas Poinsettias

As the joyous season of Christmas approaches, our thoughts turn to holiday traditions. Each year we decorate the church with poinsettias for Christmas. Plants may be ordered in



memory, or in honor, of loved ones. To assure quantities, all orders are to be submitted by Wednesday, December 14. Please make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church with "poinsettia" in the memo. Order forms may be turned into the office.

Number of poinsettias at \$10 each: Paid by check #: Amount by cash:				
Name:				
Home phone:				
IN MEMORY OF				
IN HONOR OF				
Please check one:				
I will pick up my poinsettia(s) after the 7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service.				
I wish to donate my poinsettia(s) to the homebound.				
I wish to help deliver to the homebound.				



And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8

Grow Us Stronger

The scheduled November 9 Community Problems Assembly via Zoom was cancelled and is re-scheduled for **Tuesday**, **January 18**. The SURE board decided it was best to do this in anticipation of the hiring of a SURE lead organizer.

In its place, all network members from the 23 congregations of SURE were invited on November 9 to attend a criminal justice meeting held at First Presbyterian Church's Fellowship Hall. It was hoped State Attorney Brodsky would attend to give us a needed update. However, the state attorney sent his Chief Assistant State Attorney Craig J. Schaeffer of the 12th Judicial Circuit.

As instruments of peace and justice SURE Board Co-Chairman Bishop Ellis of Koinonia Life Impact Church opened the meeting with these statements:

We have been working for over a year to see an adult civil citation program started because we have seen too many members of our congregations have their lives ruined because of one misdemeanor arrest for something relatively minor.

Based on the data we received from the Sarasota Clerk of Court, we now know that in 2020 there were 5,838 people arrested for misdemeanor offenses. Over 5,000 people are now branded for life with criminal records. These people will find it harder to get a job, to get housing, to volunteer at their children's school.

It's taking a very long time to get the program up and running, but that does not concern us. We don't mind that it's taking a year to get the program started as long as we get it right and we set up a program.

We Cannot Criminalize Poverty

There are three areas that are key to having a successful program:

- 1. The majority of all misdemeanor offenses must be included.
- 2. There needs to be proper screening to ensure that all people get equal access to the program.
- 3. There can't be large fees attached to the program because that leads to a system where the wealthy don't get arrested and the poor do get arrested.

Rev. Laurie Etter from UCC and Dorothy Murphy from FPC led the discussion. Mr. Schaeffer stated that he would continue meeting with SURE. As promised, he sent the revised Adult Pre-Arrest Diversion draft the state attorney's office has been working on to be shared with network members. He also agreed to give SURE monthly updates and stated he believed we were getting much closer in agreement. Co-Board Chairman Rev. Wayne Farrell of St. Boniface Episcopal Church summarized the meeting and the needed follow-up items.

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. - Amos 5:15

WWW.FIRSTPRESSARASOTA.ORG



Family Promise celebrated the grand opening of "Francis House"—a shelter for pregnant and recently delivered homeless mothers. The first year's rent on this two-bedroom, two-bath house was provided by First Presbyterian Church with funds from our Imagine the Future campaign. The home was brightly painted and comfortably furnished by volunteers. Francis House, named after Doug Francis, the former Family Promise board chairman, will provide a safe environment for two mothers at a time for up to three months after their baby's birth. Other young children in the family also stay with their mothers. Mothers will receive counseling from Family Promise, and will be assisted in finding long-term stable housing.

Family Promise is so grateful for everyone who has the heart to give and chooses to donate to Family Promise and the families it serves. You may donate to Family Promise through our annual *Thoughtful Giving* Booklet and anytime on the giving page on the First Presbyterian Church website. Go to https://secure.accessacs.com/access/oglogin.aspx?sn=91629 and select "Family Promise" from the drop-down menu. Family Promise and its clients are blessed by all you do.

Family Promise celebrates the grand opening of Francis House



Seating area



1 of 2 bathrooms



Well-furnished kitchen

Pack-n-Play cribs



Immanuel - "God with us," is a phrase that is joyously repeated during the Christmas season. It is a happy thought in the best of times, and a comfort during times of loss, memory of those who are gone, and times when feelings can be overwhelming. Even more powerful is the presence of God with you by the comfort and care of a fellow believer during dark times. Someone who is there to listen to you, to accept you and your feelings, and a person to empathize with you. In essence, to be a physical reality of "God with you."

Stephen Ministers can provide this kind of real comfort. They are prepared to be compassionate, confidential listeners. Stephen Ministers provide a continuing care for as long as they are needed. Stephen Ministers are also equipped to help you find resources that may be appropriate for you through a difficult time should that also be needed.

Currently, we have openings to offer care assistance. If you or someone you know is hurting, find out more about Stephen Ministry. Please call the church office (941-955-8119) to speak with Pastor Margaret LaMotte Torrence, Faith Community Nurse Cheryl Track, or Director of Music Ministries and Congregational Care Steven Phillips.



Love Note

Dear First Presbyterian Family,

Thank you very much for your caring and concern during

my recent surgery and recovery. The cards, telephone calls, emails, and the flowers that were delivered by Deacon Bob Bittner – a wonderful surprise – all contributed to my recovery and continuing to return to my old self.

I am blessed to have such a wonderful church family. Thank you again and blessings to each one of you.

Bonni Arbuckle



Are You Handling Your Emotions or Are They Handling You?

submitted by Cheryl Track, Faith Community Nurse

The title question for this column is timely given the chronic stress that we have all been facing the last year and a half. My answer to this question is, "Yes!" Yes, there are times when I am handling my emotions, and yes, there are times when my feelings are handling me. One of the warning signs I recognize in myself when I am not managing my emotions well is that I am irritable and impatient in my communication with others. Perhaps this is why I resonate with the advice that when it comes to good communication, it is wise to strive to "Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Don't say it mean."

There is much wisdom in these three short sentences. Like many wise sayings, it takes a moment to memorize, but a lifetime to master. Let's reflect briefly on each of these three sentences.

"Say what you mean" describes the importance of having the emotional intelligence to recognize and express the full range of our emotions. For example, if I am sad or scared, and if I am not mindful, I might express those feelings as anger or criticism, when it would be far healthier to be vulnerable enough to share what I am really feeling. Being thoughtful and honest about what we really mean is good for ourselves and those with whom we are in relationship.

"Mean what you say" invites us to reflect on what we are communicating so that it is an accurate expression of what we are feeling. For example, "You never help me clean up around here" is probably not accurate and indeed not helpful. Much better is, "The last week or so, I have felt like I have been doing most of the household chores. You may have a different perspective, but in any case, I want to talk about how to balance all this better going forward." The person who is frustrated in this example probably doesn't really mean that the other person never helps out, and escalating their words to that level greatly reduces their chance of being heard.

"Don't say it mean" is often the most challenging advice for many of us to follow. Somewhere along the line, it seems we got the idea that we can increase our chances of being heard by raising our voices in anger. Yet, we know that attempting to increase our persuasive power by raising our voices actually has the opposite effect. People instead shut down and stop listening when we are mean.

It is natural, at times, to be overwhelmed by our emotions and to feel like they are handling us rather than that we are handling them. Whenever we find ourselves overwhelmed, it is wise to call a time-out and wait until we are sure we won't say or do something we'll later regret. When we have calmed down, we will be more able to "say what we mean, mean what we say, and not say it mean."

It takes a lifetime to master this wisdom. Any of us, at times, can and will "say it mean." It happens to all of us, and when it does, we need to be careful not to be too hard on ourselves. We simply and humbly need to apologize, learn from what happened, and grow a little wiser when it comes to handling our emotions.

*Handling Emotions is one of the eight dimensions of wellness in our *Wellness Compass Model for Well-Being*. You can learn more about that model https://www.wellnesscompass.org/our-wellness-compass-model-for-well-being.

Taken from *The Wellness Compass*, November 12, 2021 by Scott Stoner, LMFT



FPC Blood Drive

The next blood drive is **Sunday, December 19,** from 8:30 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. You may use the Quick Pass on December 19 prior to your donation to register:

https://suncoastblood.org/donate/quickpass/.

Stewardship Thought: An Easy and Tax Efficient Way to Donate

If you are 70½ or older and have a tax-deferred retirement account, a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) may be an excellent way to donate to fulfill your pledge to First Presbyterian. We have seen a rising number of QCD contributions and anticipate a growing number of our contributors will join this trend and take advantage of the current IRS rules. If you have any questions, ask our Finance Manager, Lisa Garcia. Please check with your tax accountant or IRA custodian to see if you qualify.

Donating to a Charity Using a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)

Taken from Fidelity Learning Center

If you are age 72 (previously 70½) or older, the IRS rules require you to take required minimum distributions (RMDs) each year from your tax-deferred retirement accounts.

A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA, payable directly to a qualified charity. Amounts distributed as a QCD can be counted toward satisfying your RMD for the year, up to \$100,000 per individual. The QCD is excluded from your taxable income. This is not the case with a regular withdrawal from an IRA, even if you use the money to make a charitable contribution later on. If you take a withdrawal, the funds would be counted as taxable income even if you later offset that income with the charitable contribution deduction.

Why is this distinction important? If you take the RMD as income, instead of as a QCD, your RMD will count as taxable income. This additional taxable income may push you into a higher tax bracket and may also reduce your eligibility for certain tax credits and deductions. To eliminate or reduce the impact of RMD income, charitably inclined investors may want to consider making a qualified charitable distribution (QCD). For example, your taxable income helps determine the amount of your Social Security benefits that are subject to taxes. Keeping your taxable income level lower may also help reduce your potential exposure to the Medicare surtax.

Tip: With the recent tax law changes, there's one additional factor to consider: you may take advantage of the higher standard deduction (\$12,550 for single filers, \$25,100 if married and filing jointly). This means that if you claim the standard deduction, you won't be allowed to itemize things like charitable donations. However, since QCDs are not includable in income, the QCD is also not deductible. As such, the QCD can remain an option for your charitable giving, even if you claim the standard deduction in a given year.

If you are $70\frac{1}{2}$, own a Traditional or Roth IRA, and donate to charity, QCDs may make sense for you; consult a tax advisor regarding your specific situation.



Birthdays

• Bir	tnaays		
1	Evan Eastmoore Jill Cardinal	23	Ann Proctor Jimi Camastro
	Drew Stuart		Meg Lowman
2	Alice Mills	24	Chuck Duddingston
	Gabriel Monahan		Charles Proctor
	David Dunlap		Bob Wrobel
4	Bette Lou Cookson		Katie Hart
	Dent Davis	25	John Herrli
6	Ryan Chapdelain		Connie Brussee
	Craig Gesell	26	Arianna Dulaney
7	Doris Hackett		Jack Senterfitt
	Merle Chorba		Zoey Stine
	Anne Hathaway	28	Debbie Williams
	Wendy Mastripolito	29	Velma Allen
8	Linda Nelson		Landon Cook
9	Savannah Camastro		Kathy Pedicini
10	Jim Minton		Bliss Rippy
	Sam Roby	30	Kathleen Carter
11	Lorenzo Mills	31	Kay Dunn
	Trisha Roby		Timothy Hall
	Marilyn Claxton		Jim Smith
12	Bob Hultz		
	Rolando Garcci		
13	Robin John		
	Aly Papa		
14	Ginny Haydon		
	Tracey Beeker		
	Michelle Fantauzzo		
17	Alan Lawrence, Sr		
18	Matt DeLuca		
19	Rob Kimbrough, Jr.		

December
Blessings
from
your church
family



Anniversaries

Chad Papa

Janet Robinson

Marion Hughes

20

22

23

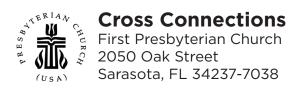
25

1	Eric & Marissa Tingstrom	27	Stephen & Reva Mitchell
2	Matt & Tracy Bretoi	29	Alan & Linda Nelson
3	Duane & Doris Harff		Frank Frey & Annette Landes
6	Gabriel & Tina Jiva		Dick & Barbara Wigton
9	Ron & Karen Saba		John Edds & Nicole Muir
16	Jim & Bobbie Dean	30	John & Velma Yost
	John & Linda Parks		Neal & Diane Price
17	Rene & Helen Corcoran		
	George & Jessica Armstrong		
19	Sam & Trisha Roby		
21	Steve & Jan Papenfuss		Cross Connections is a

Cross Connections is a monthly publication of First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota, Florida, Volume 39 Issue #12. Please submit articles for the next issue by December 15, 2021. Articles submitted are proofed and edited.

Harry & Mary Jo Steltmann

Brian & Lois Bowen



(941) 955-8119 www.FirstPresSarasota.org

Return Service Requested

Sarasota

Intergenerational Advent Workshop SUNDAY, NOV. 28

A Celtic Christmas FRIDAY, DEC. 10

10:00 am - Fellowship Hall /Courtyard

7:00 pm Musical Presentation \$10 - suggested donation

Christmas Eve Services FRIDAY, DEC. 24

7:00 pm Candlelight and Communion 4:00 pm Family Nativity

Christmas Hymns and Carols One 10:00 am service SUNDAY, DEC. 26

Second Sunday of Christmas SUNDAY, JAN. 2 (2022) One 10:00 am service

SUNDAY, JAN. 9 (2022) Epiphany Worship Services

www.firstpressarasota.org

One 10:00 am service

Presbyterian Church

at First