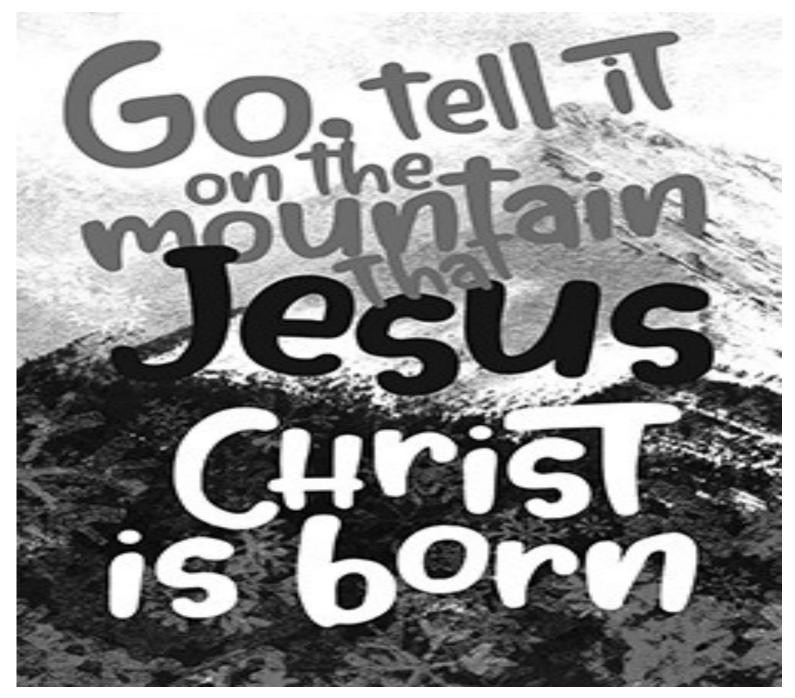
VANTAGE



December 2023

Pastor's Page



Jennifer Yardley Barney remembers something from Christmas Past she will never forget. It shaped her. Some gifts mean so much. When we receive them, they're amazing, maybe even goose bumpy amazing. Yet, when we're the one who gives them, it's even more than this. We're the light of God's goodness. May we all find in the gift of Christ the reason to live as lamps of love.

She writes: "I knew I was not supposed to be quite so excited. I was too old for that. At age eleven, the oldest and my mom's "grown up" girl, I had to keep my cool. I was in middle school after all. But every chance I got, when I was alone, I checked each present under the tree. I read every tag and felt every package, guessing at the contents within. I had examined each gift so often that I could tell which present went to which person without even looking at the tags.

It had been a tough year for my family. Whenever my mom looked over at the tree and scattered presents, she would sigh and warn us, "There won't be as much for Christmas this year. Try not to be disappointed." Christmas had traditionally been a time for my parents to spoil us. In years past, the presents would pile up and spill out from under the tree, taking over the living room. I had heard the phrase "giving is better than receiving," but thought that whoever had said that must have been out of their mind. Getting presents was the whole point. It was the reason I couldn't get to sloop on Christmas Evo. was the whole point! It was the reason I couldn't get to sleep on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas morning, we eagerly waited in the hallway until Dad told us everything was ready. We rushed into the living room and let the wrapping paper fly. We made weak attempts to wait and watch while other family members opened their presents, but as the time passed we lost our self-control.

"Here's another one for you," said Mom as she handed me a package. I looked at it, confused. Having spent so much time examining the presents before Christmas, I recognized this one. But it had not been mine. It was my mom's. A new label had been put on it, with my name written in my mother's handwriting.

"Mom, I can't..."

I was stopped by my mother's eager, joyful look—a look I could not really understand. "Let's see what it I is, honey. Hurry and open it."

It was a blow dryer. Though this may seem but a simple gift, to me it was so much more. Being an eleven-year-old girl, I was stunned. In my world, where receiving outweighed giving by light years, my mom's act of selflessness was incomprehensible. It was a huge act. Tears filled my eyes, and I thought in disbelief about how much my mom must love me to give up her Christmas so I could have a few more presents.

I have always remembered that Christmas fondly. It had such an impact on me. As an adult with children in my life whom I adore, I can now understand my mom's actions. I see how she was not "giving up her Christmas" as I had thought but was finding an even greater joy in her Christmas because giving truly is better than receiving. My mom's simple act meant the world to me."

Peace and joy (and Merry Christmas—soon!)

Pastor Tom



If you are interested in participating in worship service by being a lay reader, please speak with Pastor Tom

December Teachings

Sundays at 10:00 am

December 3 Isaiah 40:1-11

2Corinthians 9:8-11

December 10

December 17 John 1:6-9, 19-23

December 24 Luke 2:1-20 5 p.m. service only with Candlelight (no Sun. a.m. service)

December 31 Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Comfort With Comfort

Don't underestimate your need for comfort. Accept someone's consolation when you're down, and their concern when your well-being is at risk. It's not like being comforted or consoled is something to run from or reject. Many times, it can be something simple that helps. Maybe you have a cozy bed, and a pillow that cradles your head just right. Or, perhaps soft towels in the bathroom are your thing. No matter what it is, turning to comfort is often turning to God's mercy for you.

Put to Good Use

The actual truth, the biblical truth about our lives and what makes us feel good and secure is this: As we give our time and resources to the work of God's life, and especially Christ's ministry, we become more satisfied with our lives and ourselves. We have our time, our season, during which we're to engage our resources, talents, time, and treasure to the work of good things, people and purposes that need what we are and have.

Wishes for a Tiny Tim-Sized Christmas

Christmas is filled with small things that loom large, special and last beyond what we might think they would. Things like Christmas carols sung at a candlelight Christmas eve service; baking cookies with mom or grandma; giving to Salvation Army bell ringers or to one's church or to the hungry or homeless. This season is filled with small kindnesses and unexpected gifts. Be part of it. Share in the joy of a small but mighty Christmas

Peace and Joy

That's why Christmas is so wonderful. We get to be reminded that even the most divine among us was born and therefore truly human. God started at the very beginning; as a baby, taking a first breath, feeding for the first time from his mommy, crying in need and dependence, falling asleep in peace, breathing in joy of being alive and loved. Christmas shows us we have a divine right to be this, to want peace and joy. Peace and joy are your birthrights from God.

Time is on my Side

The Bible reminds us to redeem the time or make every minute count. Sometimes we must respond now, we must answer now, we must act now, we must not wait or delay or put things off. We must not say, "Tomorrow is another day." Let's make today the day that matters most.

Team Updates

News from the Vision Ministry

by Sarah Hugus, Acting Church Moderator

Financial Update

In late October we were blessed with a large donation as part of an estate settlement from a member who died before 1996! His widow lived another 10 years but had moved away. We had only been informed of John's death. We came up with approximate date of his widow's death by researching online. We are so grateful for this \$7500 gift! A brass plate to memorialize the wife's death will be added to our Cook Memorial Garden and is ordered - in thanks for their gift. We hope to reinvest at least part of that gift before the year's end, to increase our savings. We have had to use some savings during 2023 to pay expenses, as you read about in previous newsletter articles.

Your 2023 year-end giving statement will be mailed in January to all 120 family units who identify their COTH contributions. Giving via Zelle is a fee-free option. Several families use this monthly recurring way to follow through on their pledges. Thank you for all financial gifts and gifts of your time and talents.

Lifepoint Church

This very friendly and helpful congregation has been worshiping following our Sunday morning service for seven weeks. In the near future we expect to share with Lifepoint additional areas of our church facilities during the week. Please continue to be warm and welcoming to new folks in our midst who LOVE being able to worship and have their Sunday School program here.

Land Sale Update

At present, the Vision Ministry has agreed to put a hold on any active marketing of the small piece of land on the west part of our church property. Our finances are much more positive now with recent income from our two visiting churches and of course the preschool.

The sub-team of Bob and Doug have come across historic church documents that may affect how and what can be sold of church property. Since we would want a squeaky-clean title to proceed with any offer, we need to research this history more thoroughly to be clear about what such a process entails. Since

the Florida conference is somewhat involved in how churches can sell property, we need to get solid clarity from that office as well to be sure about our rights as a local church.

We will update you further when we get all the facts. Many thanks to Doug and to Bob for their countless hours for meetings, research, writing reports, and answering questions.

From Bread and Cup to Faith and Giving Pledge

Watch for your letter and pledge card soon regarding our 2024 pledging campaign, or Stewardship Drive. At this time of year, we continue planning for our programs and ministries going into 2024. Your pledge of financial support, as well as sharing time and talents in volunteering, are all crucial to our church. We need to meet our expenses. Perhaps more importantly we want to pursue additional ways we can continue being a very special church in our community. Help us do that with your loyal support.

Newsworthy from Fidelity investment company

"A required minimum distribution (RMD) refers to mandatory withdrawals from qualified retirement plans like traditional IRAs that kick in once a saver reaches age 73. Your first RMD deadline is April 1 in the year after you turn 73. All subsequent RMDs must be taken by December 31. Missing those deadlines can be costly with a 50% penalty on withdrawals not taken.

Note that if you delay your first RMD until April, you'll have to take 2 RMDs in your first year—and pay taxes on them. The first will still have to be taken by April 1; the second, by December 31."

Check with your accountant, but you should be able to transfer all or part of RMD funds directly as a gift to a charitable organization - such as Church on the Hill - which prevents your being taxed on that income when it is paid directly to you as an individual taxpayer.

Sounds like a win-win!



Team Updates

Publicity and Promotions Update

Jerry Clinton, Team Lead

I hope everyone has had the chance to visit our newly "renovated" website. If not, stop by and check it out at www.churchofboca.org. Special thanks to Andrew Lowe and Thomas Brown for making it happen. To keep it fresh and current, we want to regularly update our content. The Church would welcome anyone with video editing and/or web design experience to volunteer some time for a worthy cause.

Contact Jerry Clinton at jerryclinton1@gmail.com.

Deacon Update

Bob Murphy, Team Lead with Rocky assisting Don't we love our very own friend-therapy dog?

Deacons provide Welcome Bags to our visitors that include some literature like the latest Vantage issues, pens, popcorn, Be The Church magnet and a smile. If you would like to serve on this fun and active team, please talk with Bob or Pastor Tom. murphyrobertf@gmail.com

Mark your calendars - This is an invitation from the Deacon Team for a Progressive Dinner on Sunday, January 28. We'll enjoy appetizers and salad hosted by Lois in Pompano Beach, main courses in COTH's Fellowship Hall, and desserts hosted by Faye at St. Andrews Estates in Boca. See sign up sheets in December and January for attendance and food donations.

Bob

Member Care Update

Jeannie Clinton, Team Lead

The Member Care Committee has been busy calling and sending notes to Church on the Hill members who may be in need of prayers, a visit, a ride to church, or just a friendly check-in. Jeannie also writes to our visitors. If you or someone you know needs help from the Member Care Team, please contact Jeannie Clinton at 561-901-5935 or jeannieclinton1@gmail.com.

Stay Connected

Did you move? Have you changed your USPS address? Would you prefer to receive our monthly Vantage newsletter via email? If you answered YES to any of these questions, please send your contact information or changes to be placed on our church email list to: office@churchofboca.org. Thank you!

From the Vision Ministry/Lay Leadership Team:

Dear Members and Friends of Church On The Hill,

On behalf of the Vision Ministry, we want you to know that we have had serious discussions about the emails sent to many of you several months ago.

As leaders of Church on the Hill, we are responding to the situation by committing to improving our communication. The Vision Ministry has taken several meaningful steps, including developing recommendations for being proactive in addressing problems and working to diffuse Issues before they become major sources of contention.

The Vision Ministry has also committed to creating a new policy handbook that will outline our commitment to improved communication. Interpersonal relationships are not easy and require ongoing effort to maintain mutual respect and appreciation. We pray that our efforts toward improved communication will serve as a step toward healing, and a commitment among us all to more kind communication in the future.

As church leaders, we want to be known as people who show God's love for all by loving others ourselves. We realize that any organization will have challenges, and we want to think of them as opportunities to learn, grow, and get along well. We intend to do always what is best for Church On The Hill.

The Vision Ministry members appreciate your prayers for them and for Church on the Hill.

Remember Your 2023 Florida Conference UCC Dues!

Church on the Hill is a member of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ. Yearly dues are \$15.00 per person in your family who is a member of this church through joining or Confirmation. Our church must pay this amount for all members, so your contribution will definitely help keep our budget on track.

Our 2023 amount owed to the Conference is \$1845; as of today our members have contributed \$555. Please remit your \$15 per member in your household to help keep our budget in line. Thank you to all who have "paid their dues," and to several folks who gave extra.

BCEO

All are invited to eat out, dutch treat, almost every Thursday evening. This group has been active, except during the pandemic, for about 20 years. We all make suggestions and decide where we would like to eat. We try to change up the location to suit everyone.

When YOU would like to attend, please RSVP to Bob Murphy: murphyrobertf@gmail.com

Here is the December line-up

December 7

Papa Giuseppe Italian & Pizza Restaurant 900 Linton Blvd Delray Beach 33444 561-272-8585 Menu is at papagiuseppecafe.com

December 14

Casa Maya Grill Mexican Restaurant SE 15th Terrace (Cove Shopping Center) Deerfield Beach 33441

954-570-6101 Menu at casamayagrill.com

December 21

J&J Seafood Bar and Grill 634 E Atlantic Avenue Delray Beach 33483 561-272-3390 Menu at jjseafooddelray.com

I'm taking a BCEO break in the last week of December between AND Christmas and New Years while my daughter's family visits from We'll restart Northern Virginia. on January 4, 2024 at a restau-



rant TBD. If you have any suggested eating spots for 2024 in Boca, Delray and Deerfield, please let me know.

Bon Apetite!

Book Buzz

Book Buzz participants enjoyed a great discussion of Unsheltered by Barbara Kingsolver. She is known for her fiction and nonfiction writing set in her beloved Appalachian Mountains.

The next book that we discuss will be The Girl With the Louding Voice by Abi Dare'. We will meet on Friday the 8th of December at 11:00. Thomas Brown will convene the group. All Church on the Hill congregants are welcome to join us in reading these books, even if you don't attend the monthly conversations. Enjoy and happy reading! If you have any book suggestions or any questions, please contact Thomas at 954-695-7573 or at:

marrom33@gmail.com.

Celebrate Florida Newsletter

Want to know what is happening around our Florida Conference and our National UCC? Both have comprehensive web sites, with links to many topics and resources. The "Celebrate Florida" newsletter is very interesting! You can find the link to sign up for the email newsletter on either of the UCC sites.

uccfla.org and ucc.org.

Daily Devotional from United Church of Christ

This is a resource that is available to anyone free of charge. You can sign up for the UCC Daily Devotional on the UCC.org website. Just type http://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional Into your browser and fill out the form.

After-Worship Events

Each 2nd Sunday of the month, we would like to have a special gathering immediately after worship. Some events have been Father's Day brunch, Sundaes on Grandparents' Sunday, Super Bowl of Caring, Bring Your Own Hero Sandwich Sunday and more. What event would you like to help plan? Please offer your ideas to Bob Murphy, Team Leader of the Deacons, or to any one else on the Vision Ministry Team.

The Pension Boards of UCC Christmas Fund

We will be taking a special offering for the UCC Pension Board's special fund for retired pastors and pastors with emergency needs. Watch for that special envelope in your bulletin during this month.



45 Churches of the Florida Conference have opted to sign on to the Pastoral Letter

Church on the Hill is one of the 45 churches that is speaking out on behalf of Educational reprinted here showing the signatures of a few of our members.

An Open Letter to Our Florida Neighbors

including The Governor, the Education Commissioner, and members of the FL State Legislature

The United Church of Christ (UCC) in Florida has been a part of the faith community in FL since 1884 and a part of our nation since its very beginning. Our faith is rooted in scripture and Jesus' commandment to Love our neighbors as we love ourselves' (paraphrase Luke 10:27). Our commitment to education began with our denominational ancestors, who were founders of Harvard College, seminaries and other institutions of higher learning, including six Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU) and more recently, New College.

In addition to supporting institutions of higher learning, we are also invested in supporting our children and youth through public education. It is our love for and our commitment to our children that compels us to write regarding the new education policies being enacted in our state. Again, we follow the words of Jesus, who said, "Let the children alone - let them come to me. the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (The Inclusive Bible). This is often interpreted as a reminder to value the qualities of children and to be open and accepting towards everyone, regardless of their age or status. It also serves as a call to nurture and protect the young ones, allowing them to grow and develop freely as well as an invitation to welcome the most powerless among us. We believe that love of neighbor means supporting the autonomy of one's faith and education, honoring the dignity of all, and promoting inclusion are ways of defining the beloved community.

To build a beloved community, we must ensure our children are taught the richness and complexities of our collective past, the good as well as the bad. Teaching children a comprehensive understanding of history will foster empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper sense of unity and will empower them to recognize injustice and discrimination and work towards a more equitable future. Yet it seems that our new educational curricula are focused on making students comfortable rather than challenging them to analyze and evaluate. Further, language expressing slavery as a benefit to African Americans is reckless and harmful; in worst cases, leading to acts of violence like what we witnessed in Jacksonville on August 26, 2021.

Moreover, we are concerned about the dropping of the AP African American history curriculum in favor of what seems to be a much less comprehensive one, especially Prager U, which purports only one viewpoint. To build a beloved community, one that embraces all its members, we must acknowledge the struggles, triumphs, and contributions of every individual and community that has

played a part in shaping our state and nation. A beloved community is not built on obtuseness or the erasure of history. It is built on a strong foundation of knowledge, understanding, and respect for one another. By equipping our children with a holistic view of history, we give them the tools to challenge prejudice and bigotry. We create a generation of leaders who recognize the immense value of embracing diversity and promoting social justice.

Furthermore, we are concerned that our policies and rhetoric toward LBGTQ+ students, parents, teachers, and faculty feel targeted and less safe. We are concerned that books lifting up diversity and the struggle for justice have been taken off library shelves, sometimes as a response to self-censorship because of the political atmosphere that has been created. We are concerned that the mission of New College has been changed and new leadership, some without educational credentials, hurriedly put in place. All of these actions threaten the building of the beloved community.

Just as we are asking you, our educational and political leaders, to remember your responsibilities for the educational policies of our state for all our children and to engage with educators, historians, and community leaders to design an inclusive framework that truly reflects the complexities of our shared pas! we acknowledge our own responsibility in the education of our children and youth. We re-commit to providing a safe space for children and youth to learn about one another and about the vision for a Beloved Community.

We express our gratitude to our dedicated educators and librarians and commit to supporting them in helping nurture our children and youth. These educational experts care deeply and play a vital role in shaping the future leaders of our society. They inspire, challenge and open young minds to the wonders of knowledge. But too many of them now feel under attack and are contemplating leaving their profession and/or the state.

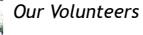
Let us work together to create a beloved community where every child grows up with an understanding and appreciation for the diverse tapestry that has been woven throughout history. In the words of Jesus, "Let the children come.'

Sincerely,

BHH Thanksgiving Baskets

Thank you to those who contributed the food or funds to fill 11 Thanksgiving boxes this year! A 10% increase over last year. The families who benefit from the annual Thanksgiving Box Brigade provided by Boca Helping Hands and many volunteers, are truly appreciative. Our youth decorated our boxes instead of giving a plain old cardboard box - they look really pretty in color, so please go on our web site to see their artistic talents in the full color version of this newsletter.





Thanks to our Previlus family volunteers who helped clean up the windfalls from a recent storm.













Our AC guy Bryan delivers and installs a unit to provide cooling at front of sanctuary

All this yard debris was "wrassled" into 4 bins for pickup! A big thanks to volunteers Bob M., Dan S., and Pastor Tom.



Equal Exchange Holiday Gift Idea!Thomas Brown has been selling coffee and

chocolate as a fundraiser for the church. Perhaps you would like a unique gift idea for Christmas. Thomas will order coffee, chocolate, Palestinian olive oil or gourmet teas for your gift giving this year.

For more information talk to Thomas. He will take your requests and make the order. All profits go to the COTH general fund to help meet our expenses.

Coffee - \$10/package

Chocolate - \$5/bar

Tea - \$5/20 bag box (many common flavors)

Palestinian olive oil - \$15/500 ml bottle

All products are organic, from small sustainable farmers and guaranteed fresh.

Let's put in a big order and help the farmers and our church!!

Information and Reminders

Offering / Donation / Contribution Options

Zelle: mobile pay using our COTH email

No Fee!! address:

office@churchofboca.org

Cash: offering plate on Sundays

Check: offering plate on Sundays

OR send via U.S.Mail

Credit/Debit Card: COTH Website:

churchofboca.org

-under the "Give" tab.

-the "Donate" button allows you to give using PayPal and/

or Credit/Debit card

PayPal: search for:

Church on the Hill Boca Raton

Bank e-check: send an e-check directly from

your bank

Special donations/offerings may also be made using all these methods.

Please indicate in the 'note' field if your donation is for a special offering.

Upper Room Devotionals

These periodicals are released every other month. **November/December** is available now! https://www.upperroom.org/devotionals

Prayer Requests

Please contact Pastor Tom with needed prayers. Text him at 561-306-5208 or email him at TOMLACEY@CHURCHOFBOCA.ORG or to COTHPRAYERS@GMAIL.COM

Email Communications

Please let us know if you would like to receive electronic copies of the weekly worship bulletin and Vantage newsletter by sending us a note at office@churchofboca.org

Stay in touch for the latest news/photos!

- Facebook: Church on the Hill-Congregational Church of Boca Raton
- Twitter: @UCCchurchboca
- Instagram: @ChurchontheHill
- Website: www.churchofboca.org

(Same address; new look and content plus many of the usual items still available.)

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/07 Lynn & Kenneth Holloway 12/14 Gail & Barry Donovan

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/01 Anne Hugus-Agard 12/15 Jennifer Attonito Holly Schultz 12/16 Rachel Borchers 12/17 12/21 **Bob Murphy** Cliff Schultz 12/22 12/28 **Ethan Hymans** Eileen Lund 12/28



Special Events:

- December 2 9:00-12:30 AA Meditation Workshop
- December 2 & 3 9:30 Hanging of the Greens
- December 17 Pledge Sunday
- December 24 No Morning Service!
- December 24 5:00 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

PUBLICATION DEADLINES

Vantage Newsletter Deadline Wednesday December 15th at noon

All articles, pictures, or announcements for the next Vantage are due.

<u>Sunday Bulletin Deadline</u> <u>Every Wednesday at noon</u>

<u>Sunday Bulletin Announcements</u> are due on Wednesday each week.

Email items to: marrom33@gmail.com



CHURCH ON THE HILL November 2023 Weekly Calendar of Events

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
10:00 am Worship Service* Communion (1st Sunday of the month) 11:15am Sermon Discussion w Pastor		12:00 noon AA		12:00 noon AA	11:00am Book Buzz (2nd Friday of the month) 12:00 noon AA	
	7:30 pm NA	6:30 pm AA	6:30 pm FA	5:30 pm B.C.E.O. 7:00 pm NA	7:00 pm NA	

ONA Covenant Statement

ONA Covenant adopted January 13, 2019
At Church on the Hill, we affirm that every person has worth as a unique creation made in the image of God. We recognize, value and give thanks for the many diverse gifts of God among us. We believe that through diversity, all can worship together and grow in a faith that transcends our differences.

Accordingly, we declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation, inviting and welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons into the full life and ministry of Church on the Hill, as well as persons of every race, culture, age, ability, gender and economic status.



The Moderator is here for YOU!

Any and all questions regarding the church inner workings, services, happenings, volunteering, concerns, praises, etc... can be directed to the Acting Church Moderator at: sarahhugus@aol.com

Boca Helping Hands receives your donations

Over the past several months, our worshipers have donated many pounds of food to help local residents. Thank you to all who regularly help with this ministry and mission work.



Church on the Hill

Address: 251 SW 4th Avenue Office Phone: (561) 395-9255 Boca Raton, Florida 33432

E-mail: office@churchofboca.org Web site: www.churchofboca.org

Pastor:

Tom Lacey

Cell/work phone: 561-306-5208 email: tomlaceypastor@gmail.com

Church Moderator:

sarahhugus@aol.com

Prayer Requests:

cothprayers@gmail.com

Sunday Worship Service

In-Person & on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bocaucc/

Staff

TV Monitor & Live Stream Administrator:

Marit Hasmats-Lacey

Accounting Manager / IT Consultant

Markus Asch

Worship Song Leaders: Guest Musicians

Accompanist:

Georgene Barger

Sexton:

(Jan-Pro Co.)

Volunteers

Sarah H, Kathy B, Bob M, Thomas B, Lois F, Dan S, Faye F., The Hinshaws, Barbara & Larry L.

> Photographer: Marit Hasmats-Lacey

> > **Property:**

Doug Briggs, Bob Murphy

First Class Stamp

BOCA RATON FL 33432 251 SW FOURTH AVE CHURCH ON THE HILL