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## *Of Shepherds and Sheep*

*“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.”* (Luke 2:8) Night watchmen at that holy event. Part of the Christmas story, but also a line that foreshadows the future of the Child in the manger. The One who will become the Good Shepherd watching over the age-old and universal “flock” of humanity on this orbiting globe, day and night.

In an intimate meeting after his crucifixion, Jesus passed the awesome responsibility of caring to his disciple—and to us: He said in triplicate: “Simon Peter, feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17) Perhaps he means to feed those who are hungry -- feed with nourishing food; to feed those who are alone, isolated, ostracized -- feed with love; to feed those who are sinful, bitter, unfairly punished, scorned because of differences -- feed with the Spirit, with news of a benevolent God, with the promise of forgiveness, justice, and inclusion.

Open Arms’ mantra “you are welcome here” means that we are here to “feed the sheep.” We must not get too involved with the glitter and ritual of Christmas and neglect the “sheep.” Christmas trees and Advent wreaths, carols and folderol are important, but finding and loving those in need should remain foremost.

**Add the word WELCOME to the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that the Christ Child brings.** All “sheep” are welcome here at Open Arms. Come in and feast at the Nativity with the Shepherds, Angels, and Wise Men. Worship the child, but prepare to welcome, feed, and watch over the “sheep” in 2024!

## *We Remember in Prayer*

**Prayer:** we reach out to God. Let us lift in prayer these loved ones and all others who are in need physically, mentally, or spiritually.

- **Gladys Barton**, who is recuperating from surgery in a rehab facility.
- **Jean Brooks**, who struggles with various issues and is moving to a new locale.
- **Rev. Bill and Gail Royster**, who would appreciate prayers in the midst of health issues.
- **Sue Kreuger**, who required physical therapy after a serious fall.
- **Rev. Carol McAninch**, who is recovering from a painful fall in her home.
- **Lisa Dove**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who continues treatment at M. D. Anderson.
- Our friends, **Rev. John and Han Will**, who welcome prayers.
- **Brenda Mayfield**, who is receiving treatment for heart issues.
- **Teresa Jackson**, who is very ill.
- **Ray Durham**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Victims of wars, storms, floods, wildfires, violence.**

### *Welcome Guests*



we welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month.  
Dalton Pratt, Sophia Braun, Elder Hansen.

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*His name will be the  
hope  
OF ALL THE WORLD*

Matt. 12:21

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## Special Thank You's

- First and foremost, thanks to the whole “**Royster clan**” for representing Open Arms at the Children’s Festival sponsored by the Children’s Hospital on the weekend of November 18. The Roysters helped children color in a large coloring book and had as much fun as the children!
- A special thanks to **Liz Royster Herrick** for helping Open Arms keep its stuff organized while it was in storage. In coordination with Amazing Spaces Storage, Liz kept the keys and codes that gave access to stored church materials, furniture, and equipment.
- **Amazing Spaces** has given us free storage for many months, and their benevolence has been a great gift. Remember Amazing Spaces if you should need extra storage. They are our blessed friends.



### *Five Candles + Evergreen Circle = The Advent Wreath* by Gail Royster

**A**DVENT IS A TIME TO REMIND ourselves that many of the Christian symbols we take for granted have rich meaning that often spans centuries. Ritual symbols are not merely designations. Rather, they are *vessels* that contain storied wisdom and the echoes of history. The tradition of the Advent wreath is no exception.

While Christians in the Middle Ages were said to have used wreaths. The origin of the Advent wreath has been traced back to Germany, though the exact dates are unknown. Historians have suggested that pre-Christian Germanic peoples would light candles around wreaths in the dark winter months in anticipation of the warmer, lighter months in springtime.

In the 1800s there was a Protestant pastor named *Johann Hinrich Wichern*; he was a man known for his mission work among the urban poor. One year, around 1830, Johann noticed that during the month of December, the children in his mission school, *Rauhes Haus*, would inquire daily about whether Christmas had arrived. In response to their impatience and constant questioning, he fashioned a “wreath” from the wheel of a cart to count off the weeks. Thus, the continuing use of candles and evergreens during Advent.

The presence of the light reminds us of Jesus' coming into our world and into our lives. The light is included in the worship service as a symbol of Jesus' coming into the presence of the worshipping community. Many congregations use two candles on the altar to point out that Jesus

was both a human being and God. The garland signifies continuous life with no beginning or end, echoing the symbolic meaning of the wreath's circular shape. Evergreen is also said to signify victory over persecution and suffering.

Open Arms has used the same white, LED candle since our beginnings. It has been to parks, patios, yards, restaurants, a community center, now transitioning to a shared facility with a Disciples of Christ congregation in Conroe. Truly God has been in our midst, and will be with us as we transition and move to a new space. No GPS needed.

From [\*The Acolyte's Book\*](#) by Hoyt Hickman: "Since ancient times, light and fire have reminded people that God is here with us. When you bring the light (fire) into the place where people are gathering to worship, and when you light the candles, you are reminding the people that God is with us at home, at school, and at work, as well as in the worship service; Lighted candles also remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world."

Open Arms will use three blue candles, one pink candle, and the Christ candle. Candles in worship are not just pleasing visually. Doesn't matter the color, how many. Rather, they symbolize that God is in our midst and with us as we worship. Those candles represent: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love. What better terms to use as we mark the coming of Immanuel, the Christ Child.



## **December Mission Project**

By Gail Royster

**T**he **Christmas Fund** (a UCC Five for Five offering) has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Thankfully, Open Arms retired clergy do not require this assistance.

**The Christmas Fund will be split with a local ministry** that has a specific need. Currently, we are working with Settegast Heights (a low-income apartment complex owned by the UCC). We understand they have need of athletic equipment for the children and youth that live there.

So many people have great needs – especially during the Christmas season. Finding recipients for our mission giving is not difficult.

The mission team at Open Arms is constantly amazed at the incredible generosity of our community. We say **THANK YOU**, and blessed holiday.

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## **In Case You Haven't Heard!**

**I**N DECEMBER, 2023, OPEN ARMS UCC IS MOVING itsfs worship center to the First Christian Church campus in Conroe. The address of the new location is:

**3500 N. Loop 336 West  
Conroe, TX 77304**

Church offices will remain the same: Vicky Royster at phone 832-368-9551; e-mail office@openarmsucc.org. For further information regarding details about the move, contact Vicky (see above) or Pastor Jules at phone 409-998-0339 or e-mail Pastor@openarmsucc.org.

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## **Important Announcement ---- About 2024** **Church Directory**

Elise Daulley is getting ready to send out the 2024 church directory, updated for the new year. This is the time of year that she adds, deletes, and changes information to fit needs of the church congregation.

If you have recently come into the fellowship of Open Arms, and you would like to be included in the directory, please send Elise your name, address, birthday (month and date), phone number(s), and email address. If there is some item you do not want included, just omit that detail. **Elise's email is daulley.elise@att.net.**

For those who are already included in the directory, please examine your 2023 copy and see if you want anything changed, added, or deleted, and send this information on to Elise. If your entry in the directory is the way you want it, you do not have to do anything! It will stay the same.

**Thank you for responding as soon as you can.**

## The Year 2023 Gave Us Many A Memory!

- January 8 Fellowship Sunday: An open invitation to all with a meal provided by great OA chefs.
- A 41-mile walk to raise money for a Forever Home. Rev. Jules and Kim literally went the extra mile(s) for Open Arms. It took all day and most of the night!
- Cyber bake sale in May including David Durham's peach cobbler (5 stars).
- Good Friday dramatic production, "At the Foot of the Cross." Ask anyone: Open Arms people can perform! (Adam Mayo as Jesus!) A beautiful service.
- On July 2, Julia Reinhart became Open Arms' first Confirmand. She gave her Statement of Faith and expressed her desire to be a member of the Christian church.
- Rev. Dr. Kendall Moore's Ecclesiastical Council and later his ordination into the ministry at St. Peter UCC, September 16.
- Fish Fries all during the year, hosted by James and Liz Lemn at their home on Hardy Street. Such generous hosts.
- Music events: Nia's solos with the Praise Team and the choir, small but mighty; and who could forget "I Surrender All" by the Noonan's talented daughter, Noelle?
- Back-to-school activities including bags for the Houser Elementary School teachers, assembled by Pam Mayo
- An August 22 trip to Camp Hope. Open Arms members took lunch and visited with veterans at the camp who are receiving help and treatment for various casualties related to military service. Arranged by Mission Maven Gail Royster.
- Again, great dramatic performances by the Open Arms actors in "It Really Happened in Old Spring" at Big Stone Lodge in September for Forever Home fund.
- A great Woodland's Pride Day in October organized by the Says. A day of evangelism and fellowship.
- Free vaccinations at Tamina by the Christus Mobile Health unit angels. We must never forget their generous service. Two visits in 2023.
- And never forget that Garage Sale on October 13 and 14 at Ken and David's. They brought in \$1830.00 with enough left over for another sale.
- A December move to Conroe midst the Joy and Hope of Christmas and Joy and Hope for the continuation of a loving and vital church!
- Any time Rev. Dr. Jules Williams stepped up to the pulpit is memorable!

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*God gave us memory so that  
we might have roses in  
December.*

*Sir James M. Barrie*

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## **Time To Put on Your Walking Shoes!**

**A**T LEAST, IT'S TIME FOR REV. JULES AND KIM to get ready to walk! They have set March 8, 2024, as the date to walk 41+ miles from Huntsville to Conroe just as they did in 2023. The request is to commit to \$10.00 a mile in an effort to put Open Arms in a Forever Home. These two wonderful people are devoted to their cause; let's support them in every way we can! Watch for more information and suggestions as to what you can do to help.

## **It's Wits Christmas Coming Up!**

**L**IT WITS MET NOVEMBER 14 to discuss a remarkable book, *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt. One of the central characters, Marcellus—a giant, Pacific octopus—thinks, feels, and acts in a human-like way! Sounds a little wacky, but the concept works very well in a charming, readable account of friendship, renewal, and hope. Kate Flagge led our active discussion at I-45 Diner on Cypresswood. A plug for the diner: really good food, good prices, and a quiet atmosphere. You might try it!

For December 12, our Christmas meeting, Sue Krueger has opened her always-festive home for a 6:00 p.m. meal and planning session for 2024. If you remember, each month a Lit Wit member selects a book for all to read. The member leads the subsequent discussion of the book at a dinner meeting in a location of his/her choice. If you enjoy reading and talking about ideas, this would be a good time to join our group. Call Sue Krueger at 281-684 6998 to learn more about Lit Wits.

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*Honor And Serve Our Pastors!*  
*Clergy Luncheon for Houston Association*

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**T**HE HOUSTON ASSOCIATION OF THE UCC is sponsoring a Clergy Luncheon for active, retired, and assistant pastors in the Houston Association. The invitation includes spouses, partners, and significant others that would like to attend. The luncheon is December 7, 2023, 12:00 noon, at St. John UCC, 4606 Mangum Road, Houston, TX 77092.

Especially during the holidays, the stressful time of planning worship services, counseling, comforting parishioners, mediating, teaching, etc., all present taxing obligations that challenge or over-extend those in the ministry. Hopefully, this holiday gathering will give these pastoral leaders an opportunity to commune and share in an informal, relaxed setting. Those pastors who plan to attend should RSVP to Pam Mayo at [psmayo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:psmayo@sbcglobal.net).

Open Arms folks who would like to help with this special day for pastoral leaders, please contact Pam. She would appreciate any assistance you can give.

**No Jewelry Sale, At Least Not for Now!**

**S**O MUCH GOING ON and not enough time to get everything done! Moving a church, health issues, winter winds—leave little space for a sale. But we will get the goods out and have a jewelry sale in the future, just not now! Watch for a new date and come to shop. Thanks.

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*Merry Christmas*  
*and*  
*a Happy New Year!!!!*

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## **CHANGE FOR CHANGE—TIME TO CASH IN**

**R**EMEMBER OUR FUND-RAISER, Change for Change? Hope you are dropping those coins in a jar and planning to bring them to church on December 10. The old adage “Every little bit helps” applies here. You may give your collection of coins to Kim Williams or Margaret Smith. We will wrap them, count them, and get them to Vicky Royster to add to our Open Arms’ bank account.



## **Too Much Stuff – Options for Gift Giving**

By Gail Royster

**C**ome On!! Admit it. We all have too much stuff. Probably, that’s true for your children and grandchildren.

Consider doing “a new thing,” that’s in the Bible you know.

Make a donation to a mission project, charity of your choice, or any place that helps people. Here’s the plus side of that: don’t have to go to the mall, won’t need wrapping, skip the post office line. And, it will bring needed help to others. And, it will provide a model of caring and sharing for your family and friends.

Many helping agencies have catalogues on their websites. Here is a short list of agencies/charities that you might consider – many of these Open Arms has supported with our mission projects: Church World Service, Heifer International, Habitat for Humanity, Audubon, World Wild Fund, environmental groups, food banks, Community Assistance Center in Conroe, and projects of the UCC.

Make your donation(s), create a note or card explaining what you have done, and let it be “the gift” you share. For small children, you could give a representation of your gift – little stuffed animals, socks, a favorite food item. You get the idea.

Finally, does your family have a Bible in the home? If not, yes, you guessed it – give one, maybe a more contemporary translation that would be easier to read.

Two books that would make good reading gifts. “Billy wants to Behave” by P.R. Maxey: a simple story that explores a neurodivergent boy and gives a window into how his mind works. “Be the Change: A Grandfather Gandhi Story” by Arun Gandhi and Bethany Hegedus: “Dynamic visuals and storytelling create a rousing family story and speaks to a broad audience.”



## Happy Birthday Wishes

*Sue Kreuger – December 4*

*Mustapha Williams – December 4*

*Liz Lemm – December 8*

*Margaret Smith – December 8*

*Greg Mayo – December 15*

*Sandy Royster – December 15*

*Chris Teese – December 18*

*Liz Herrick – December 21*

*Jan Says – December 24*

*Carol Foss – December 27*

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North American names for **December's** full moon, which will be Tuesday, December 26: Cold Moon, Moon Before Yule, Long Night Moon.

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### **Some of the Monthly Observances in December**

Art and Architecture, Eggnog Month, Hi Neighbor Month, National Fruit Cake Month, National Identify Theft Prevention and Awareness Month, National Pear Month, Read a New Book Month, Safe Toys and Gifts Month, Made in America Month, Tomato and Winter Squash Month, Universal Human Rights Month, Write a Friend Month.



**“A friend in need is a friend indeed.”** The earliest known expression of this sentiment is thought to have first been used by Quintus Ennius (239-169 B.C.) a Roman of Greek descent, who is considered by many to be the father of Roman poetry.

## **December 2023**

- December 3 - First Sunday in Advent
- December 7 - National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- December 8 - First Day of Hanukkah
- December 10 - Second Sunday in Advent  
Bring your Change for Change
- December 12 - Lit Wits
- December 17 - Third Sunday in Advent
- December 21 - ❄ First Day of Winter ❄
- December 24 - Fourth Sunday of Advent
- December 25 - Christmas Day
- December 31 - New Year's Eve

## **January 2024**

- January 1 - New Year' Day
- January 6 - Epiphany

# Open Arms Photo Gallery

Photo Courtesy of Peter and Vicky Royster



**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from Open Arms UCC**

# Open Arms Photo Gallery

Photo Courtesy of Peter and Vicky Royster

**“Royster clan” representing Open Arms at the Children’s Festival sponsored by the Children’s Hospital**

