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January 1, 2023	Volume 3, Number 1

## ***AFTER CHRISTMAS – ONE SOLITARY LIFE***

**B**elow is an abridged version of a famous passage most of you have seen before. It seems an appropriate reading for us as we have just witnessed the birth of this special person so long ago. We know that infant grew to become a Teacher and Preacher who is the model by which we seek to live. This reading succinctly traces His influence over the ages, validating the endurance—and the importance--of that “one solitary life” to our secular and troubled world, and to us.

### **ONE SOLITARY LIFE**

***He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. For three years, he was an itinerant preacher.***

***He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place where he was born. . . He had no credentials but himself.***

***He was 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends abandoned and denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. . . He was crucified and laid in a borrowed grave.***

***Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race . . . Of all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have not affected the life of humanity on this earth as much as that **one, solitary life.*****

(Some scholars have taken issue with who is the author of this popular piece, but now authorship is generally attributed to James Allan Francis. You may take issue with a phrase or two in this reading also, but most will find truth here.)

## The Spiritual Life at Open Arms

**T**he old hymn “Take Time to be Holy” speaks to us as we observe religious tradition and worship, perform Bible study, and note the Seasons of the church year in 2023. Beyond the ordinary practices in our day-to-day lives, we turn our thoughts to the “spiritual,” sometimes found in customs of the larger church.

1. Following Christmas, **January 8 is the first Sunday of Epiphany.** Epiphany extends through six Sundays until February 12. Many do not understand the meaning of this season of the church year. Like all ancient holy days, the history of this Christian holiday is long and complicated, but basically Epiphany marks the revelation of Christ as being both human and divine, the word “epiphany” meaning a “revelation” or “manifestation.” A simpler and more popular meaning is “a sudden flash of understanding” or “insight.” When the Magi visit the manger, after following the light of the star, they are “overjoyed”—as the holiness of this child is **revealed** to them, and they worship him. Later in Christ’s life, His divinity is shown in his baptism, **manifested** to the witnesses through the ascending dove. Both Bible stories give insight to the reader in understanding that God has come into this world through Jesus Christ.
2. In many cultures, Epiphany refers to a Christian Feast Day, not too different from our **Fellowship Sunday on January 8th** during which we will observe the first Sunday of Epiphany with worship, praise, fellowship, and food.
3. Our new unit in **Bible Study, beginning the week of January 22**, will focus on the lives of the Apostles, each of them dedicated to delivering Christ’s Word to the world, attempting to teach that this man has been God Incarnate who brought God’s message of *Love for One Another*.
4. Looking to future Seasons: **Lent begins on February 26**, and lasts 6 weeks until Easter. During that time, we prepare for the ultimate sacrifice of that “babe born in a manger” -- culminating in Holy Week, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection.

## We Remember in Prayer

**P**rayer has the power to heal and change the lives of those who are hurting in body or mind or spirit. We ask that you would send up prayers for:

- **Gladys Barton**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Anthony Maldonado**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Antonia Rivera**, who has major medical issues.
- **Jean Brooks**, who has fallen twice and is restricted to a wheelchair.
- **Romie Hollins**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Rev. Juvenal Cervantes**, who is home and doing rehab.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Vicky Royster**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Carol Foss**, who has not been feeling well.
- Our friends, **Rev. John and Han Will**, who welcome prayers.
- **Brenda Mayfield**, dealing with pain.
- **Jim Lemm**, who has issues with his knees.

## *Welcome Guests*

**W**e welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month. Lisa Dove, Margaret “Magpie” Bennett, Kole Krueger, Cambridge Krueger, Eva Hollins, Anthony Alex, Hannah Poenisch, Spencer Arnold, Eva Hollins, Micah Tanner, Carol Aninch.

*Act justly*

*Love mercy*

*Walk humbly*

**Micah 6:8**

*Thanks to Those Who Helped Make  
Christmas Merry at Open Arms*

*To The Carolers:* **Pam Mayo**, who organized; **James Lemm**, who drove the trailer, got the hay, and provided good cheer; **Dr. Rev. Jules and Barry Fairbanks**, who led the singing; **Ron Krueger**, who played his guitar with gusto; all the other carolers from Open Arms and Tamina; and **those who helped with fellowship afterwards.**

*To Those Who Helped With Worship:* The **Praise Team**, especially with special numbers, such as “Alleluia”; **the readers in the Advent vignettes; the readers in worship; Gail Royster** and her beautiful enhancements, **Norman Swaney** and his handcrafted manger; **those who contributed snacks after worship and set up the buffet for Christmas Eve** (including **Kim W’s** roasted pecans); and **Vicky and Peter Royster** who set up and printed programs in spite of sickness.

*To The Card Makers:* **Gail Royster and her group of artists** who fashioned old cards into new ones, and again to **Gail** who distributed those cards to school teachers and to ones who were serenaded during caroling.

*To The Doners:* Those who contributed to the various Christmas missions sponsored by Open Arms.

**Happy Birthday**

**Leru Poenisch – January 14**

**Brenda Ruegge – January 24**

**Rev. Dr. Jules Williams, Jr. – January 31**

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**Rev. Dr. Jules Williams, Jr.’s  
New Email address: [Pastor@openarmsucc.org](mailto:Pastor@openarmsucc.org)**

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## “Great Day a ‘Comin’”—

### ***Open Arms Fellowship Sunday — January 8***

***Fellowship Sunday:*** As always at Open Arms, it’s a day of worship, of meeting the creator in prayer and song, embracing the holy spirit and feeling it move in us. It is a day for listening to Dr. Rev. Jules preach and inspire us—a time when we are made better.

For Fellowship Sunday, we are asking you to bring friends, family, and neighbors with you to bask in the atmosphere of a church that welcomes all: “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey.” This day is a time to show Open Arms UCC to others!

On Fellowship Sunday, you will have the opportunity to join Open Arms as an avowed member. Membership is no requirement to attend here, but some may wish stronger ties with the Open Arms fellowship. That would be a commitment, and something to think about. Please know that anyone joining will be welcomed with Open Arms!

After worship, all are invited to a great meal provided by the Open Arms church.

On January 8, Fellowship Sunday, plan to stay and enjoy the food and this loving community. Here the light is always on.

## **January Lit Wits—Begin Reading More In 2023!**

**T**he January Lit Wits choice of book seems the perfect way to begin your reading for the new year. The selection is *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict and Victoria Murray, a fictionalized account about the personal librarian to J. P. Morgan, Belle da Costa Greene. Greene, a “person of color” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, disguises her ethnic identity and establishes herself in high society as she works to help Morgan collect rare manuscripts. This historical novel has received honors and accolades from many sources. Pam Mayo will be reviewing and discussing this “engrossing and well-researched read.”

The meeting venue has changed for the January session. As a “community” book club, representing members from a number of organizations, we will be gathering in

the meeting room of the **Spring Historical Museum on January 10 at 6:00 p.m.** An informal meal will be provided. Participants are asked to bring their own drinks.

Attendance is open to all.

## *Consider Joining the Open Arms Church Council*

**T***he Open Arms annual meeting is scheduled for January 22<sup>th</sup> after worship.* At that time, we will survey 2022—with reports on the past year’s activities from the various committees and the President of the congregation. We will handle other areas of business, such as electing new members to the Council. The entire Open Arms family should be present for this important session.

Much needed now are volunteers for the Church Council, to be affirmed at this meeting. Three vacancies for a two-year term must be filled to make the Council complete. What do you think? Can you answer the call to serve on the Council and help this wonderful church remain viable? Call Kenneth Reaves, 832-326-3058, for information about serving. He can tell you what the position entails.

We look to 2023 with great expectations for our church. Let’s all work together to help Open Arms grow and continue to serve as we have in 2022. While we are Open Arms, we are also God’s great arm, answering Christ’s call to care and welcome all.

**January is National Blood  
Donor Month**



## January Mission Project

**W**hen difficult times happen, a kind and loving response can make all the difference. That's why the CWS Blankets program was created—to give a kind, loving and tangible response to someone facing a difficult time, reminding them that they are not alone. Through the generosity of CWS partner organizations, congregations and individual supporters, our most vulnerable neighbors around the world can feel safe and keep warm with fresh linens and clean sleeping quarters.

When our neighbors are in need, even \$10 for a single blanket goes a long way.

### **December Mission/Outreach/External Team – Report**

- ❖ UCC Christmas Fund – Monthly Giving
- ❖ Wheelchair Foundation – Monthly Giving
- ❖ Christmas Baskets – Thanks to Pam they were made and delivered to Shirley Grimes.
- ❖ Caps and Gloves for Back Bay Mission – Our collection was delivered to Sue Earl at First Church and she will deliver them to BBM.
- ❖ The card making workshop was a good activity. We had fun and made 102 cards for distribution. There is conversation about another such project, perhaps for Valentine's Day. How about Valentine baskets at the Community Assistance Center Resale Shop in Montgomery County?

We have had a request from Slumber Falls Camp Development Committee. The camp is in a dire financial situation. Actually, there is much discussion about the sale of the camp. Do we want to make a contribution to help with the current crisis? We'll postpone discussion until our January meeting.

Thanks to all for hard work this year. We have been blessed with sharing our work and resources with many in need.

## MEET DR. KENDALL MOORE

**Y**ou might say that Open Arms UCC is a degreed community. We have three ordained ministers in our congregation, at least two more PhDs, and about a dozen Masters and Bachelors, as well as others trained in specialty occupations. Dr. Kendall Moore is definitely one of these “degreed.”

Kendall grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and received his first Doctoral Degree in Music Arts, specializing in Instrumental Performance from the University of Miami, Florida in 2016. He will be completing his Masters of Divinity at Eden Theological Seminary this May, 2023. He does not plan to complete a doctorate in Theology or Ministry at this time.

When Dr. Moore is not busy at Open Arms assisting with sacred practices such as helping with music, leading congregational prayer, lay reading, and Holy Communion, he is an adjunct instructor at Houston Community College teaching Music Theory. He also freelances as a music composer and arranger.

Dr. Moore says, “As a UCC Minister, I hope to continue helping faith communities widen their welcome . . . I also want to continue expanding community and spiritual development through interfaith dialogue and joint community work...”

Thank you, Dr. Kendall, for blessing Open Arms with your many talents.

*Happy New Years!!*

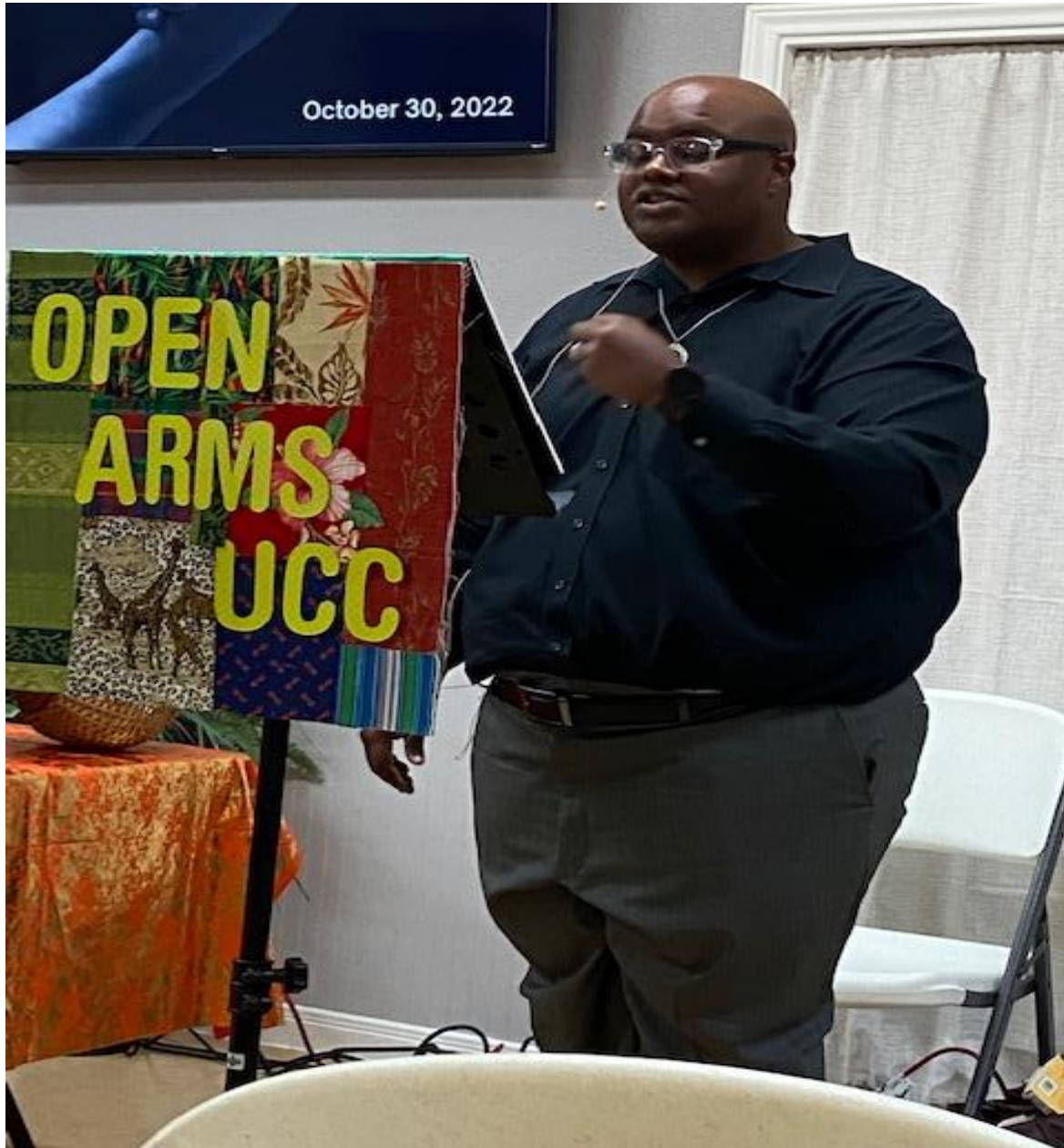
**I**t is said that the ancient Babylonians some 4,000 years ago were the first to make New Year’s resolutions. They were also the first to hold recorded celebrations of the new year. Their new year started in mid-March when the crops were planted, not January.

A similar practice started in ancient Rome after emperor Julius Caesar established January 1 as the beginning of the new year in circa 46 B.C. January was named after Janus, the two-faced god.

The early Christians saw the first day of the new year as a day for thinking about one’s past mistakes and resolving to do better and be better in the future.



Open Arms Photo Gallery



Dr. Kendall Moore officiating at Open Arms-October 30, 2022



Christmas Caroling at Open Arms-December 17, 2022



Santa Claus joins our Open Arms Carolers – December 17, 2022