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A Taste of Mardi Gras

(Two of our youth, Heather and Julia, helped with a Mardi Gras celebration during Open Arms' Children's Time last Sunday. Here are excerpts from their speeches, telling of Mardi Gras customs and God's prevailing love for all whether Mardi Gras celebrants, or not!)

The six weeks before Jesus' Crucifixion is called Lent, a time when Christians deny themselves many pleasures to think about Jesus' sacrifice. Mardi Gras for Christians is a time just before Lent starts when people party a lot and eat a lot, getting ready to give up those things to reflect on Jesus.

At Mardi Gras, people wear festive colors—**green, purple, and gold**. The meaning of the colors is important. **Purple is for justice; gold is for power; green is for faith.** They are what Jesus wants us to be: **fair and just, strong, and faithful!**

Another Mardi Gras custom reminds us of Jesus. At Mardi Gras, people eat a cake called a King Cake. Inside the cake is a little baby doll. People believe that the person who finds the baby finds a symbol of Jesus and will be blessed. In a way it reflects the Three Wise Men finding the Baby Jesus in the manger, knowing he is a great king.

We have a little King Cake for each of you. There are five babies—brown, black, red, white, and yellow--hidden somewhere in the tasty cakes distributed to you. These dolls are symbols of the different races or ethnic groups of the world. Finding any one of them in your King Cake is a blessing.

Their presence shows that God cherishes all people in the world at Mardi Gras and all times. As you eat your cake, look for a baby!

We Remember in Prayer

Prayer 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 is restricted to a wheelchair and was in the hospital.
- **Romie Hollins**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Rev. Juvenal Cervantes**, who is home and doing rehab.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who welcomes prayers.
- Our friends, **Rev. John and Han Will**, who welcome prayers.
- **Brenda Mayfield**, who is dealing with pain.
- **Jim Lemm**, who had knee surgery.
- **Norman Swaney**, who is suffering with severe back pain.
- **Kenneth Reaves**, who is having a diagnostic test.
- **David Durham**, who is having a diagnostic test.
- **Victims of natural disasters**.
- **Victims of violence**.

Welcome Guests

We welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month. Micah Tanner, Brooklyn Brothers, Myra Yingst, Eva Hollins, Ira Grimes, Ireaun Grimes, Brooke Adams, Dalton Pratt.

*Encourage one another
and
build each other up.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11

On The Way

To “Forever Home”

“WHERE THERE’S A WILL, THERE’S A WAY!” At least that’s what the parishioners at Open Arms UCC say as they strive to obtain the capital for a worship center--a “forever home.” And it’s certainly what Rev. Dr. Jules Williams, pastor of Open Arms, and his wife Kim are saying as they plan a fund raiser for the Open Arms’ Forever Home project. On **Friday, March 10, Jules and Kim plan a 41-mile walk from Huntsville to Tamina, just south of Conroe.** Forty-one miles! Jules is asking folks to donate \$5.00 a mile or give a single donation to support this more than worthy cause.

A hard-working and dedicated church such as ours needs a location from which to do its ministry! When Jules and Kim begin their walk, the Open Arms folks will be with them, following with cars and bikes, manning rest stations, honking and cheering “every step” of the way! Can you help?

For more information, contact Vicky Royster at 832-368-9551, Open Arms UCC, 25914 Indian Springs Way, Spring, TX 77373.

Please help us find the way Home.

New Church Officers

ON FEBRUARY 5, the Open Arms Church Council elected new officers to direct OAUCC business for the year. The officers are as follows:

Kenneth Reaves, President

Ian Says, Vice-President

Barry Fairbanks, Secretary

Leru Poenisch, Treasurer

We are grateful to these members who have agreed to give time and effort to support our church. **Thanks to all!**

PROGRAMS THAT PREPARE US FOR LENT AND EASTER AT OPEN ARMS

- **SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 9:00 A.M. AT THE TAMINA COMMUNITY CENTER,** Open Arms members began Lenten lessons with *For the Common Good*, a study guide by Christine Harmon. An Upper Room publication, this book reminds us that the Holy Spirit gives each Christian one or more spiritual gifts to be used for the common good. It guides readers to find their own gifts and put them to use for the church. Examining passages in Paul's writings, Harmon leads readers through a personal spiritual assessment. These lessons will continue each Sunday until Easter. We are fortunate to have Dr. Carol McAninch as instructor for this course.
- **THE WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY group completed a four-session exploration of the personal relations between Jesus and his apostles as found in the Gospels.** Jesus' instructions to the Apostles (and us) as to how to perform their ministry; friendships then and now; betrayal and guilt; and the nature of a leader, such as Simon Peter, were topics in these sessions. Tentative plans are to continue a study of Peter's role in the new church, along with Paul's, by reading the book of Acts. **This class will begin after Easter and will be a Wednesday evening zoom meeting.**
- **ON GOOD FRIDAY EVENING, OPEN ARMS' MEMBERS will present *At the Foot of the Cross: The Last Words of Jesus.*** The drama consists of monologues by characters Jesus affected during the course of his life as they wait at the foot of the cross during that tragic time. Filled with great sadness and great hope, the conclusion has a profound message for each of us. Music by Open Arms' musicians, both vocal and instrumental numbers, will enhance the program.

Unremarkable grace how ordinary the sound. That bored a perfectly upstanding, capable, respected member of society like me. I once was just temporarily misplaced through no fault of my own. But now, thanks to my brains and quick wits, I see what caused me to stumble and will avoid it next time. Grace means less on the mountaintops of life...Grace makes a better entrance in the valley, in the desert, in the barren places. Grace becomes real when it's the only thing we've got left.

- from *Re-Lent, "Who Can?"* by Matt Laney

MUCHO GRACIAS TO OPEN ARMS ANGELS!

- ❖ Many thanks to Elise Daulley for her help with cupcakes and baby dolls at Open Arms Mardi Gras festivities. Elise, you are a treasured “daulley.” And to Margaret Smith who baked the cupcakes.
- ❖ Thanks to Gail Royster for her Sunday morning enhancements, which do indeed enhance our worship.
- ❖ So many thanks to Dr. Kendall for his work in every way—Sunday morning setup, warm greetings to all, prayers and Bible readings. He is to cherish. Congratulate him on his recent performance at Eden Seminary.
- ❖ Thanks to Ian Says for his continued efforts to get grant money for Open Arms. And for all else he does for Open Arms.
- ❖ Always thanks to Vicky Royster. She took a few days off, and we nearly lost our minds, didn’t we, Peter?
- ❖ Thanks to our beautiful girls, Heather and Julia, for conducting Children’s Time on February 19 -- Mardi Gras beads and all!
- ❖ Thanks to Dr. Carol for leading our Lenten Studies classes. She joined Open Arms and jumped right into the “fray.”
- ❖ Always thanks to Kim Williams, greeter, cinematographer, scheduler and communicator, walker, mother and wife. How many hats can one person wear?
- ❖ Thanks to all who agreed to participate in the Good Friday program *At the Foot of the Cross*. That’s true devotion.



Happy Birthday to You
Myra Yingst - March 10

Pam Mayo - March 23

Daylight Saving Time Starts March 12 – Spring Forward

March Mission: One Great Hour of Sharing

The message for us in March is to focus on One Great Hour of Sharing... one of the 5 for 5 offerings we share with the UCC and thousands of other churches.

The theme this year is: It's Time to Share

Why? Because generosity makes a difference. OGHS provides immediate aid and long-term support to people experiencing hunger, thirst, disaster, or crisis around the world.

One example of that caring comes from Honduras. In the “Pass Chain” program, a family receives a pregnant pig, sheep, or cow with teachings of how to care for the animal. When the next piglet, lamb, or calf is born, it is passed on to another family, which will do the same. That improves food security as the family will have a microbusiness for the production and sale of meal.

MARCH IS FOR READERS:

THE LIT WITS BOOK CLUB

Lit Wits met February 7th at Wunsche Bros. Café and Saloon to discuss the Toni Morrison classic *Beloved*. Sarah Rinehart led us through this powerful Pulitzer Prize novel about the escaped slave Sethe and the struggles and horrors she faced as she tried to establish a new, free life for herself and her family.

This month Kate Flagge will hold a session centered on *The Venice Sketchbook* by Rhys Bowen. In a change of venue, Lit Wits will meet on March 14 at 6:00 P.M. at Pallotta’s Italian Grill for a meal and a discussion of the book. In an intriguing review, one critic says of *The Venice Sketchbook*, “Love and secrets collide in Venice during WWII in an enthralling novel of brief encounters and lasting romance.” Sounds like great reading! Hope to see you at Pallotta’s.



Lenten Reflections: Respect for God's Creation

As we begin and continue our Lenten journey toward Easter, two observances also happen in March.

World Wildlife Day March 3 and World Water Day March 22

Both touch directly on The Creation God gave to us to respect and act as stewards.

WILDLIFE: Species of many animals are vanishing in alarming numbers. That happens in our country and around the world.

- Many gardeners have worked diligently to provide habitats for the Monarch butterflies during their migration; otherwise, they could disappear in our lifetime.
- Illegal traders refer to giraffes as “motorbikes” because selling their body parts can fetch enough money to buy a motorcycle
- Habitat Loss and Destruction with an expanding human population is causing us to lose vital natural habitats through destruction and fragmentation at a rapid rate.
- Wildlife crime and poor legislation has a massive impact on the survival of animal species across the globe.
- Critically important vultures are being ruthlessly poisoned and pushed to EXTINCTION.
- African penguin populations have declined by 98% in the last century! The species could be EXTINCT within the next few years!
- Marine Degradation: Protecting our oceans is the single most important way we can ensure the survival of life on Earth.

WATER: In the Bible water is mentioned 722 times – *more often than faith, hope, prayer and worship!*

“God swept over the face of the waters.” Water is such an essential component of life; it was created on the very first day. And water is mentioned near the end in Revelations 22:17, “Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.” Living water flows throughout the scripture, and this should remind us of its importance...both spiritually and physically. (*Duke University Wordpress*)

World Water Day lifts up the crisis of water around the world. Who ever thought we'd face large populations in our country, such as Flint and Jackson, with unsafe

drinking water? The crisis may be bad in the US, but far more troubling around the globe.

- 171 billion people globally lack access to safe water – that's 1 in 10!
- Every two minutes a child under five dies from a preventable waterborne disease
- In parts of Africa, it is estimated that women spend 40 billion hours collecting water
- Since mostly women and children spend horrendous time collecting water, other activities are neglected. Mainly education is sacrificed by the children which impacts attendance, therefore lessens a positive future. Women are denied opportunities for investments in business or other jobs. 80% of women feel trapped in the cycle of poverty. (*Lifewater International*) One volunteer reports the sight of oxen pulling a cart through a small stream. When they left, children came and collected drinking water where the oxen had been. Clean? No - Healthy? No
- Crisis? Yes

Another observance is in March – World Day of Prayer on March 3.

As we reflect, serve, and pray during Lent, the World is greatly in need of prayer. Perhaps adding water and wildlife to your prayers, then God's living water will touch your sharing soul.

"We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." - John Stott

[**10 Reasons to Drink Water**](#) (from Allaboutwater.org)

1. Water is absolutely essential to the human body's survival. A person can live for about a month without food but only about a week without water.
2. Water helps to maintain healthy body weight
3. Water leads to increased energy levels by increasing metabolism and regulating appetite. The most common cause of daytime fatigue is actually mild dehydration.
4. Drinking adequate amounts of water can decrease the risk of certain types of cancers, including colon cancer, bladder cancer, and breast cancer.
5. For a majority of sufferers, drinking water can significantly reduce joint and/or back pain.
6. Water leads to overall greater health
7. Water can prevent and alleviate by flushing out wastes and bacteria that can cause disease and headaches.
8. Water naturally moisturizes skin and ensures proper cellular formation underneath layers of skin to give it a healthy, glowing appearance.
9. Water aids in the digestion process and prevents constipation.
10. Water is the primary mode of transportation for all nutrients in the body and is essential for proper circulation



Another return to Valentine's Day: Open Arms enjoyed creating Valentines one Sunday after church. Many participated—male and female, children and adults, preacher and musician. What to do with so many lovely homemade cards? Who might enjoy receiving a Valentine note? The OA Mission group agreed to give the cards to the Montgomery County Meals-on-Wheels team so the recipients of meals could be cheered with a little gift from Open Arms. Thanks to Pam Mayo for delivering these cards to Meals-on-Wheels sponsors. Folks received a touch of love, and the givers at OA were blessed in return!

A Late Valentine

Valentine's Day is past—the candy is eaten and the flowers are wilting. But a clever message on Facebook from Rev. John Will, a friend of Open Arms, is worth our sending out to you. Please enjoy a brief note of levity!

THE FARMER'S LOVE LETTER

My sweet Potato, do you Carrot at all for me?
You are the Apple of my eye with your
Radish hair and Turnip nose.
My heart Beets for you.
My love for you is a strong as Onions.
If we Cantaloupe, Lettuce marry, and we
Will be a happy Pear.
(And we all say Amen!)

**March is National
Women's History
Month!**

OPEN ARMS FINANCIAL INFORMATION FEBRUARY, 2023

Offerings - \$2,810.80

Missions - \$630.00

Forever Home Fund - \$375.00

Other Items:

41 Mile Walk Total - \$1,445.00

Forever Home Fund Total - \$16,753.38

Happy St. Patrick Day – Friday, March 17, 2023

May you have warm words on a cold evening.

A full moon on a dark night.

And the road downhill all the way to your door.

An Irish Blessing (author unknown)

Naming the Full Moons

Each full moon of the month has at least one name. March's full moon will be on Tuesday, March 7, 2023.

Names for March's full moon are: [Worm Moon](#), [Sap Moon](#), [Crow Moon](#), [Lenten Moon](#). These are the North American names for the full moon.

Naming each month's full moon dates back to the Ancient Romans. In the United States the Algonquin people, native to the region between New England and Lake Superior, named their full moons for the seasonal changes.

**DONATE
TODAY!**

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41 MILE

WALK FOR HOME

STARTING FROM HUNTSVILLE ALL THE
WAY TO OPEN ARMS UCC IN CONROE

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

SPONSOR US \$5 PER MILE OR SINGLE DONATION

SUPPORT OUR FOREVER HOME

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