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## **A Deeper Meaning**

**T**he advent season/ holidays are hectic for many people in most denominations. Many are concerned with making sure decorations are in their proper places and the colors are coordinated to fit the season's theme. The servant-leaders (Pastors) are working hard preparing sermons to prick the people's hearts that will prayerfully fill the seats of their perspective sanctuaries. The efforts of all of the people, as mentioned above, are commendable. The actions of faithful people must not be reduced to exercises in futility. The hard outer work of the faithful servants decorating sanctuaries always captures my heart because it resembles the challenging inner work needed to lead to inner transformation.

Advent season/Holy days must cause the believer to pause leading to an “Epiphany” about the importance of inner transformation by slowing down to practice the faith given by the One that often retreated into the silence to pray and spend time with God. May we enjoy the beauty of holiday decorations but remember to beautify our minds with hope, peace, joy, and love. Let us not lose time for growth by simply moving from theme to theme and holy day-to-holy day. The New Year is our time to make inner growth a priority so that our time on the earth will resemble the inside of the beautifully decorated houses of worship.

*Peace,*  
*Rev. Jules Williams, Jr.*

## Welcome Guests

**W**e welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month. Minnie Pearl Ross; Pearl Yvette Edwards; Liz and Jim Lemm; Barbara and Rodney Castille, Will Castille, Kate Castille; Adam and Sarah Rinehart, Julia Rinehart, Laura Rinehart; Lisa Garcia; Dawn Patterson; Hannah Poenisch and Brooks Ward.

## We Remember in Prayer

**P**rayers 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:

- **Olive Baer**, who has limited mobility.
- **Cheryl Jett**, who has back issues.
- The family and friends of **Bud Spooner**, who died on December 17.
- **Marjorie Meier**, who is living in a memory care facility.
- The family and friends of **Paula Haley**, who died on December 24.
- **Gladys Barton**, who welcomes prayers.
- **John Rehling**, who is living with heart failure.
- **Kevin**, who welcomes prayers during his illness.
- **Anthony Maldonado**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who is receiving chemotherapy.
- **Mack Joseph**, who welcomes prayers during his illness.
- **Diane Mayo**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Mary Amburn**, who is suffering with a vertebrae fracture.
- The **Moore/Bradbury** family, who have experienced illness and loss.
- **Ray Durham**, who welcomes prayers.
- **All who have been affected by COVID-19.**

## THANKS TO ADVENT ANGELS

**M**any thanks to those who helped make Advent special at Open Arms:

*\*Thanks to Gail Royster* for creating and displaying lovely banners for each Sunday in Advent and for *Leru Poenisch* helping with the banners. See picture on page 9.

*\*Thanks to all of those in the “Peace at Christmas” program,* presented on December 19. Singers and speakers did not miss a beat—a really stellar performance

*\*Thanks to the Praise Team*—music well-chosen—presented beautifully every Sunday.

*\*Thanks to the choir* for performances each Sunday in Advent.

*\*Thanks to Kenneth and David* for hosting the Open Arms Christmas party in their festive home. Good food and good fellowship. See pictures on pages 10, 11, 12.

*\*Always thanks to Peter and Vicky Royster* for setting up the technology, taking it down, designing and presenting the power point for the service, etc.

*\*Thanks to Pastor Jules* for inspirational sermons every Sunday in Advent and every other Sunday of the year.

*\*And thanks to God’s angels at that first Christmas for announcing the “great and joyful event that is meant for everyone worldwide,” the birth of a Savior who is “Messiah and Master,” Jesus the Christ.*

## NIA LEAVES US, FOR A LITTLE WHILE

**N**ia Williams, our pianist, guest cellist, member of Praise Team—will be leaving us this month for a six-month hiatus. Nia will be doing her internship in Ft. Worth as part of her requirements for completing her Bachelor’s Degree in music therapy at Sam Houston State University.

Nia has helped with our music at Open Arms since its beginning. Her contributions have been invaluable. We will miss her but know her studies come first right now. Hopefully, she will return soon and make beautiful music for us again.

*Nia: thanks, be safe, and God bless.*

### A Celebration That All Are Welcome Here

In the South Central Conference Newsletter, December 2, 2021, the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ formally welcomed Open Arms UCC in Spring, Texas, as a certified Open and Affirming Congregation (#1732). The Coalition added Open Arms to the catalog of ONA churches in the UCC and asked all to join in prayerful blessing of this union along with a call for “new passion and energy for living the Gospel!”

On January 2, 2022, the Open Arms congregation formally voted on adding to its constitution a personal Membership Covenant affirming ONA membership. The Covenant reads in part: We will walk together, “holding hands in community and fellowship with persons of all sexual orientations or gender identities, knowing we are all children of the same family and the same God.”

One more action that proves **“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here at Open Arms”**

## HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

**A**nnouncing Open Arms first in-person Annual Congregational Meeting on January 23 after worship. The meeting is multi-purpose with many agenda items. One important matter of business is selecting the church's first Council. We have President Kenneth Reaves, Financial Secretary/Treasurer Vicky Royster, and Secretary Gail Royster. **We will need volunteers for two more spots on the Consistory as specified by the Constitution. Any volunteers?**

After the meeting, we will gather for a Fellowship Lunch, something we haven't indulged in at Open Arms. The menu is in formative stages, but it will be delicious, with everyone's contribution and help! Invite friends and family to come and dine with us.

## **Religious Studies At Open Arms**

**A**s we begin the new year, we usually make New Year's resolutions. One resolution at Open Arms UCC is to extend our religious studies. We plan to expand our adult education programs, help with a tutoring plan for our neighbors, and begin a Sunday School for children and youth.

Two areas for adults that are being considered are "A Discussion of White Privilege," and "Building an Inclusive Church." These studies would be based on UCC booklets/research, providing an in-depth look at both areas of concern. At present, all details must be worked out as well as determining whether the classes will meet via Zoom or face to face.

The Bible Study class will continue somewhat as it was in 2022, including exploring some subjects requested by participants. The class will be face to face in a private room during the noon hour twice a month in a local restaurant where we feed both our bodies and souls. Perhaps we can vary our choices of restaurants to share driving distances.

**TAMINA TUTORING AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FUND  
HONORING BUD AND PAT SPOONER**

Sad news: in December, Bud Spooner followed his beloved Pat to a peaceful place where they can be together forever.

Both Bud and Pat were concerned with the welfare of children. They also were pleased that their newly established church, Open Arms UCC, was planning to partner with Tamina, Texas, to give educational aid to the children in the area. Both were excited about this union and the ministry/mission possibilities the partnership offered.

With this in mind, the Spooner family has established a legacy in Bud and Pat's honor, "The Tamina Tutoring and Children's Ministry Fund." This fund will provide for tutoring for all ages, enrichment materials, and teaching of specialized skills in academics where needed, all in the setting of the Tamina Community Center.

If you would like to donate to this fund in the memory of Patricia and Lawrence (Bud) Spooner, contributions can be made to Open Arms UCC. Please visit the Open Arms website <https://www.openarmsUCC.org/> for information regarding both the project and Open Arms United Church of Christ.

You may mail your payment to:

Open Arms United Church of Christ  
25914 Indian Springs Way  
Spring Texas 77373

Please reference Spooner Tutoring and Children's Ministry Fund with your donation.

## **A LIT WITS CHRISTMAS**

**F**or the Open Arms book club, “Lit Wits,” Christmas was a celebration at the home of Ron and Sue Krueger. Lovely decorations and an evening meal with chocolate trifles for dessert heightened the congenial mood. See picture on page 10.

For once, we didn’t discuss one book; we discussed several books that would be possibilities for study in 2022. Members announced their book choices and selected dates to host in the new year.

For January, the book will be *The Redhead by the Side of the Road* by Anne Tyler with Margaret Smith as moderator. Tyler is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author of more than twenty novels. *Redhead* is one of Tyler’s most recent books, filled with humor and conflict as a man struggles with old habits while he faces new issues.

Lit Wits meets the second Tuesday of the month at 6:00 P.M. Meetings occur in members’ homes, on Zoom, and/or at a local restaurant. This month we will meet on January 11 at Wunsche Bros. Café in Old Town Spring for a light supper and discussion.

Readers, this would be a perfect time to find out about Lit Wits, talk about a good book, and enjoy a unique setting. Hope to see you there. Call 713-416-0491 for more information.

## **Happy Birthday**

**Leru Poenisch – January 14**

**Brenda Ruegge – January 24**

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



## January Mission Project

When 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.

Sometimes we feel like our mission efforts are invisible and happen so far away. This affirmation comes to us from just down the road.

“To all the volunteers, the donors of Church World Service: God bless you! You are touching the hearts of people you will never meet. You are bringing hope to people that are hopeless and bringing hope to people that feel so disenfranchised. God bless you, God keep you! Keep doing what you are doing because you are making a difference.”

- Shirlyn Thomas, co-pastor at God's Kingdom and Restoration Ministries in Galveston, TX.

The scripture tells us in 1 Peter 4:8 that love covers a multitude of sins. Perhaps as we begin a new year, let us act and share so that blankets and love cover those in need.



Looking toward Epiphany:

## THREE WISE WOMEN

Would have asked directions;

Arrived on time;

Helped deliver the Baby;

Brought practical gifts;

Made a casserole;

And there would be

**PEACE ON EARTH!**

## Open Arms Advent Banners



**“Lit Wits” Christmas Celebration**



**Open Arms Christmas Party**





## Open Arms Christmas Party



## Open Arms Christmas Party

