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## What Makes You So Strong?

Pastoring and working with others in churches, social groups, and the workplace can be challenging at times. Challenges are a part of life and can make us stronger. I have learned over the years not to run from challenges but to face them head-on. Partly, I have learned how to face challenges by watching my elders in the churches I served in the past. I spoke with many men and women ranging in age from 75-99 years of age, and they all pointed to the power of faith and the refuge found in the church that made them strong.

Often, older members like Brother Trogie Shankle would tell stories of life during his time and how he and his family managed to hold on to their sanity by holding on to their faith. His grandparents were slaves and found their home in East Texas as a result of slavery. I had the tremendous good fortune to be Bro. Shackle's pastor for four years. I was in my early 30's when I served as his pastor, and I would often sit and listen to his stories of life and perseverance during a time of intense pain. I listened to his stories and deep faith in the same God I call on every day. I found myself immersed in his stories while gaining the strength to continue my faith walk. It was by faith that he walked the lonely roads of oppression, and it was in the house of the Divine where he and others found solace from the slings and arrows of racism.

So, today I stand on the shoulders of giants while facing challenges and overcoming them by faith in a God that the eye cannot see but that the soul recognizes. My question to you today is, *What Makes You So Strong?*

*Blessings,*

*Jules Williams, Jr.  
MA/CE, LCDC*

## A Special Day . . . . .

### A Special Guest

**O**n **October 31, 2021**, Open Arms UCC will have the pleasure of hosting **Rev. Phil Hodson, new Conference Minister, South Central Conference, United Church of Christ**. Rev. Hodson will preach during the morning worship service at Pallotta's Banquet Room. His text will be Psalm 65: 1-11, and his message will be titled "Pick Three." Rev. Hodson comes to bring support to us in every way, and he will be available for a Q and A session during the time he is with us. As part of the meeting, we will celebrate with an Open Arms catered lunch prepared by Pallotta's Italian Restaurant.

Please mark your calendars now for this date as we begin our partnership with Rev. Hodson in our ongoing process of church development. If you wish, call the church office for more information.

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### Welcome Guests

**W**e welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month. Brenda Mayfield, friend of David Durham and Kenneth Reaves; Leru Poenisch, Bill and Gail Royster's daughter; Liz Herrick, Bill and Gail Royster's daughter; Jean Brooks; Ron and Sue Krueger's grandson Kole and granddaughter Cambridge.

## 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:

- **Brother Moore**, as he seeks to get back up on his feet.
- **Olive Baer**, who has limited mobility.
- **Cheryl Jett**, who has back issues.
- **Bud Spooner**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Marjorie Meier**, who is living in a memory care facility.
- **Paula Haley**, who is living with Parkinson's disease.
- **Sudie Ferguson**, who will be receiving physical therapy.
- **Gladys Barton**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Jim Fairbanks**, who welcomes prayers.
- **John Rehling**, who is living with heart failure.
- **Kevin**, who welcomes prayers during his illness.
- **Carol Foss**, who fell and injured herself.
- **Anthony Maldonado**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who welcomes prayers.

We would like to remember **Norman and Lori Miller**, who were very close friends of Peter and Vicky Royster. Peter has known Norm since the 80's when they formed the band Mechanix and have been friends ever since. They both met Lori in 2016 as her and Norm started dating, she joined the band, and later they married in 2017. They finally found the one they should be with forever. They had a great faith and will be missed here on earth deeply.

## The Wednesday Forum

**E**very Wednesday, Open Arms members meet via Zoom at 7:00 P.M. to discuss church matters and listen to reports and concerns of the congregation. As one would imagine, the resurgence of the Covid 19 epidemic has held an important

place in the conversation. Members and friends and loved ones have been deeply affected and remain in our prayers.

At OAUCC, finances are more than satisfactory; attendance is up; the spirit is strong, but the issue of a house of worship is still a concern for Open Arms. We have found many locations for a church, but there is always a “catch” that keeps us away from our goal. We ask everyone’s prayers in this matter as we seek a place from which we can do the Lord’s work in the Spring-Woodlands area.



***Many Thanks To All Who Have Helped So Much  
In August  
We Mention Just A Few***

- ❖ Thanks to Sue Krueger for keeping the Lit Wits program alive. She has nurtured Open Arms membership in Lit Wits as well as community members who want to be a part of a reading group. Sue keeps us organized and on task. Without her, we would fold!
- ❖ Thanks to our choir people who continue to bring us special music for worship. Barry Fairbanks offers his home for rehearsal and spends time researching music selections. Thanks, Barry.
- ❖ Thanks to everyone who sets up and takes down furniture arrangements and technical equipment for worship each Sunday at Pallotta’s . We pray that soon we will have a home where all this juggling does not have to take place every week.
- ❖ Thanks to all who brought food for our “Food for Friends” program. You are blessed for your generosity.
- ❖ Thanks for the precious programs for “Children’s Time.” Adults and children alike find joy and meaning in these presentations.
- ❖ Thanks for the new faces we are seeing in our congregation. Please make yourselves at home. We welcome you and want you to be a part of our fellowship. If you have questions or needs, let us know. We are here for you with Open Arms.

## Open Arms Mission Activities For - - -

### August And September

\***Top of the list: Haiti**, an island battered by storms, by poverty, by political unrest. Open Arms is in the process of planning how to help these folks in their struggles. Wait for more news about ways we can reach out to this island nation as we plan to make service to Haiti our September mission project.

\***“Yes to Youth,”** an agency of the Montgomery County Youth Services was Open Arms’ mission project for August and was definitely supported by the church members. The **“Yes to Youth”** organization addresses emotional and physical needs of youth and their families as well as provides a shelter where neglected and at-risk youth may recover and heal from past damages. Many services are provided by **“Yes.”** As a focus, Open Arms selected to give support to programs for technical and job training. Call the church office for further information.

\*Monthly church projects such as **Food for Friends**, a meal OA provides once a month to five families who want/need a home-cooked meal, continues; and **The Love Train**, a group visit to shut-in members who like the closeness of a personal connection, is still in the works. Love Train travelers took the month off because of the heat. Open Arms will be back on the rails in September.

## IS YOUR CHURCH 5 FOR 5?

\*Is Open Arms a **5 for 5** church, and what does that mean anyway!?? The success of the United Church of Christ's national ministries relies on the individual church's contributions to five mission areas. Being a **5 for 5** church means that Open Arms is a leader in providing support to **Our Church's Wider Mission** and the **Special Mission Offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and The Christmas Fund**. Yes, Open Arms is a **5 for 5** church, dedicated to helping the UCC's valuable mission projects. Open Arms will proudly receive special recognition for achieving this status.

## Bible Study: The Parables of Jesus

**T**he focus of our unit in Bible Study for September and beyond is on the parables of Jesus, those short, deceptively simple, symbolic stories that teach a religious or moral lesson. Jesus was fond of using these as his teaching tools, proven by the fact that about 59 of his parables are included in the Gospels.

On August 12, we began our study with the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, that age-old story that contrasts the "haves" with the "have nots." In addition to juxtaposing greed and poverty, Jesus holds up for ridicule those who are too stubborn to change their selfish and sinful ways, even if bidden by the Law, the Prophets, or "someone risen from the dead."

On August 31<sup>st</sup>, we continue our study with the parable of the shrewd manager, another story of riches and wealth, a story difficult to unravel. Meet with us at 5:00 p.m. for an hour of deciphering this parable.

**Bible Study meets every other Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. The 7<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> are the September dates. Tune in—we're on Zoom!**

## A PASSING COMMENT ON CERTAIN FACEBOOK MESSAGES!

"I don't know if Facebook has ever made the lame to walk. But it has, beyond any doubt, enabled the dumb to speak."

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### Join Lit Wits: A Great Reading Group

Open Arms community book club, entitled Lit Wits, meets every second Tuesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. The meetings occur at members' homes or via Zoom for those who cannot, or do not want to get out. The meetings are open to anyone who enjoys reading and discussing with others who have shared the same piece of literature.

This month's book is a provocative piece that delves into a tragic time in American history and explores the resilience of those challenged by circumstances and determined to protect loved ones, no matter the repercussions. **The Fours Winds** by Kristin Hannah is set in the 1930's during the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl of Texas and Oklahoma, and the migration to California to search for a better life.

If you like history, and you like to read about brave characters, this is your book. If you only have time for a partial reading but want to be involved in the discussion, join us. Also, you are welcome to come to just one Lit Wits discussion group or to attend every month. All folks from any area are welcome. Call Sue Krueger at 281-684-6998 for more information.

## **Happy Birthday Wishes To You**

*Donna Gonzaski - September 5*

*Justin Gonzaski - September 6*

*Jonathan Sanders - September 6*

*Kate Flagge - September 8*

*Adam Mayo - September 9*

*Jonathan Mayo - September 9*

*Robert Cobb – September 18*

*Claudia Sanders – September 29*

A CLOSING THOUGHT:            Luke 10:25-28

“DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.”

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied.

He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”