



The Happening

JANUARY 2025

Mission of the Month

Campaign Against Human Trafficking (CAHT)

The Campaign Against Human Trafficking – Southshore (CAHT) has been active in the south shore since 2009. Throughout the years, United Methodist Church has been an active supporter and partner in our efforts to end human trafficking.

Here in the south shore of Hillsborough County we have challenges with both labor and sex trafficking. Our County Sheriff's office and the Hillsborough County Human Trafficking Task Force work hard to identify and eliminate the threats to our community.

CAHT continues with our commitment to supporting victims, celebrating survivors, reducing demand, and ending human trafficking.

This year we have several goals:

- Continue to support our victims and survivors with the rescue backpack and mentoring programs
- Recruit volunteers to support our programs
- Expand our Trafficking Free Zone community awareness program
- Begin outreach to men's organizations
- Begin a Survivor Scholarship fund to assist survivors as they complete their program and begin their new life
- Explore the possibility of creating the first safe home/shelter program for human trafficking victims in this area

We invite you to join our organization and support the cause of eliminating human trafficking.

Thanks so much to all of you for supporting our efforts over the years. With God's Blessings, we look forward to a continuing partnership.



CAMPAIGN AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING— SOUTH SHORE

Committed to Supporting Victims

Our Survivor Services Team assembles Rescue Back Packs and distributes them to law enforcement agencies, shelters, and various organizations. Each Rescue Back Pack includes toiletries, cosmetics, clothing, shoes, a journal, a blanket, a pillow, water bottles, and a cuddly beanie baby. In the last five years, we have prepared and distributed a total of 845 bags.



Committed to Celebrating Survivors

Our Survivor Services Team is thoroughly vetted and trained to visit shelters and provide mentorship to survivors. They prepare meals, engage in crafts, socialize, and spend quality time with them. Since many survivors have not experienced a typical life, this mentorship aids them in understanding and participating in daily living activities.



Committed to Reducing Demand



It is a reality that children in our own communities are being bought and sold. To combat human trafficking effectively, it is essential to focus on its root cause: the demand. Implementing law enforcement, imposing stricter penalties on offenders, and introducing various deterrent measures have demonstrated that reducing demand is effective.

CAHT is collaborating with US Institutes Against Human Trafficking to enhance awareness within our communities, offer training, and assist our residents in creating a Trafficking Free Zone.

For more information about Campaign Against Human Trafficking, to join our efforts, or to contribute to our mission, please visit our website at www.sccblueheart.org.

A Word From Our Pastor

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! It is a joy to consider all that is ahead in a new year of serving together in ministry. You have been such a blessing to Pastor Travis and me as your new pastors. Thank you for your many kindnesses and your joy as a congregation. We feel it in our daily ministry with you.

Christmas Eve worship services were a special joy for me. Experiencing such a meaningful time with you for the first time was incredible. The music, scripture readings, candle lighting and simply looking at your faces of wonder, joy and reflection was powerful. We had 1,270 people in attendance over four worship services on Christmas Eve. What an opportunity to witness to the hope and love of Christ at Christmas! Thank you to all who brought friends, family and neighbors. It was a beautiful night.

And now the ministry of a new year begins. It is ministry that will continue to reach out to new people in our community. It is ministry that will continue to lift up and inspire meaningful weekly worship. It is ministry that will continue to provide opportunities for mission and service. It is ministry that will continue to support young people and the next generation. It is ministry that will also continue to be about discerning what is new – what we haven't done before but feel God is calling us to do in the future. This is exciting and I am so happy to be serving with you in this season. I believe God has great things in store for us!

Please take a moment to stop in the church office and say hello in the new year, or my email is cynthia@sccumc.com. I'd love to hear from you!

Grace and peace,
Pastor Cynthia

Budget Update

The Finance committee presented a balanced budget of \$1,944,000 to the Administrative Council on December 10. This budget ends the church's prior practice of using reserve funds/savings to supplement the annual operating budget. The 2025 budget represents an 18% decrease from 2024 expenses. You may ask for a copy of the 2025 budget in the church office.

How did we accomplish the reduction in expenses?

Staffing reductions = 26% total (as follows)

Pastoral – reduced 30% (7/1/24) by moving from 3 pastors to 2

Program – reduced 50% with elimination of nursery coordinator and paid kitchen staff

Administrative – reduced 18% by outsourcing a portion of accounting responsibilities

Facilities and Grounds reductions = 10%

Office and Administration reductions = 18%

We are grateful for your generosity and support for this important work.

Mike Schoonover, Stewardship chair, Andy Lotze, Incoming Finance chair, Cynthia Weems, Senior Pastor

Stewardship Campaign by the Numbers

The results of our November stewardship campaign were incredibly positive. Thank you to all who pledged!

Total pledges to date: 300 households

Amount pledged: \$1,125,000

New giving households = 52

**2025 pledges represent a 10% increase over giving in 2024!*

Anticipated giving from unpledged households = \$495,000

Additional income from other sources = \$324,000

You may still make a pledge at www.sccumc.com/pledge





Healing From Loss is a Journey: *Everyone Experiences Grief Differently*

A new Grief Share session will begin on Wednesday, January 29th and continuing Wednesdays through April 23rd, at 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM in room 19. This 13-week grief support group will be led by Pastor Debbie Marion, Minister of Pastoral Care, and Renee Childs, and focuses on important grief topics associated with the death of a loved one.

Weekly videos feature nationally respected grief experts and real-life stories of people, followed by a group discussion where confidentiality is key to this program.

Many grieving people find they are only beginning the work of healing while friends or family members have returned to their daily life routines. Too often people tend to repress their grief and allow fear of what others may think keeping you from what could be helping you. Your bereavement experience may be recent, or not so recent. The hope is that you will find encouragement, comfort, and help in grieving the death of a spouse, child, sibling, other family members, or a friend. No matter what the cause of your loved one's death, this is an opportunity to be around people who understand what you are feeling. You will learn how to recognize the symptoms of being stuck in your grief and that you do not need to stay there. You will learn valuable information about dealing with the changes in your life and renewing your hope for the future. I hope you will consider being part of this valuable ministry.

To register for this group, please go online to griefshare.org/findagroup and search for our church's group. You will also find additional information and resources there.

We hope to see you in our meetings.

Blessings,

Pastor Debbie and Renee

Welcome
New Members!

Please welcome those who joined our church family in December! When you see them, give a warm welcome and take the time to get to know them. It is always a blessing to receive new members into our church family!

Delores Lines, Richard Runion, Pam Nash, Jess McLaurin, Jimmy Lee, Patti Lee, Eric Ellis, Karen Sarley, and John Lea

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

The Friendship Circle will resume their monthly meetings on January 6th at 1PM in Room 19. A big thank you to everyone who contributed to the bake sale on November 30; we raised \$439, which will be allocated to missions both locally and abroad. We also loved starting our Christmas celebration with the beautiful performance by the bell choir! On January 6, we will have the pleasure of welcoming members of the Volunteer Response Team (VRT) to discuss their ministry.

Everyone is invited to join us!
LOVING GOD & EACH OTHER



THURSDAY, JANUARY 16TH AT 8:00AM

Please plan on joining us for our first Men's Breakfast of the New Year. It'll be a good time with good guys, so don't be afraid to bring a buddy with you. This is a great opportunity to make new friends and meet some new brothers.

Men's Breakfast is the 3rd Thursday each month.
Cost is \$10.00. Sign up by Jan. 12th.

UTC Youth

**JAN 19-20
6PM-9AM**

**FOOD • GAMES • MOVIES
NO SLEEP!!**

**Youth age 6th - 12th grade.
Parental consent for all youth
attending.
To Sign Up email Next Gen
Director, Faniel at
faniel@sccumc.com**

'Happenings' with Next Gen

Hello, SCCUMC! We have had a lot happen during this past holiday season, that we would love to share with you!



Mission Monday: The Monday before the Thanksgiving Meal, we had our UTC youth come together to help set up the tables and chairs for that meal! They did a wonderful job at staying on task and getting the job done as quickly as they could. They also prayed over the tables and chairs for all of those who would be partaking in the meal!



Friendsgiving: As for our "Unity Young Adult Group" we gathered and shared in our first annual Friendsgiving dinner! With the hustle and bustle of work, school, and randomness of life, it was great to get an opportunity to sit down together and share a meal and chat about all the people and things we were grateful for. Grateful for these young people!

Christmas Drop Off: On the 23rd Pastor Travis and I decided to do our best Santa impersonation and deliver some gifts to some kids! We spent the day dropping off some goodie bags to our UTC youth to show them how much they mean to us as well as the church. We were greeted by a lot of big smiles and surprised faces. We normally have programming on Mondays, but we decided to match the schools schedule (They had just started Christmas break) and give the students the next couple of weeks off as well, but not without a Christmas treat!



Besides that we have seen a little bit of a bump in numbers! We have had one new youth, and three new young adults join our ministries these past few months. Excited to have them and are eagerly awaiting new friends for the future. All in all, it was a great holiday season. We are looking forward to doing more fun and new things in 2025! See you all then!

CENTER 4LIFE LEARNING

Step out, get inspired, have fun, be entertained! There is a wide variety of classes that will liven up your life.

**2025 Winter Semester
Begins January 27th**

**Registration is Open
December 29th**

Register Online, Visit the Office, or
See Sue on the Patio

**Monday - Friday
8:30AM - 12:30PM
813-634-8607**

www.sccumc.com/4lifelearning

CLASSES AVAILABLE:

ART

- Creative Paper Crafting
- Modern Dot Art
- Introduction to Modern Quilling
- Reading Pictures

FINANCE

- Investment, Estate, and Tax Planning
- What Would Happen If You Got Hit by A Bus? (Getting Your Stuff Together)

HEALTH

- Aging with Grace & Vitality Through Holistic Methods
- Befriending the Ending, Introduction to Advanced Care Planning

TECHNOLOGY

- Android Smartphones & Tablets
- iPhone/iPad for Seniors

HISTORY

- Beginning Genealogy Gettysburg
- Immigration, Ellis Island, and the Lower East Side, NYC
- Film History 1929-1961 (Featuring Movies of the 1940s and 1950s)

LANGUAGE

- Sign Language
- Beginners
- Conversational Spanish Level I
- Conversational Spanish Level II
- Conversational Spanish Level III

DISCUSSION

- Artificial Intelligence, the New Frontier ; the Next Ten Years
- Chautauqua X; Ethics and Morality in a Capitalist System
- Fun with Logic; Justice – An Introduction to Moral and Political Philosophy
- UFOs, We're Not Alone & They're Here, Now What?

Center 4Life Learning's Upcoming Trips and Tours!

Sylvia, Early Bird Dinner
Theater, Clearwater

March 20, 2025



**My Fair
Lady**

My Fair Lady, Suncoast
Broadway Dinner Theater,
Hudson

May 8, 2025



StarLite Luncheon Cruise with
Entertainment, South Pasadena

May 22, 2025

**JESUS
CHRIST
SUPER
STAR**

Jesus Christ Superstar, Asolo
Repertory Theatre, Sarasota

June 4, 2025

*Forgot a holiday gift for a special
someone?*

Make Memories!

*Enjoying trips and classes together are
great gifts for holidays and special
occasions.*

**Trip Reservations Fill Up Fast –
Register Today!**

**Trip flyers are available on the Center 4Life
Learning website, the church Sanctuary lobby
and the Center 4Life Learning office.**

Contact the Center 4Life Learning office at
813-634-8607

email at center4life@sccumc.com,
or visit our website at www.sccumc.com/4lifelearning

Update from VRT

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the VRT! We are a compassionate group of Christian volunteers dedicated to community projects, His Helpers, church maintenance, disaster response, and recycling.

The VRT is currently seeking volunteers for the Team Recorder and Youth Volunteer positions. For further information, please reach out to Linda McGovern at lwmcgovern@gmail.com.

New member training has been scheduled. ERT basic training will take place on Saturday, February 1st, 2025, while ERT recertification is scheduled for Saturday, January 18th, 2025. Both sessions will be held in room 30 at SCCUMC. The VRT will cover class fees and background checks. For more details, please contact Linda McGovern at lwmcgovern@gmail.com.



Our VRT has been incredibly busy over the past month. Many members have generously contributed hundreds of hours restoring the Ruskin Methodist Church, which suffered significant flood damage. Tasks included mucking, debris removal, demolition, drywall installation, trimming, ramp construction, caulking, and painting.

This year has been excellent for recycling! From January 2024 to October 2024, we collected enough recycled materials to generate \$4,600!

Please note: Our meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month in room 19 from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m. The next meeting will take place on January 15, 2025.

The Volunteer Response Team (VRT) of Sun City Center is always on the lookout for individuals with diverse skills to join our ranks. In addition to those with tool skills, we also welcome cooks, organizers, administrators, and anyone willing to provide a caring Christian presence.

If you're interested in becoming an active member of our VRT, please consider attending our monthly meeting and signing up for our VRT email database at <http://eepurl.com/gew3MD>.

WORSHIP ARTS

WOW!!! What a beautiful and powerful Advent/Christmas season this has been at the UMCSCC. Christmas hope, peace, joy, and love were quite evident in the many extra special worship services like the *Christmas Cantatas*, *Blue Christmas Service* and, of course, our annual *Sights & Sounds of Christmas*! And, when you factor in the NINE December concerts [including this year's *Madrigal Dinner*] attended by so many in our community, it was a truly extraordinary season. Special thanks to Larry Hirschak for his excellent above-and-beyond work with the *Thank God Its Variety* concert series.

I'm writing this newsletter article just after Wednesday night's *Sights & Sounds*, and I think we're all looking forward to things slowing down a bit after Christmas Eve services (which I'm sure will be wonderful). Lisa and I will be on a short cruise out of Tampa the day after Christmas... can't wait, and I pray that we both get over our colds before then!

It HAS been a great [calendar] year, and there are several folks I'd like to thank for helping to make all our services, concerts, and special events so amazing:

Teo[dorable] for being the very best organist/accompanist with whom I've EVER worked.

Nancy Harris [Handbell Queen] for creating the biggest and best handbell ministry in the state of Florida (and maybe the world!).

Maria Leasure for all the many things she has done (and learned) for the *Broken Together* Praise Team.

Larry Hirschak, again, for two most amazing and well-attended Concert Series.

Holly Bowes for her fine direction of the Glory Ringers.

Marleta Newberg for faithfully serving as worship pianist each week.

Bill 'Bull' Turner for wrangling the many AVLC volunteers together each week.

Aisling Turner for 'making everything happen' and having all the answers.

Jennilyn Crawford for being my right-hand gal.

All the Bell Ringers, Choristers, Praise Team and AVLC crew for putting up with me and 'fixing' all my many mistakes.

To both of our new pastors for their support and encouragement.

And finally, to my sister-by-another-mother, Victoria (yes, I called you 'Victoria,' Valerie) for keeping us all in line!

As for the New Year – I 'hit the ground running' on January 2nd with a Worship Team meeting, Choir Rehearsal and the beginning of the Men's Chorus season. Please remember that we ALWAYS have more room for Choristers... this would be a GREAT time to join in the fun! And the same goes for handbell ensembles and the Praise Team.

The coming month won't be anything like this last month, but I'm certain we will all be busy inviting people to be part of this faith community and pointing them toward the One whose birth we just celebrated! God is SO good and has showered this church with so very many blessings! I know...I believe... that He will continue to do so in the coming year!

Finally, and once again, I love this church and this family of faith. Thank you for your never-ending love and heartfelt encouragement!

Soli Deo Gloria

"You crown the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with plenty"

-Psalm 65:11

'Break Away' with Breakaway

So much joy was felt in Breakaway this past month thanks to amazing musical performances by Six Rivers Band, The Orange Blossom Ukes, Par for the Chorus, Rick Koen, Dave Oglesbee, The Patio Bells and Mary Pizzano! I believe it's by the Grace of God that our friends living with dementia often remember all the words to the songs being played, and that music can also invoke memories, if not a complete memory, maybe the feelings associated with a lost memory. I thank God for putting Breakaway on the hearts of these artists to play for us! We also had a lot of fun making our own music and being recorded for Sights and Sounds, and hope that you enjoyed the show!



Thanks to our amazing volunteers, over 20 boxes containing several dozen homebaked cookies each went home with our friends, another day, our friends went Christmas "shopping" for their caregivers thanks to all of volunteer donated gifts!

Our arts and crafts sessions this past month created "Snowplace" Like Breakaway with everyone creating snowflakes for decorations and snow globes to take home. On another day creating two different style Christmas trees to take home, these crafts were brought to us by, once again the amazing volunteers of Breakaway. They bring not only the ideas but often all the materials required for our friends to create something both meaningful and beautiful!



Santa came to visit us thanks again to yet another amazing volunteer, and if you go to the Breakaway Respite Ministry Page on Facebook among other things, you'll see the pure joy visiting with Santa brought to so many friends and volunteers alike!

We felt some sadness this month not just having to close for the holidays, but having to say goodbye to some friends who won't be returning next year because this dreadful disease has sent them into another phase of their lives. Please keep Bob, Bev, D.C. and Nancy and all of Breakaway in your prayers.

While I'm asking for things... Breakaway is facing some new challenges in the new year. With the elimination the church's kitchen staff, I am asking for ideas/help in feeding 45-50 people every Monday and Wednesday. Do you like to cook for and serve large crowds or know someone who does? Would you be interested in sponsoring a portion of our lunch or do you know any managers of local restaurants or caterers that might be interested in helping? If so or if you have any other ideas, please share their contact info with me or mine with them:

Renee Tisdale, email: Breakawaymin@sccumc.com
PH: 813-634-2539 x. 1011

Please don't find me greedy but since I'm asking for things... Breakaway is ALWAYS looking for volunteers to help bring a sense of purpose, love and joy to our friends living with dementia. If you're interested, please stop by and check us out when we're in session, check out our Facebook page or contact me directly.



TGIV - Thank God It's Variety

It's hard to believe that we are starting a new year and for the Thank God It's Variety concert series, we are into our peak portion of the year. There will be five events in January with an excellent mix of entertainment!

The first concert will be on Friday January 3rd at 7:00PM when the North Carolina based group Small Town Sunday takes the stage. Small Town Sunday was voted the 2024 Country Gospel Group of the Year. They will be performing a wonderful mix of country and country gospel songs. They may even perform their popular hit *Christmas in a Small Town*.

Returning by popular demand on Sunday, January 12th, comedian, ventriloquist, musician and magician, Taylor Mason will once again be appearing at 7:00PM. Taylor's unique entertainment blends observational humor, keen musicianship, ventriloquism and magic effects. He presents a positive, hilarious, unforgettable program that connects people through those things that bond us: laughter, music, and magic.

A fan favorite, Keith Allyn's tribute to Neil Diamond has drawn large crowds for several years! Keith will be here on Friday, January 17th at 7:00PM. With his excellent showmanship and Diamond vocals, Keith will surely get the audience involved as he sings one of Neil's most popular hits, *Sweet Caroline*.

If laughter is truly the best medicine, then Dennis "The Swan" Swanberg is just what the doctor ordered! Dennis will be performing on Friday, January 24th at 7:00PM. As the second comedian for the month, Dennis uses his down-home charm and heaping help of hospitality to win the hearts of audiences across the country. In addition to performing over twenty impersonations, this pastor-turned-comedian tells side-splitting stories of growing up, families, and the funny side of church.

Rounding out the month on Friday, January 31st at 7:00PM, the Tennessee-based group American Pride will help you relive the musical memories of The Statler Brothers. American Pride includes two brothers, similar to the Statler Brothers. Audiences cannot help but clap their hands and tap their feet to tunes like *Do You Know You Are My Sunshine* and *The Class of '57!*

Tickets are still available for all events and can be purchased at the Pages of Life Bookstore, the Church Office or online at www.sccumc.com/events.

I'm sure you will enjoy these and the upcoming variety of groups that will be performing in the coming months! We are blessed to have a wonderful venue and program where we can share the love of Christ through entertainment to the surrounding community!

Have a Happy and Blessed New Year!

Larry Hirchak, TGIV Concert Series Coordinator

Vivacious Ministries with Victoria

“January is nature’s way of saying, ‘Let’s begin again.’” – Unknown

January, the first month of the new year and the first month of new beginnings here at the church. It is hard to believe 2024 is behind us; it feels as if we just started it and now it is in our rearview mirror.

As we begin this new year together on the church campus and with our ministries, I would like to share some news with you about how we ended last year. Your gift donations allowed us to provide not only games for so many children at Christmas, but we were also able to provide them with some warm handmade blankets as well to make their Christmas a wonderful one.



On December 19th, we presented Ms. Danette Lyles, School Social Worker, LCSW Sumner High School and Team Leader for PLC Area 8 and Ms. Gabrielle Segura, School Social Worker, Wimauma Elementary School, with over seventy-five games that you provided for the children and youth in our local area. Ms. Lyles and Ms. Segura were incredibly surprised and grateful for your generosity ensuring students would have a wonderful Christmas this year.

In addition to taking care of our children and youth in the local community, this year we also assisted with bringing cheer to our seniors in local assisted living facilities. As you know, most do not have family in the local area, so it was wonderful to help make their Christmas a happy one. I would like to thank our

Knit-A-Square group for the beautiful handmade Afghans, soap sacks and soap, tissue holders, and handmade bootie slippers. An additional thank you to the Sew ‘n Sews of Sun City Center for their donations of handmade lap quilts, neck purses to hold cellphones and other personal items, and all the other wonderful tidbits they provided. Both of these groups helped our church make Christmas bright at Belvedere Commons, Pacifica, and Palm Gardens. As you are aware, several of our senior communities have residents who have no family in the local area, and these gifts help them to feel our love this Christmas.



The other wonderful news I have to share with you is about our Food Pantry. We have been so blessed to have so many people donate so much food to allow us to feed our community, including families and students in the local school communities. I was fortunate enough to meet with representatives from the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay during their last visit and shared with them the wonderful work we do through our small but mighty Food Pantry. As a result of our discussion, on December 4th, we received a grant of \$8,000.00 to help keep our Food Pantry continue its work in our community, providing food for those in need. This is just another blessing for our church to be able to continue the wonderful work



we do in the community and surrounding area.

As I close this note to you, I want to say how grateful I am for each one of you in our congregation. Your willingness to help not only here on the church campus through our different ministries and help with our continued outreach into our local community.

May your New Year be filled with Much Love and Many Blessings.

Victoria



SUNDAY, JANUARY 26th

OneBlood’s Big Red Bus will be on campus January 26th beginning at 8:30AM. Every two seconds, someone needs blood. The blood donated at our blood drive will likely be transfused into a patient within 48 to 72 hours. During our last blood drive, our congregation contributed 9 units of blood and we were able to help 57 lives with your donations. Be on the look out for registration information. Sign up and be a hero in someone’s life.