

**CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF
CHRIST
OF PUNTA GORDA**
An Open and Affirming Congregation



OCTOBER 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

OFF TRACK

You may all know that the month of September was dedicated to Earth Month. I know, we honored Earth Day in May during our worship, but this was for a different reason. You may also know that our Congregation is being presented with an opportunity to become a Creation Justice designated church by the United Church of Christ Environmental Ministry. So, in September I centered on the “why” of the need for Creation Justice.

The idea originated from a Living the Question study we engaged two years ago, pre pandemic. We studied different aspects of Creation Justice and how they theologically and morally fit our mission as a faith community. Now, the study format we used came from the Lutheran tradition, but it fit us, for the most part, and what we wanted to achieve.

The hope was that as a conclusion to the LTQ study, we would ask the Congregational UCC to become a Creation Justice Church (CJC), certified by the UCC Environmental Ministry group. As we were ending our study, Covid-19 began decimating the population of our country, and our church decided to suspend In-Person worship and the consideration of CJC designation. Now that some aspects of life have returned to near normal, the Social Justice Ministry Team of our church felt it was time to renew our focus on becoming a CJC once again.

As you may have seen, each week in September we had a different theme for worship. We engaged Earth Justice, Humanity Justice, Sky Justice, and finally Mountain Justice. The themed materials were “borrowed” from the Uniting Church of Australia and adapted for use in the USA. The UCC had partnered with this material and offered it to our churches wanting to acknowledge Creation Justice for an entire month.

This presented a particular challenge for me, a staunch user of the Revised Common Lectionary and its familiar three-year cycle. Each week, texts were chosen to fit the theme of CJ and not the Lectionary. I adapted to this schedule for September and all of my connections as to how it would play out. We did Bible Studies on the materials each week. Isaac adapted to hymns with familiar tunes, but very different, theme specific, lyrics. Some of those pieces proved very challenging to accept. Isaac and you all did very well adapting too!

To just add more confusion, I decided to incorporate elements from the recent General Synod of the UCC which was held virtually in July. Each part of the 7-day event was prerecorded and pieced together to meet the varied needs of the gathering. So, all of the worship materials were recorded as much as a year in advance to be used at General Synod. The theme for General Synod was “Rooted and Grounded in Love”. Consequently, much of the recorded materials was Earth related. There were pieces from Indigenous Christian sources, African Christian sources, rap music sources, blue grass, and some just plain different musical sources. These pieces from GS were infused into worship for us in September. Not everything worked as it was supposed to, but we were given some really different experiences during worship last month. Did you catch the service where we had potting soil up front so that folks could with their hands and bare feet FEEL what soil on naked toes and bare hands was like?

So, we immersed ourselves, somewhat reluctantly in some cases, in Creation Justice. We considered Global Climate Change and the threat it poses to ALL species on earth. We considered Racial Justice and the threat it poses to ALL humans on Earth. We considered Resource Justice and how unequal use of them affects ALL life on earth. We considered Sea Level changes and how it affects ALL of US in Florida. It was certainly a challenging month, and somewhat trying. Not all were pleased with our pursuing a whole month of everything Creation Justice.

This is first for me in ministry. We have several acceptable seasons already, Advent, Christmas, Stewardship, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. Now we have several new ones; Black History/Racial Justice Month (February), Pride Month (June), and now Earth Month (September). I will likely not engage each with a whole month of separate liturgy, but you can be assured that the topics for each will come up quite frequently!

I must honor you all with your patience this past month. So far, I haven't been fired for trying this Creation Justice Month thing, though I have had a few sideward glances. Now, you will be asked to consider all of the things we have done in the realm of Creation Justice and all of the things we can do in the future, beginning with our Social Justice Moment on October 3rd. You may be surprised in both considerations. Thank you all for a challenging and wonderful month of September!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

The agenda of our September Leadership Team meeting was very full as we grappled with numerous issues. Unfortunately, most of the topics were left unresolved and will require continued research and discussion.

As has been the case for the last nineteen months, COVID issues were discussed, and we are going to continue to require masks for the immediate future. The seven-day average of new cases in Charlotte County is now higher than it was in January 2021 when people had not been vaccinated. Although we feel confident that most if not all the individuals who are attending church are vaccinated, breakthrough infections require that we continue to wear masks while indoors. We are also going to continue to require social distancing. Joys and concerns still need to be sent to Mary before Thursday or shared on Facebook or in writing during the service. It does appear that new cases are starting to decline. Let's hope and pray the trend continues. Indoor fellowship is still on hold, but as it gets cooler, we may be able to do some things outdoors. As always, stay tuned.

Be sure to check out the Treasurer's Report for an update on our search for less expensive insurance coverage. Jason Lamarca from Lamarca Insurance and Financial Services, Inc., attended our September meeting, and his input was very helpful and gave us much to think about.

Another item that was discussed at this month's Team meeting focused on improving our energy efficiencies and the possible benefits of an energy management system and HVAC upgrades. Expect to hear more about this in the months ahead.

Apologies for the audio/visual glitches we continue to experience. The Team is looking into things that can be done to avoid the issues. Our current system is outdated and uses analog technology. We may need to undertake some equipment upgrades, but the research has just begun.

Laity Sunday is scheduled for October 17. Refer to Isaac's Discipleship Report for further updates. He's looking for volunteers for that Sunday to participate in the service, which will be presented by some of our non-ordained members. The entire service--announcements, the call to worship, readings, prayers, the sermon, and benediction--will be undertaken by lay personnel.

We are looking forward to having our snowbirds return in the coming months. I expect it will feel like a reunion every week for the next several weeks as one or more of our northern members return. Safe travels on your way to Florida.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Recommendations from the Endowment Team regarding distribution of Endowment Funds are considered and approved by the Leadership Team.

The following distribution of Endowment Funds was made in September:

- a. The UCC Severe Storms 2021-Ida Relief Effort received a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$500.

The Endowment Fund received no new contributions during September.

Expanding your support of CUCC community ministries by regularly contributing to the Endowment Fund is a fitting way to honor a loved one or memorialize special dates or events. All contributions are conservatively invested to produce growth and income.

Also, regular giving to the Endowment Fund, in addition to your pledge to the general operation of the CUCC, is a simple and easy way to directly give back to our community.

You can now make regular contributions to the Endowment Fund via designated contributions made in the Sunday offering. Just write your check to “Endowment Fund” and place it in the collection plate! May God Bless You.

TREASURER’S REPORT – Michael Robinson, Treasurer



Contribution’s income in August was good at \$ 13,447, not including \$ 600 for building use donations. The latter is a mineable source of future income, as we have a marvelous facility, adaptable and usable for many groups. What could be more Christian than opening it up to multiple uses by the community?

Our cash position is strong with a \$ 31,000 bank operating balance, \$ 51,100 in Capital Funds (earmarked for a handicapped-accessible bathroom renovation) and \$ 629,000 Endowment Funds, earmarked for missions and outreach. Expenses remain within budget, and we continue with efforts to rein in insurance premiums.

Thank you, Snowbirds, for continuing to support the church financially during your sojourn up North. The weather is starting to moderate here in the Sunshine State, and we look forward to your return.

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Janis Tulk, Chair



Many thanks to everyone for returning your surveys. The Pastoral Relations Team will be busy calculating the results and giving our recommendations to the Leadership Team in November. If you have not sent yours in yet, there is still time.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James,



October is upon us! Which means Halloween, pumpkin spice latte at Starbucks, harvest, fall colored leaves...and LAITY SUNDAY! That's right, on October 17th pastor Mike gets to sit amongst the congregation as we carry out worship. I will be going around asking for participation either in person or by email so be on the lookout!

Now to a serious matter at hand. We are desperately in need of greeters as well as communion preparers/servers for Sunday services. We have had little to no sign ups which means the same person usually is at the door quite frequently. It takes the community to build the church. Please, please sign up for either or both so we can relieve people from having to greet every Sunday. There is a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary. You may also email me at isaac.james@icloud.com if you would like to participate, I would greatly appreciate it.

If you have signed up, the books for Living the Question are in the church office.

Blessings on your month!



MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jessica and Dennis Danner



We are continuing to suspend indoor after-services fellowship at least through mid-October.

However, we are planning an outdoor breakfast before church services on Laity Sunday, October 17th. Details to follow. Volunteers needed – please call Dennis Danner 217-299-1493 or email the2danners@gmail.com.



STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



LET'S TALK ABOUT CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

What is *stewardship*? What's it all about anyway? Where did such an idea come from? By who's authority?

To begin appropriately, it occurred to me that the Bible may be a legitimate place. I found four scriptural references in Apostle Paul's letters to the churches:

EPHESIANS 3:1-3, 1CORINTHIANS 9:16-18, COLOSSIANS 1:24-26, and 1TIMOTHY 1:3-5.

By prayer and the Spirit's inducement, I am persuaded that Paul offers a clear explanation about how we should consider *stewardship*.

First, Paul is assuming that we have heard of the "stewardship" of God's Grace. Ah, it must be that God models stewarding by using the character of 'grace'. Two things-it's God's work; it's graceful-full of grace!

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians that he is compelled to "preach the gospel" - his stewardship. So, by stewarding, one is actively complying with God's calling. God is the authority for stewardship. Further then, stewarding is doing God's work on earth. And I surmise by that work, we are 'preaching the gospel'!!

Third, Paul accepted his calling to be minister 'according to the *stewardship* given by God', which he described as 'to make the WORD of God fully known'. Thus, you 'and me' have that choice – accept/reject/put off choosing our own calling for ministry (not as preacher necessarily). Do we take up our cross and become STEWARDS of God's kingdom? That is, accepting His call-in stewardship. Fourth, how can it be said better than Paul's explanation in 1Tim 1:4b, "... *stewardship* from God that is by *faith*"! My gosh, it smacks of truth; apply your faith that it is God's call – for you/me - and do the work of *stewardship* of God's creation.

MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James



For All the Saints by William Walsham How

Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Bishop William Walsham How (1823-1897) was educated at Oxford and served through the ranks until elected Bishop Suffragan in East London (1879-1888) and Bishop of Wakefield (1888-1897), the latter being a poor, smoky industrial parish. Early in his service to Wakefield, he comforted the families of miners killed in a disaster, although later he failed to resolve a miners' strike. While serving in London, he ministered in the slums of the East Side for little pay and with no social prestige.

How declined prestigious appointments as bishop of Manchester and Durham. In London, his parishioners called him by various popular titles including "the children's bishop," "the poor man's bishop," and "the omnibus bishop," the latter designation for his frequent travel among the people of his parish. Instead of riding in a private coach like many bishops, he took public transportation, working and living among the poorer people.

Writing his first hymn at age thirteen, How produced many of his hymns early in his career, while he was a rector at Whittington (1851-1853), a rural hamlet on the Welsh border. He wrote many of his hymns for people who had little education. His hymns total around sixty, with more than a third appearing in British and American hymnals — a large percentage of his total output.

Though his hymn writing came primarily from his earlier years, How was active in the field of hymnal production throughout most his life. He co-edited *Psalms and Hymns* (1854 and 1864) with a Supplement (1867); the SPCK [Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge] *Church Hymns and Children's Hymn Book* (1881). His own collection, *Hymns*, was published in 1886. The apex of How's recognition as a hymn writer was his commission to compose a hymn text for the Diamond Jubilee [60th anniversary of the reign] of Queen Victoria.

Originally, "For all thy saints" was written for All Saints' Day and published in Horatio Nelson's *Hymns for Saints' Days and Other Hymns* (1864). The heading was "A Cloud of Witnesses," a reference to Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,

let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us . . .” (KJV).

After appearing in Church

Hymns (1871) with the revised title “For all the saints,” its usage spread.

This hymn is a commentary on the article in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the Communion of Saints.” Within the Anglican tradition, the relationship with the faithful on earth—The Church Militant—and the saints in heaven—The Church Triumphant—is paramount. This hymn emphasizes this union.

Excerpt taken from the Book of Hymn Stories by William Channing

LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj



Book Talk Tea will start its new season on Friday November 12. Plans at this time are to meet in Gilchrist Park by the gazebo at 12 noon. Please bring a brown bag lunch, lawn chair and any books you want to discuss. Looking forward to seeing everyone again!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Weaver



“And what does the Lord require of you? To ACT justly and to LOVE mercy and to WALK humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8b

Punta Gorda CUCC’s Social Justice Ministry’s mission is to recognize the interconnectedness of all Creation, seeking and acting for God’s justice, and encouraging our congregation to participate in justice ministries.

Environmental Justice

Ten Easy Environmental Activities to help save planet Earth

- Reduce, reuse, and recycle. Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three “R” s to conserve natural resources and landfill space.
- Volunteer. Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed, too.
- Educate. When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.

- Conserve water. The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean.
- Choose sustainable. Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.fishwatch.gov.
- Shop wisely. Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag.
- Use long-lasting light bulbs. Energy efficient LED light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room!
- Plant a tree. Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change.
- Don't send chemicals into our waterways. Choose non-toxic chemicals in the home and office.
- Bike more. Drive less.

Racial Justice

Getting pandemic boredom? Here are some excellent books/movies on racism in the United States.

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

The Color of Compromise by Jemar Tisby

Caste by Isabel Wilkerson

The Cross and the Lynching Tree by James Cone

The Devil in the Grove by Gilbert King

Movies: Harriet, Just Mercy, Green Book, The Hate U Give, Loving, Hidden Figures-all of these movies can be seen on YouTube



CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: The office will be open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm. We will be closed on Fridays. Phone # 941-637-8443.

PLEDGES AND OPEN DONATIONS: Thank you for sending in your pledges and donations. Please send them **ONLY** to Congregational UCC, P.O. Box 510838, Punta Gorda, FL 33951, **NOT** 1201 Aquí Esta Drive. It has come to our attention that checks are being stolen from street side mailboxes. You may still drop them off in the church office, if you prefer, **Mon-Thurs from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm.**

Updating Your Information

We are always trying to keep our information on members and visitors up to date. We need your help! If you have had a change of address, new email address, home phone or cell phone change, please let us know so we can keep our records current which will help us to keep good communication with all of you. If you are not receiving emails or the Beacon newsletter, please let us also know that. Thank you so much. Your help is very much appreciated.

Send Changes To: office@puntaqorda-ucc.com OR you can drop them off in the church office.

Birthdays and Anniversaries: Is your birthday or anniversary missing from the bulletin or screen on Sunday morning? Please let us know. It probably is missing because we do not have that information for you.



BIRTHDAYS

Oct	3	Paula Gair
	8	Jean Mann
	10	Kathy Rivadeneira
	11	Jerry Larson
	11	Cathy Ann Colson
	13	Pat Blandford
	15	Ann Barker
	19	John Schmuhl
	21	Dick Michael
	22	Richard Whitman
	23	Jenna Klossner
	25	Bob Wood
	25	Kathryn Frantish

ANNIVERSARIES

Oct	2	Dennis & Jessica Danner
	7	Gerry & Pat Blandford
	8	Scott Anger & Mary Cassidy Anger
	14	Fred & Sally Benson
	14	Olin & Joan Lyons

Did we miss a birthday or anniversary? Please email the office, and we will try to make sure it does not happen again: office@puntagorda-ucc.com