

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



August 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

For Times Such as These

We don't often hear the story of Queen Esther. She lived as part of the conquered Israelite people in Babylon. King Xerxes ruled the land from 486 to 465 BC. Esther became his Queen after forming a friendship with the head Eunuch Hegai, who was in charge of the royal harem (and you thought the Hebrew Texts were boring). Life in the palace is good. There were lavish parties, beautiful jewels, great costumes, but her contacts were strictly controlled. She could not even speak to the King unless she was summoned to his side.

The plot thickens. Haman, a trusted advisor to King Xerxes, had decided that the Jews in Babylon should be eliminated. He had convinced the King to allow him to carry out that plot.

It was around this time that Esther's cousin Mordecai (whom we are told was hated by Haman) came to convince Esther of Haman's plot to kill the Jews and to encourage her to use her influence as Queen to advocate for mercy. She was not sure she should. She was torn. She had a relatively good and privileged life in the courts of Xerxes. She would be placing that all in jeopardy if she spoke to the King.

Then we come to a convincing conversation between Mordecai and Queen Esther. It is told in the Book of Esther 4:13-14 like this, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. *And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:13-14 NIV).

Mordacai, in essence, was telling her that she possibly was placed in the position to speak out

as part of a divine plan. If she didn't speak out, she faced death, right alongside her fellow Jews. She might be Queen, but she was still a Jew to the Babylonians.

Esther has been rolling around in my brain a lot these past few days. I have been struggling with the same issues in many ways. I live a life of privilege compared to many in our world. I have a home, my family is healthy and safe, I have a job I love, we have food on our table, we have a car to drive, we even have a small amount of investments to look forward to wasting in retirement. I have it REALLY good. I have nothing to complain about. But still, I am vexed. I know there are so many in the world who are crying out for help and to be noticed as Children of God. I am in the position to help. Should I?

We hear a different message from the world right now, a message of fear. We are told that in order for others to rise, we must have taken away all that we have. We KNOW in our hearts this is not true, but we are being asked to believe it and resist helping. Then I think of Esther.

It takes quite a while to unfold, but Esther has a plan. She appears before the King, and he asks her what she desires, and he will grant it up to half of his kingdom. She invites the King and Haman to a banquet to honor them.

The banquet lasts for two days, with lots of wine consumed. Finally, the King asks her again what she wants and he will grant it up to half of his kingdom. Esther asks that she and her people be spared from a plot to kill them. Xerxes is furious and demands to know who has hatched this plot. Esther names Haman as the one responsible.

The King storms out of the room while Haman is still present in the banquet. Haman begs Esther for his life. His kneeling in front of her as he begs. Just then Xerxes comes back in and thinks that Haman is seducing Esther. He orders Haman hanged. Ultimately, Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai's death. You really should read the book of Esther! It is a script better designed than any soap ever devised.

Bottom line, Esther saves her people, though she risked her life and all the privilege she had when she spoke up. Esther becomes the hero!

I really feel that we are living in times when we are being asked to take action. We may be asking ourselves, "Why now? Why us?" My answer is, "Why not us?" We may have been placed here exactly for this moment of choice. Our created purpose may in fact be to be the generation who solves the problem of racism, poverty, sickness, climate change, and conflict. What if we are? What shall we do?

I completely understand the conflict this decision brings. We can turn and run and make someone else deal with it or we can engage and make a difference as Esther did. It is risky. Some will judge us as fools. Others, the ones crying out for relief will not though. Don't they deserve our bravery and intellect to find solutions that EVERYONE can live with? I believe they do, that they deserve our last measure of devotion to end this struggle once and for ALL. What do you say, shall we?

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson

July Leadership Team Virtual Meeting, and News

Old Business: We discussed two items regarding resuming physical Worship Services in the Sanctuary on Sunday mornings. One was the mechanics of conducting a safe and practical worship service during this time of a Covid-19 pandemic. The other was the requirements necessary to qualify for reinstating physical worship services, regarding the rate of occurrences of infected persons in Charlotte and contiguous counties. Outcome: your Leadership voted not to resume physical worship until the infection rates match our goals.

New Business: The Capital Campaign shared the schedule for the Construction Project modifying the front entrance to the Sanctuary, and construction of new ramp and stairs leading to the front entrance. Please see the Capital Campaign's report elsewhere in this month's Beacon.

An update was given on the search for a new source for Janitorial Services. Bill Colson and Guy Greenfield met with six candidates in the church facilities, giving them individual tours, and discussing a proposed cleaning schedule and scope of items to be cleaned. Two other sources had been contacted but did not reply to messages to indicate an interest.

Subsequent to the LT Meeting, the following occurred. Of the six candidates, "No Quotes" were received from two. Proposals from the remaining four were evaluated. Proposed prices ranged from \$800 to \$1450 per month, which did not include any floor maintenance such as stripping, re-waxing and buffing. After much reflection, discussion between Bill and Guy, it was decided to not accept any proposal, since they were all much higher than this year's budget for Janitorial Services. All four of those submitting proposals were called, and then sent e-mail messages telling them their proposals were not accepted, and thanking them for their interests. Currently the Leadership Team is discussing, via e-mail, placing an advertisement for a Janitor in the local newspaper. And we are also discussing a very recent request for consideration as candidate for Janitor (a direct employee of the congregation).

One last item from the Leadership Team Meeting. We had been having discussions as to appropriate responses to various Social Justice issues occurring outside our congregation, Because of

unfamiliarity with the scope of issues, and the very nature of the different issues coming to our attention, we agreed to undertake, as your Leadership Team, the study of one particular issue- 'The Poor People's Campaign'. We agreed to meet virtually each Monday afternoon, to study the history, issues, and 'demands' of the Poor Peoples Campaign. Using materials from the Campaign web site, we will spend five weeks examining each to the five sections they espouse, and one week examining how we as a congregation might support their proposals. As I write this article, we are beginning the third week of study and issue examination.

Upcoming. Following past practice, and a vote in the meeting, the Leadership Team will not meet during the month of August. We will resume scheduled meetings in September 2020. In an emergency, we can always call for a virtual meeting, to take action as needed.

Stay in touch with us via E-mail messages, and this Beacon Newsletter. The entire Leadership Team wishes to hear your thoughts and interests about the issues we discuss. Please contact us through the office, or you may e-mail me directly. Bill.colson@gmail.com

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE– Kathy Frantish, Chair

We are excited to announce the construction project for our new front entrance has begun. Security fences have been set up and the demolition of the old steps has been completed. Over the next few weeks Boyette & Miller will be installing drainage and complete the block work. After that, the new split face block will be installed and the new steps and ramps poured. All of this is because of the generous pledges that have been made to our Capital Campaign. Included are a few pictures of the demo, and I will continue to share more pictures as the project progresses. Stay tuned and Thank you to everyone for your support.





ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

At its recent meeting, the Endowment Team recommended and the Leadership Team approved a distribution of \$1,000 to the Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens. The request for funding was for landscaping tools and storage. Additional funding will be considered at year end.

Your Fund portfolio has returned 4.8% over the past 12 months and 8.5% over the past 3 years. The portfolio reached a high in January 2020 when your Leadership Team authorized 2020 distributions of up to \$49,000; since that time distributions of \$40,764 have been approved which include \$25,000 to the Capital Campaign.

Considering the volatility of the market and the nearly \$41,000 of distributions, the value of the portfolio has returned to within a few farthings of the January 2020 high. Your Endowment Team and Leadership Team are providing fine fiscal stewardship.



TREASURER'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

July 2020 Treasurer's Report

Financial Results	June 2020	2020 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$10,688	\$100,099	\$87,300
Expenses	13,294	80,785	87,300
Net Income	-\$2,606	\$19,315	\$0

June expenses exceeded our donations by \$2,606. This trend will continue through July, August, and September so the current budget surplus of \$19,315 is going to be gone by the time the early snowbirds return, and that's *if* the snowbirds return because we still don't know what is going to happen with COVID-19. **Thank you** for continuing to send in your operating account donations. Although it may seem that virtual worship would be less expensive, it isn't. This year's expenses of \$80,785 are slightly higher than the \$78,020 that we had incurred at this time last year. The increase of \$2,765 over last year is mainly due to the increased expenses related to our property insurance, salaries, and our higher OCWM contributions.

If you would like an easy and cost-free way to contribute to the church, you can set up an automatic payment through your bank by using electronic banking. Payments are mailed from your bank to the church. If you would like to pursue this form of payment, please be advised that the address that should be used for mailing the check is Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda, PO Box 510838, Punta Gorda, FL 33951-0838. Most banks do not charge for this service—not even for the postage to mail the payment.



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion: August 2
September 6
October 4

Education: Last month we saw the passing of John Lewis, civil rights leader, Congressional Representative and often called the “Conscience of the Congress” at age 80. If you would like to learn more about this courageous leader who exemplified non-violent resistance, check out the documentary “*John Lewis: Good Trouble*” on Netflix or Prime.

Current Happenings: Each night on the news, we hear a lot about the sad things happening due to COVID-19. Here are some good things that are happening within our church family and our church ministry! People have more time to meditate and study the Scriptures (our church Zoom Bible Study keeps growing). We are able to reach more and more people through our worship services, and weekly presentations (Pastor’s devotional, Isaac’s Hymn History, M.E. Steele-Pierce’s Poetry Corner, Rev. Ann Barker’s Spiritual Women, and Guest pastor devotionals), on Facebook and YouTube. Again, a big thank you to our fantastic Tech Team- Pastor Mike Ford, Isaac James, Susann Luckenbach, Kevin Rivadeneira, and M.E. Steele-Pierce! We so appreciate the many hours you faithfully devote to our virtual ministry! Deeper relationships are forming through our Caring/Calling Friends Ministry. Zoom groups are forming to keep in touch with church families scattered across the U.S. One group watched the movie, *I Am Not Your Negro* (Netflix) and had an engaging discussion about James Baldwin and the Civil Rights Movement. Another group is in the process of reading *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and will be discussing it in August. People are realizing more and more the injustices towards People of Color and your Leadership Team is learning about the Poor People’s Campaign (thanks again to Zoom meetings!).



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

“Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings
and pipe!” - Psalm 150

Over the past few decades, the so-called “worship wars” have been fought within churches and entire denominations, largely over the kind of music that is appropriate in the worship service. Contemporary versus traditional, hymns versus choruses — what does the Bible have to say about the best music for Christian worship?

Most of the Bible’s teaching on worship is found in the Old Testament. More modern worship certainly looks different than that offered under the old covenant, for the sacrifice of Christ means that we no longer bring bulls and goats to the tabernacle. Nevertheless, some elements of worship — such as music — remain integral to new covenant worship (Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:18–21), and the Old Testament can help us understand what pleases God in our worship music today.

We see in Psalm 150 that it is appropriate to praise the Lord with nearly every instrument that has ever been invented. Even those instruments not mentioned specifically in that chapter are only new forms or derivations of those listed therein. It goes without saying that some instruments may not be wise choices for worship in some contexts, but God never absolutely forbids instruments in worship. It has been somewhat customary to use instruments that are somewhat less distracting but that really comes down to opinion.

The power of song is at the root of our disagreements regarding church music. Music shapes our beliefs, informing our thoughts and actions. Singing hymns helps to form our theology, for it is the words that are sung that we most easily remember years into the future. That is why any discussion of music in the church must first consider the lyrics of the songs we sing. Lyrics of hymns or choruses should reflect biblical theology to ensure that the doctrine we learn as we sing is faithful to Scripture. Hymns or choruses based directly on Scripture help guarantee the soundness of our beliefs. The hymns are to be based as Christ-like and as he taught in the scriptures with themes of love, kindness, gentleness, humility, justice, open hearts to all humanity etc.

Elaborate music should also be used in worship, since it requires the best of a musician’s skills, and nothing but the best ought to be offered in the church’s praise. Such complex songs are not necessarily hard to sing. Varied lyrics that present biblical themes comprehensively and music that contains more than just one repeated chord make for elaborate songs that exalt the Lord our God.

The importance of music in shaping our worldview and theology means that we must never sing songs without carefully considering the meaning of the lyrics. As we participate in worship each week, let us always think carefully on what we are doing and saying in order that we might be able to praise

God with understanding and with all our might. Do you participate thoughtfully in worship each Lord's Day?

Blessings on your daily praise of our loving and faithful God!



STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH 2020

Members and friends of Punta Gorda Congregational UCC, we will be initiating a somewhat belated effort surrounding a second denomination-wide mission donation project concerning STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH. We completed the earlier One Great Hour of Sharing on Sunday, July 20.

Our nation is amazingly diverse, representing different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Yet most of us live in communities marked by sameness, among people who think, act, and generally look or at least behave similar to us. The vision behind STRENGTHEN is to experience some unity amongst such a diverse crowd. You might ask, How?

Through funds provided by the Strengthen The Church giving initiative. An example is seen under the Penn West UCC Conference. To support conference youth programming this past year, the Conference provided grants to two churches in support of youth wishing to attend the National Youth Event (NYE). Penn West Conference Minister David Ackerman explained why this mattered, saying, "At National Youth Event, our youth get a sense of the width and breadth of the UCC. Most of the youth come from smaller rural churches. At NYE, they meet other youth from different backgrounds and come away with a sense of being united."

Every UCC conference uses your generous gifts to Strengthen the Church, excitedly at the local community level as well. As in West Penn's example, the STC grants made a real difference in the

lives of those youth attending NYE. That financial support permitted their attendance, on a national level, to experience God's vision about a truly united and uniting church, amidst different cultures and backgrounds. By numerous STC projects, investing in God's vision for the Church, our UCC facilitates conferences and churches programs to reach congregants in exciting ways.

Please give generously to our CUCC-PG 2020 Strengthen the Church initiative when the opportunity comes to you. The STC reflects the shared commitment of all settings of the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build up the UCC. Conferences and the national setting equally share the gifts given by members and friends through our local denominations. Those funds support leadership development, new church starts, youth ministry, and innovations within existing congregations.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – No report this month

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, our ladies luncheons are on hold. We will keep you posted as to when we will resume Ladies' Lunch, so keep reading your email updates from the church



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogai



Hope you are enjoying your summer reading!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM – Glenn Weaver and M.E. Steele-Pierce

A year ago, we told you about the program Witness at The Border, a group of volunteers who stood vigil and reported happenings at the child immigrant detention center, in Homestead, Florida. Many of the children there were separated from their families by Homeland Security agents when their families

sought asylum at the border. At that time, some of our church members participated as witnesses at Homestead.

We want to let you know about an upcoming documentary to be released in the fall: Asylum Seeker. It describes what was happening at the border before Covid-19 struck the U.S. Since then, both adults and children able to cross the border have been forcibly deported before their asylum applications. They have been taken on planes to Central America without any clear homes to which they may return. Those who remain at the border in Mexico suffer squalid conditions in camps where the Covid virus is spreading rapidly.

The Witness at The Border group was founded by Joshua Rubin, a NYC software developer, to photograph(witness) what's happening to immigrant children, first at Tornillo, Texas, and then Homestead, Florida, and finally at Brownsville and Matamoros, Mexico. If you missed the trailer for Asylum Seeker during July's Social Justice Moment, we invite you to watch it here. Please join us as we stand with the group Witness at the Border in their efforts to make hurtful policies toward asylum seekers known and to work and pray for immigration reform. Learn more here:

www.witnessattheborder.org.

Together we pray:

God of love and compassion: may we always recognize your spirit:

in the refugee family, seeking safety from violence;
in the migrant worker, bringing food to our tables;
in the asylum-seekers, seeking justice for their families;
in the unaccompanied child, traveling in a dangerous world.

Give us hearts that break open whenever our brothers and sisters turn to us.

Give us hearts that no longer turn deaf to their voices in times of need;

Give us eyes to recognize a moment for grace instead of a threat.

Give us voices that fail to remain silent but which decide instead to advocate prophetically.

Give us hands that reach out in welcome, but also in work, for a world of justice until all homelands are safe and secure.

Prayer source: Xavier University, *Dan Hartnett S.J.*

We remain devoted to our goal to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). You are invited to join us. Write or call any of CUCC's Social Justice Ministry team: co-facilitators Glenn Weaver or M.E. Steele-Pierce, Mary Cassidy-Anger, Jim DeGood, Jerry Larson, Lori Larson, Elizabeth Pitcher, Carol Schmuhl, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick. Social Justice Ministry Mission statement: Recognizing the interconnectedness of all Creation, we seek to act for God's justice and encourage our congregation to participate in justice ministries.



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.

Please note: To have an event listed on the Sunday bulletin, please have the information in to the church office by Tuesday at 12:00 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@puntagorda-ucc.com OR you can drop them off in the church office.

Name Tags: Just a reminder, if you would like a magnet on the back of your name tag instead of the pin, just leave your name tag in the blue bin on the name tag rack and it will be changed and ready for the next week.

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

Aug	1	John Casey
Aug	4	Bill Remiger
Aug	6	Bob Pierce
Aug	12	Isaac James
Aug	16	James Grunden
Aug	23	Chrystal Reichard
Aug	23	Stacy Scarrow
Aug	25	Richard Cleveland

ANNIVERSARIES

Aug	3	Ron & Louise Jankowski
Aug	7	Jim and Jane Provencher
Aug	8	Bob Pierce & Mary Ellen Steele Pierce
Aug	12	Duane and Marilyn Belseth
Aug	20	Jerry Oscarson & David Cramer
Aug	29	Ian & Sandra McLauchlan
Aug	31	Neoma & Bill Remiger

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