

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



MARCH 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

New Language

By now, you all know there is a third vaccine in the fight against Covid-19. Yea! In record time, the industry that normally takes years to develop vaccines has come up with safe and effective ways to help reduce the instance of moderate to severe illness due to Covid-19. This is expected to drastically reduce the number of hospitalizations and deaths from this pesky bug. Due to the fact that nearly 53,000,000 Americans have been infected and subsequently have developed anti-bodies AND that nearly 25,000,000 have completed a course of vaccines, we have a third of our population protected! Another yea! By the end of March, we may have half of the population protected. That is great news for ALL of us. We know that some are reluctant to have the vaccine. If you are one of them, please talk to someone who has had them. They will be able to give you an eyewitness account as to the adverse effects. I am very anxious for the vaccine to be made available to anyone who wants it. I myself am in a place of limbo. My status is such that I will be dead last to get the vaccine. I'm hoping not literally :)

One of the least talked about weapon against Covid-19 is what we are doing personally to protect ourselves and those around us. We have heard them so many times that we are probably not hearing them anymore. What seems to be making the fight more even are these precautions; masking, washing hands (which we were taught to do in Kindergarten!), and social distancing. These are the same precautions we are taking when we resume In-Person worship on March 7th. If you are tired of having your temp taken or the rest of the precautions, I'm sorry, but we are not. We all know it

is a pain to wear a mask, too bad. We all know how hard it is to not sit together, too bad. We all know how difficult not hugging and shaking hands is, too bad. If they keep us all safer, too good.

I have found a way of dealing with all of this mess. I have changed one single aspect of my language which makes things a bit more fun. I am fairly certain that this is not my original idea (that doesn't happen very often), but I cannot recall if I have heard it anywhere else. It is a phrase that applies ONLY to faith communities. Instead of wearing face masks, we will from now on be wearing "faith masks"! It may feel and sound like we are speaking with a lisp, but so be it. I LIKE wearing my faith mask! It also applies to faith shields. Our Choir will be demonstrating how they wear their faith shields. When you walk in the door, someone will make sure you are wearing your faith mask.

My thought process is simple. I consider it an act of faith to restrict myself by wearing a mask and all the other precautions. I feel as though, by doing this, that we are exemplifying what real faith looks like. When you hear comments about how hard it all is, simply tell folks, "I am showing the world my faith. Why don't you do the same?" It is another way the church (with a small c) can make an expression about loving all, no matter their life circumstance. It is a way we can affirm that Christianity can be involved in relevant ways and contribute to the care for all of God's creatures. It is such a small thing to ask, please put on a mask and stay six feet apart, it won't be forever. But if we can do this small thing for the greater good, too good! Be well!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

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The Leadership Team met on February 16, and we had a new date and time (third Tuesday of the month at 11) and some new faces (Isaac James, Michael Robinson, and Bil Tucker). All done via Zoom. Angry emoji here: I am hoping for face-to-face meetings sometime this year!

As most of you know by now, the Team voted to do another "soft" opening of the church on Communion Sunday, March 7. Again, we are asking that you speak with Mary Tulip in the office sometime on Monday through Thursday, 8:30 to 12:30, (941-637-8443) to make a reservation. Masks will be required. Seating will be socially distanced. Temperatures will be taken. Initially, we are limiting attendance to 30 people. COVID-19 positivity rates have dropped in Charlotte County, permitting us to feel that we can offer a safe and healthy return to in-person worship. If the downward trends continue, Easter in-person capacity will be increased!

If you have been to the church lately or driven by, you have probably noticed the new entrance, but hopefully you have also seen the changes in our landscaping. Guy Greenfield and Dick Michael spent time spreading new white rocks in the landscape beds, and it looks fabulous. Thank you both for donating your time and energy.

On Sunday, February 14, we welcomed nine new members to our church. Since we haven't been having fellowship, getting to know our new members is a little harder. I thought it might be fun to learn about our new members, and I asked them if they would like to submit their life histories. Over the next couple months, I hope to share these with you. And so, we begin:

JOAN AND OLIN LYONS:



JOAN:

I was born and raised in New Jersey and still visit a daughter and two grandchildren there. When I married Olin in 2000, we moved to Bath, Pennsylvania, where my oldest daughter, two grandsons and great granddaughter live. I have a son in Virginia who is the parent of my two youngest grandchildren. Olin and I live in Port Charlotte year-round, and I was glad to find this area in Florida after a visit to cousins who live in the area. I graduated from secretarial school in 1972, attended some college and held differing administrative positions throughout my career, before retiring in 2015. My family was very musical, I have been fortunate to sing in choirs since I was a little girl, and I love to sing and dance. I am also an avid reader. I love being a "groupie" to my husband, who is a percussionist who can read music. I love animals and have had many pets throughout my lifetime, but Mylo, our huge black cat, is the only one living with us currently. We were searching for a church home and visited many churches when we moved to Florida. While I was home recuperating from surgery, I came across the website for the Congregational UCC in Punta Gorda, and once I stepped through the doors and heard Mike and met all the wonderful people and listened to the choir, I never wanted to leave.

OLIN:

I have three sons all married with children. Five grandchildren but no great grandchildren. I retired in July of 2019 from Old Dominion Freight Line as a P&D (pick-up and delivery) driver. Before that I was an executive recruiter, freight broker, owner-operator truck driver, insurance salesman/sales manager, mechanic, dairy farmer, and a production welder making furniture. Our week is now six Saturdays and one Sunday!

Hobbies: I am currently building a "rat rod" which is a type of custom car for the street. I had a 38 Ford which I used to drag race, but I sold that a few years ago. We have a HD motorcycle that we like to take short trips on. I play drums in the Charlotte County Concert Band and fill in with a North Port big band on occasion. Joan and I both sing in the choir under the excellent direction of Isaac James. The first time we walked in the church (after going to a few in the area) and were met at the door by Mike, we both knew this was the place for us.

ANNIE ROBERTSON:



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When I reached out to Annie to ask about sharing her “life story” in the Beacon, she was between water aerobics and one of the many other activities (writing, painting and dancercise to name a few) she pursues while wintering in Punta Gorda. She summers in Belvidere, New Jersey. Annie grew up in Astoria, Queens. The summer after her freshman year in college (SUNY, New Paltz), she met her husband, John, who was introduced through the machinations of her pastor! While Annie pursued her teaching degree, her husband-to-be focused on his future career as a minister. Marriage and children (two sons and a daughter) followed. John’s career as a minister took them to many places, including New Jersey, New York City, Queens, and central Pennsylvania. During the “birth” of the pre-school movement, she designed an innovative cooperative education curriculum called “Making the Most of the Pre-school Years” at a community college. Annie also taught primary grade reading in public schools and helped with youth ministries. John’s last call was a church in Belvidere. One day, a young woman named Linda called to offer her help as a youth minister. It wasn’t long until Annie found Linda the perfect husband: a man named Glenn Weaver. And the rest, as they say, is history.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



The Endowment Team is now at full strength with the additions of Olin Lyons in late 2020, Carolyn Kvam-Hansman this month and me last month.

At the February Leadership Team meeting, the LT approved the amount of up to \$15,800 of Endowment Fund earnings for distribution during 2021. Our first request for assistance in 2021 was received just over a week ago and is being reviewed at this time. If you are connected with or volunteer at an organization that might be considered for Endowment Fund support, please contact me or any team member.

SCHOLARSHIP TEAM – Kathy Frantish, Chair

29 applications have been received from Charlotte High School and Pt. Charlotte High. Reference forms have been sent to all named on the application. The team will be reviewing these based on needs and not academic scores. Once the list is reviewed the interview process will begin, and the \$8000 we currently have will be distributed. March will be a very busy time for the team, as April is when the scholarships are rewarded to seniors.

Congregants are welcome to contribute to this fund at any time. Checks can be sent to the church office, and please denote on them that they are for the Scholarship Fund. They will be added to your yearly donations.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Mike Robinson

Through February, operating income for the church has totaled \$ 26,395. Our targeted budget for the year is \$181,639, an increase of \$14,609 over last year's actual receipts of \$ 167,030. If we annualize February year-to-date ($\$ 26,395 \times 6 = \$ 158,370$) at the current level we are experiencing of receipts, we will end the year with an operating deficit of some \$ 23,000 ($\$ 181,639 - \$ 158,370$). If this trend continues it will become increasingly worrisome.

We are exploring other insurance companies and income possibilities.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



Hard to believe we are already coming upon Easter! Holy week preparations are underway...a mini version of the choir has been assembled for Palm Sunday and Easter. Socially distant and wearing face shields, will be exciting to get back together once again. Pastor Mike plans on having either a zoom or Facebook live service for Maundy Thursday. More information to come in announcements.

A big welcome to our new church family members!

Carol Nickerson
Olin and Joan Lyons
Lucia and Anamaria Rivadeneira
Annie Robertson
Jay and Donna Sidmore
Helen (Birdie) Tisstola

Thank you to all who have brought in the short sets, there is still needed sets! Please contact either Judy Minier at 941-979-7316, or Mary Tulip at the church office 941-637-8443 if you would like to donate. These can be dropped off during office hours Monday-Thursday 8:30-12:30.

Just a reminder that services are now open for up to 30 persons on Sundays. Please make your reservations with Mary Tulip over the phone during office hours.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



“3-GREAT LOVES” PLEDGES:

- a. As of this date, pledges are less than those offered for last year, but ahead of the 2019 results. In various media, we have asked our friends and congregants who have NOT completed a pledge commitment form for this year to prayerfully attend so during February.
- b. Thank-you letters for those pledging were mailed on Tuesday, Feb16.

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS):

We prepared a Church Announcement on the CUCC theme, “LET (YOUR) LOVE FLOW” which was sent out by the CUCC Office. It describes support of the UCC program and One Great Hour of Sharing. In accord with UCC plans and OGHS materials, members/friends should complete financial support for One Great Hour of Sharing by March 14. A letter describing the program and soliciting donations will be sent this week to congregants.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man . . . and he said to him, 'Follow me.' ” (Matt. 9:9)

She could not believe the cold, hard facts. The prognosis of her disease was eventual paralysis. Born in Clapham, England, in 1789, Charlotte Elliott had experienced an active and normal life for thirty years, so the verdict about her future resulted in a very despondent and frustrated young woman. As the months grew into years, her frustrations grew into anger. Why would God allow such a thing to happen?

But one day, in 1822, a very special visitor came to the family home. The well-known Swiss evangelist, Caesar Malan, sat by her bedside. Seeking his wise counsel, Charlotte explained her

hopelessness and despair. The question that got to the source of her anguish was "You speak of coming to Jesus, but how? I'm not fit to come."

Malan patiently explained the all-knowing, but all-forgiving and loving Savior. He told Charlotte that Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life; that whoever comes to him will not hunger (John 6:35). As they prayed, she recognized her hungers. She wanted freedom from the depression that plagued her. She longed for peace and hope in her circumstances. It was a relief to say "Yes" to the simple request of Jesus: "Follow me."

The immediate change in her attitude was lasting. Each year she celebrated that day as the beginning of her new life— her spiritual birthday. On such a birthday in 1834, she captured her new insight on paper in the poem "Just As I Am." It expressed her "formula of faith" as she lovingly explained it to others. The music for her poem was later composed by American gospel musician William Bradbury.

For the remainder of her life, poetry was an expressive witness of her Christian faith. There were more than a hundred poems published in *The Invalid's Hymnbook*. Profits from its sales built a school for needy children. The director of the school, who was her brother and a minister, said: "In the course of my work, I hope to see some fruit of my ministry. But I feel more has been done by the single poem of my sister, 'Just As I Am.'

Could it be that one little poem touched more lives than many sermons or a school for needy children? It would not seem possible. But multiplication can be a miracle in God's plan. After Charlotte's death at age eighty-two, more than a thousand letters were discovered in her papers from people around the world, expressing thankfulness that their lives had been redirected by this one hymn.

Precious Lamb of God, the call to follow you is exciting. You give more than this world could begin to offer. With our whole being, we come, we come. Amen.

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Charlotte Elliott, 1835

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-Nogaj

Book Talk Tea will be on Friday March 12 at noon in Gilchrist Park by the gazebo. Please bring a lawn chair and brown bag lunch. Masks will be worn and social distancing practiced. See everyone there!

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

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. The quieter times of the COVID pandemic have allow us to reflect on how we have "walked the walk" of our mission statement. Here are some of the initiatives and actions our congregation (you!) have supported.

CUCC's members and social justice supporters have:

- Contributed to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers for health protection of immigrant farm workers against COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, farmworkers continue to provide resources farm to table.
- Supported the Blanchard House and participates in annual Martin Luther King Day breakfasts and celebrations, and served as readers for the annual Martin Luther King local school essay contest.
- Participated in the United Church of Christ's national program "Sacred Conversations to End Racism."
- Studied, discussed, and supported the Principles of the national Poor People's Campaign.
- Met with leaders of the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance to learn about and support their affordable housing project in Immokalee.
- Coordinated Living the Questions presentations and conversations around environmental, health, and economic justice issues.
- Supported the Citizens Climate Lobby.
- Sponsored highly successful community forums with Nobel Prize winner Dr. Terry Root on caring for our environment in the U.S. and specifically in SW Florida.
- Participated in Punta Gorda police and clergy co-sponsored events.
- Joined in walks and rallies on behalf of ending gun violence.
- Kept in contact with school officials about the funding of local lunch programs.
- Continued contributions to support St. Vincent De Paul.
- Created and presented Social Justice Moments during worship services on topics like farmworker justice, equity versus equality, voter rights, racial justice, environmental care, and many more.

All these align with the words of the prophet Micah: 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, Betty Pitcher, Elizabeth Pitcher, Carol Schmuhl, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick.



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.

2021 PLEDGE CARDS: Please return your 2021 pledge cards as soon as possible. If you need a pledge card, one can be emailed to you or you may pick one up in the church office.

2021 CHURCH ENVELOPES are available in the Church Office .

2021 CONTRIBUTION STATEMENTS have been emailed. If you did not receive one, please call the church office, and we will be glad to send you one.

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

March 1	Paula Michael
March 5	Vicki McDonald
March 6	Janis Tulk
March 10	Carol Schmuhl
March 11	Bill Klossner
March 14	Anamaria Rivadeneira
March 15	Charles Salisbury
March 17	Betty Pitcher
March 19	Sandra James-Nogaj
March 20	Olin Lyons
March 22	David Ley
March 23	William Tucker
March 26	Michael Ford

ANNIVERSARIES

March 25	Keith & Sandy Weber
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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