

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



SEPTEMBER 2019

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

It's A Matter of Perspective

I am always left, when reading the Gospel narratives of Jesus' ministry, questioning whether Jesus was a troublemaker or a peacemaker. There are many occasions in the Gospel accounts where Jesus confronts the religious community in its interpretation of Torah law. By his day, there were well over six hundred thirteen laws dealing with Sabbath observance. There were bound to be different interpretations of those laws, depending on the group enforcing them.

Jesus often had the most difficult conversations with leaders in the religious community when it came to Sabbath observances. He would see a need as he taught in the synagogue, he would meet that need, usually by healing someone, and would be confronted by the leaders in that synagogue for breaking Sabbath law. We find that confrontation in Luke 13:10-17. I'll leave you to read that passage before reading on in this essay. I'll wait.....did you read it? Good!

The short version is, Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom, and was teaching. A woman walks into worship, bent over by a crippling illness. Jesus sees her, calls her to him, tells her she is set free, touches her, she stands up and begins to praise God. One would think it is time for everyone to praise God for the healing they have witnessed. We would be wrong. The leader of the synagogue tells the crowd, not Jesus, that there are six days on which to be healed, but that the Sabbath day is not one of them. He in essence says, "come back during office hours tomorrow and we'll make an appointment to see if a healing is in order."

It serves us well to understand the nature of this dispute. There were two schools of thought and teaching about the purpose of the Sabbath day. In Exodus twenty, when Moses has introduced the ten commandments to the Israelites, it read, "8Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9Six days you shall *labor* and do all your *work*. 10But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and

all that is in them, but **rested** the seventh day; **therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.**” This school sought to define the nature of work as defined in the commandment. They thought it would be “labor” as we define it, work done to produce income or profit. It clearly says that ALL are to refrain from work, including the slaves and beasts of burden, even strangers visiting you.

The other, and conflicting, school of thought comes from Deuteronomy 5. We find the same commandment worded this way, “12Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13Six days you shall **labor** and do all your **work**. 14But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15**Remember** that **you were a slave** in the land of Egypt, and **the Lord your God brought you out from there** with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; **therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**” Subtle difference, but ones which radically change the intent of the commandment.

In the Exodus text, the Sabbath is seen as a release from work for the purpose of having a day to rest, as did God in the time of Creation. All of the same players are still restricted from working on the Sabbath, but it is solely for rest. In the Deuteronomy text, the same command is given to refrain from work on the Sabbath, but the purpose is to remember the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Much different than laying around and sleeping on your day off, eh?

Here we come to the conflict between the leader of the synagogue and Jesus. The leaders see the healing as breaking the Sabbath laws simply because the healing constituted an effort on Jesus part, work. Jesus saw it as liberating the woman from her eighteen year bondage from the spirit which had afflicted her. Two valid perspectives simply seen from two places. Which one is correct? You guessed it, both!

Jesus changes the narrative and explains his perspective when he asks the leader if he would lead his beast of burden to the water hole to keep it from dying of thirst. The leader wasn't afforded the chance to answer, but everyone there knew the answer to his question. Of course, you would water your animals, they can't do it for themselves because they are tied up in the manger. It would be cruel to leave them without water. I think you see where Jesus was coming from in his question.

Jesus then says that healing this woman from the spirit which had kept her in bondage for eighteen years was equally compassionate as leading the animals to drink. He goes on to say that it should have happened for no less reason than that she is a daughter of Abraham. Should she not be set free as her ancestors were from the bondage Egypt had placed them into? Of course, the answer is yes!

It also helps to understand the interior dynamics of this story. First, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. In his day the men would have been seated near him and the women would have had to listen from the outer room. The men were afforded the opportunity to question the teacher, women only to listen. Second, she was infirmed. In that culture, she would have been seen as a sinner who deserved her disease because she was not righteous. Anyone who had a disease was excluded from coming to the synagogue because they were unclean. It didn't stop this woman from coming though!

Third, she was a woman. Jesus invited her into the space the men occupied. A clear broken taboo. Lastly, he touched her. It was forbidden for a man to touch a woman who was not a relative, much less one who is cursed with a disease, and unclean. None of these factors seemed to be an issue for Jesus. He saw a daughter of Abraham, not an unclean woman intruding on the space of men. He saw a need. He met that need and set the woman free. She was set back into full relationship in her community as she was no longer cursed by God. So, what does she do? She rises and praises God for her freedom, exactly what one is supposed to do on the Sabbath! The leader of the synagogue saw these same dynamics as the reason NOT to heal the woman.

So, I am left with a couple nagging questions. Why didn't the church praise God with her? Why did they let the leader disparage the miracle that Jesus had released into this woman's life? My theory, because that was the status quo. They looked for the reaction of the leader to interpret what they had just witnessed. Perhaps he chose the interpretation from Exodus because it fit his world view better.

Jesus exposed the synagogue to a later interpretation of the commandment. In fact, he did this many times during his ministry. It's what got him into trouble so many times. It's what got him killed ultimately. He was trying to show people that what they had listened to for so long was an outdated way of seeing God's kingdom on earth. It's about liberation from bondage and not bondage created by rules.

I'll leave you to think about how this applies to today's world view..... Got it? Good! Seems to me Jesus the Peacemaker won this round. The old way of seeing the world has passed away. Time for a new vision of God's kingdom on earth! Praise God!!!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT- Bill Colson

Leadership Team Meeting [held August 13, 2019]

Old Business

Establishment of Capital Campaign Planning Committee. Until the LT meeting for August, the Leadership Team as a whole acted as the capital campaign steering or planning committee. Over several meetings, we learned that the group was too large and unwieldy. A formal Capital Campaign

Planning Committee was established, with Kathy Frantish as Chair. Members are Melissa Brown, Elden Wick, Kathy Reed, Pastor Mike Ford, and Emeritus Pastor Bill Klosser. Kathy Frantish will report on Capital Campaign activities monthly, directly to the Leadership Team. The Capital Campaign team will be meeting twice monthly, on the second and fourth Wednesdays.

It was further decided that members of the Leadership Team could participate on the project teams, as leaders or as support. LT members should not be on more than one project. Options are in place to add Campaign members as needed. The Campaign Team was then formally empowered by the Leadership Team to plan and implement the Capital Campaign without further restrictions.

As it now stands, the projects under review for possible inclusion in the Capital Campaign include:

- Roof Replacement
- Air Conditioner Replacement
- Handicap Access, within and into the building (including bathroom).

New Business

The Leadership Team accepted the resignation of Dick Tulip as Vice Moderator and thanked him for his contributions to the Leadership Team. Dick conducted Leadership Team meetings when the Moderator was absent. He also outlined the steps needed to implement the Capital Campaign, and their timing. He will be missed.

While the Leadership Team searches for a new Vice Moderator, LT meetings may be conducted by Bill Ringelstein, or Jan Tulk, if the Moderator is absent.

Other New Business. Charlotte County has notified the church that the Buckley's Pass Project will cause the imposition, upon the church, of a yearly maintenance fee for the upkeep of the Alligator Creek Waterway. The fee is paid by all property owners affected by the Buckley's Pass Project. The fee is determined by the potential equivalent residential units that may be sited on the property, currently set at 6.2, with a total annual assessment of \$155.00. I will be contacting the local County Commissioner, seeking an abatement, or deferment agreement similar to the agreement negotiated with the City of Punta Gorda.

Committee Reports. –From the Discipleship and Worship Committee: Laity Sunday will be October 13th.

From the Fellowship Committee: A Pot Luck Breakfast will be held before worship, on September 29th.

Look for further information in this Newsletter.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting will be held September 10th at 3:00 PM, in the church Library.

Blessings and Peace

Bill Colson

Moderator

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN TEAM – Kathy Frantish, Chair

Our almost 35-year-old building is in need of some major “big ticket” item repairs. Therefore, the Leadership Team has established a Capital Campaign Team (CCT). Kathy Frantish - Chairperson, Melissa Brown, Kathy Reed, Elden Wick, Bill Klossner (advisor with voting rights) and Pastor Mike Ford (ad hoc member without voting rights).

Kick-off is scheduled for November 9th, so please Save The Date. Stay tuned for updates, and we hope to see you on November 9th.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

With the recent trade war announcements and resulting market volatility, it is no wonder people are concerned about their investments. When your Endowment Fund was established in 1999, one of the primary considerations was the safety of the Fund. We also looked very hard at creating a stable portfolio so as to better weather the ups and downs of our economy. That stability has been tested in recent weeks. Indicators and prophets tell quite different stories. The prophets would have us believe that Chicken Little was right and the sky is falling. Actually, our economy is strong and your Endowment Fund is well positioned to remain healthy during these turbulent times.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick. Chair



The 2019 theme for the Neighbors In Need offering is "Love of Children."

Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the [Council for American Indian Ministry \(CAIM\)](#). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities.

Our church will receive the NIN offering during worship on **October 6, 2019**. We understand that some of our snowbirds will be giving to the Neighbors in Need offering at their home churches up

north. If you cannot be here on October 6th, and you wish to make a donation to the offering, you may do so by sending a check to the church (Congregational United Church of Christ, PO Box 510838, Punta Gorda, FL 33950). Please indicate on your check that it is for the Neighbors in Need offering.

TREASURER – Melissa Brown

August 2019 Treasurer’s Report



Operating Income/Expenses	19-Jul	2019 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$13,092.00	\$94,813.00	\$88,375.00
Expenses	\$12,933.00	\$90,953.00	\$94,246.00
Net Income	\$159.00	\$3,860.00	-\$5,871.00

We are continuing to exceed budget expectations and remain in the black year-to-date. This is very good news. If we get through August with a positive year-to-date balance, that will be excellent. Just a reminder that our budget anticipated a year-end loss of **\$10,065**. I will be very happy to have the individual who prepared that budget to be proven wrong. 😊

We are currently in the midst of submitting an updated application to the Insurance Board, and several folks have been helping me gather the information they have requested. Many thanks to Guy Greenfield, Bill Klossner, David Cramer and Mary Tulip for helping out and being responsive to numerous emails.

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.

MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James



I have received so many appreciative responses from all of you regarding the stories behind some of the hymns we sing. I’m so glad you have enjoyed them, that being said I will continue to do so.

As a reminder, choir rehearsals start the first Thursday in October. For any of you wanting to join please reach out to me, would love to have more members.

Thanks to a very generous anonymous donation, the choir will have new navy-blue choir robes for this coming season. Along with that, and a list of fabulous music for the Christmas season,

I am very excited to welcome the choir back. This month's hymn, "My Jesus I Love Thee", is a sweet expression of love for the Savior that flows directly from the author's experience of the Savior's love for him. A remarkable thing about "My Jesus I Love Thee", is that it was not penned by an aged and experienced hymn-writer like so many of our favorite hymns. Rather, it was originally written as a devotional poem by William Ralph Featherston, a teenager who had recently come to faith.

Not much is known about Featherston, except that he attended a Methodist church in Montreal, that he was young when he wrote the poem (12 or 16 years old), and that he died at just 27 years of age. One story about how the poem became public is that Featherston mailed it to his aunt in Los Angeles who, upon reading it, quickly sought its publication.

It wasn't until several years after Featherston's death that Adoniram Judson Gordon (founder of Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) added a melody and published it in his book of hymns, thus forever transforming this poem to a song.

As we consider the words of the poem, it is clear to see why Gordon deemed it worthy of wider attention. As we sing Featherston's words we are all able to declare our intimacy with Christ, to sing of our assurance of salvation, to celebrate the gospel, to delight in Christ's loveliness, and to resolve to praise Christ through all circumstances. The movement of each of these themes extends from now—this very moment—into eternity.

My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign.
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love Thee because Thou has first loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;
And say when the death dew lies cold on my brow,
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

In mansions of glory and endless delight,
I'll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright;
I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion Preparation:

September 1-Judy Minier and Bil Tucker

October 6-Linda and Guy Greenfield

PLAN AHEAD! Sunday, October 13 is Laity Sunday! In late September, look for the sign-up sheet for congregation participation, on the back table. This means that if you are interested in participating or helping out--please sign up.

Book Review: *The Sun Does Shine* by Anthony Ray Hinton

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you woke up black instead of white? What if, just because of your skin color, you were charged with 3 murders which you definitely DID NOT commit? What if you were given the death penalty and lived on DEATH ROW for 30 years? How would this affect your faith, your soul, your beloved family? This book is a true account of one man's faith, family and endurance through these horrible situations! A short book with a long impact on my life! Highly recommended. This book can be found on our Social Justice bookshelf in the church library.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

Commentary: Finding Freedom Among Wild Things

August 22, 2019

Written by **Madison Mayhew**



A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of traveling with UCC National staff colleagues to the Wild Goose Festival in Hot Springs, North Carolina. Together, we hosted the UCC hospitality tent and met many incredible human beings who had traveled near and far to attend this eccentric gathering at the intersection of faith, art and social justice.

One of the key characteristics of the festival that I cherished throughout the entire weekend was the complete

immersion in nature. The festival took place under the canopy of majestic Carolina trees in the valley of the Smoky Mountains right alongside the river. Cell service was extremely limited, so we were quite literally forced to remove ourselves from the outside world and social media and be present amongst the wild things around us.

Together, we learned from researchers, authors and activists all pursuing a more loving and just world. We made new friends effortlessly while sharing similar stories of pain and joy, and we found healing in belonging with one another. In his poem, "The Peace of Wild Things," Wendell Berry writes about the gifts the natural world offers us in finding peace, rest and freedom. The Wild Goose Festival curated a community along the river, under the trees, allowing us to free to be in our bodies, free of despair, free to feel deeply. I heard over and over again, people felt they were able to bring their fullest selves without shame. As we stood and danced amongst the peace of the wild things, we embodied their peaceful presence ourselves

I returned to the Washington office feeling renewed and restored, incredibly grateful for an opportunity to have a few days away from the political chaos we witness here on a daily basis. The Wild Goose Festival was a humble reminder to me to seek moments of refuge when the despair of the world grows too heavy. As justice advocates, finding peace and restoration is incredibly valuable to sustain us in our work. Wherever your place of peace may be, may we find freedom in what the natural world offers us.

Madison Mayhew, MSW is Justice and Peace Policy Fellow, United Church of Christ | Justice and Witness Ministries

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jan Tulk



Thanks to our August Fellowship Hosts:

August 4	Linda and Guy Greenfield and Vicki McDonald
August 11	Joanne and Lee Arvid and Lou and Lynn Stayner
August 18	Emily Klossner and Molly Hall
August 25	Kathy Frantish and Jean and Bill Ringelstein

Start looking for your favorite breakfast recipes, or a new one you've been wanting to try. Publix bakery is perfectly acceptable for those of us who are retired from cooking. We will be having our potluck breakfast on September 29 at 9:00 a.m. There will be no coffee hour after the church service, so please take any leftovers home. Always good warmed up!

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Our August ladies' luncheon will be at 12:00 noon on September 27th at F.M. Don's on Marion Ave, Punta Gorda. Please join us, we have a great time of conversation and fellowship! A sign-up sheet is available at the kiosk in the back of the church.



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogai

Sandy is away but will be returning after Labor Day.
Happy summer reading!

FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk



We look forward to hearing from Joyce next month.



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. **CLOSED LABOR DAY.**

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.

ELAINE ERICKSON has a new email address that she would like to share with her friends here in Punta Gorda. Her home address is Dickson Hollow – Apt. 111, W156N4881 Pilgrim Road, Menomonee Falls, WI 53051 and her email address is ericksonelaine36@gmail.com. She would love to hear from you.



BIRTHDAYS

September 1	Kelly Ford
September 4	Rene Ley
September 5	Keith Weber
September 9	Jerome Noble
September 14	Joseph Noble
September 18	Judy Marchert
September 24	Patricia Baran
September 24	Elinor Kline
September 27	Jackie (Szeifert) Chandler
September 28	Gloria McLaughlin
September 28	Denny Reed

ANNIVERSARIES

September 13	Debra Grenzow & Barb Smith
September 19	Chrystal Reichard & Ann Barker
September 30	Lynn & Lou Stayner

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