

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



MARCH 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

BE A BLESSING

Spending nearly a month in one chapter of the Bible can at once be daunting and illuminating. Much of the month of February we have been in the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. This is one of most well-known chapters in all of Scripture. It is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. At the start, is something we call the Beatitudes.

For twelve verses Jesus turns the world of his disciples on its head. He tells of blessing coming to those who mourn, who are poor in spirit, we seek righteousness, who are hungry, who are persecuted, etc. Those hearing these sayings would have thought he was naming the outcasts, those who were not favored in God's eyes. In that day, the rich and healthy were the blessed. It had worked that way for millennium. Instead Jesus names the undesirables and proclaims them blessed.

Jesus goes on to say that his followers are to be rich flavoring to those with whom they come into contact. They are the salt of the earth. Though them the world is preserved, healed, and tasty. He then tells them they are the light of the world, God's light. When we shine that light into the community, we glorify God, not ourselves. He tells his followers that he didn't come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.

The topics get a bit tougher beginning with the 21st verse. He addresses the Law concerning murder, adultery, and divorce. I was particularly struck when Jesus equated anger with murder. The teaching was that we should not offer our gifts to God if someone from the faith community has a charge against us. To me, Jesus was saying that anger between people of faith is possibly more damaging than murder and definitely a hindrance to offering God our best selves.

This is where I was stuck. Anger. Have we any pent-up anger? I might suggest that this is what I see most in the news and on the streets. Our society has become a place where violence, verbal and physical, is more valued than dialogue. A place where one opinion must overcome the other. It also dawned on me that Jesus was addressing the church in these comments. Could it be that we are missing an essential truth?

When I spoke of this portion of the Sermon on the mount in my message, I had in mind Jesus' comments about being salt and light. I feel there is a direct correlation to the destructiveness of anger that he was addressing and our call to be God's salt and light in the world. What are we being called to do?

Now I come back to the Beatitudes. It was not an accident that Matthew began this difficult chapter with the words of Jesus declaring blessing. The one that stands out to me is about the Peacemakers. Being a Peacemaker means taking the risk of standing between two warring parties and declaring that there is a better way. It means taking the risk of giving up being right to create peace. There must be a willingness to listen more than talk. There needs to be a heart of compassion for BOTH perspectives.

I have a quote on my phone by Indira Gandhi. It speaks to my heart about the position a healer and Peacemaker takes when standing in those roles. She once said, "You cannot shake hands with a closed fist." I am reminded of what we undertake at the beginning of each worship service, Passing of the Peace. We stroll around the sanctuary, greeting one another with all our salt and light showing. It is a good moment when we get to practice being Peacemakers. It is not a moment to say hello or good morning. It is a time we approach one another with open hand and heart to offer and receive Peace from one another. If anyone has a grievance with me, I offer us the chance to deal with it in a peaceful way. It is the way that enables us the chance to offer our gifts to God.

When we offer open hands to clasp, we cannot help but feel the warmth of the other. We cannot avoid the pulse that throbs through both bodies. We cannot deny our shared humanity. It is an intimate sharing of self with other.

Think about a topic that makes you most angry. Now think about the people that make you most angry. Now, think about holding their hand in Peace rather than anger. It does not mean we agree about anything other than finding our common humanity. It does not mean we agree with one another. It does not change our opinions. What it demands of us, however, is that we remember whose salt and light we are, that we are blessed in our call to be Peacemakers.

It is far more difficult to make peace with an enemy than a friend. Then again, we don't need to make Peace with friends, do we? Our country and democracy will not survive if we continue to have only enemies. Please don't let that be our reality or the legacy we hand to the next generations to suffer through. It is our job, now, to be the Peacemakers. Blessed are the Peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson

After an eventful January in the life of the church, February has been quiet (kinda sorta) If you have been watching to see what has occurred on the roof, you saw the roofer moved in quickly during February, completed the low roof in the rear of the church, and after the solar panels were removed, removed old shingles on the front roof, and replaced them with new ones. Harriman's Solar has replaced the solar panels. So, we will be generating electricity shortly. Thank you to the supporters of the Capital Campaign.

Look for Kathy Frantish's report in this Beacon for news of the Capital Campaign projects. The Leadership Team meeting on February 11th was mostly items from Old Business from past months. Briefly, they were as follows:

- Long term contract for Isaac James. The LT continues to discuss a proposed contract with him. I will report further when the discussion is completed.
- The need for a contract and agreement with Excaliber Services as to the scope of their services regarding cleaning of the sanctuary, restrooms, and stripping and waxing of floors was discussed. Three persons are to meet with the owner regarding omissions and services not performed. More on their performance later.
- The Leadership Team restated that all organizations and persons using the facilities of Congregational UCC are expected to sign a User Agreement, and abide by the terms it contains. As new persons/organizations come to the office to schedule use of the facilities, they are expected to sign the User Agreement.
- During discussions about various personnel matters, it was learned that the church has no codified or single collection of personnel policies that apply to non-ordained personnel employed by the church. A committee of four from the Leadership Team was appointed to collect and review existing policies, and to draft proposed policies were none now exist. They will report back to the Leadership Team in coming months.

Under new business, Bruce Nielson met with the Leadership Team to discuss a proposal. We have taken his proposal under advisement and will report our decision, most likely after the next Leadership Meeting.

The rest of the Leadership meeting was about the written reports received from the various standing committees and officers. They are summarized elsewhere in this issue of the Beacon.

The next meeting of the Leadership Team will occur on Tuesday, March 10th. 2020.

If you the congregation have comments, critiques, or praise about any happenings in the life of the church, let us, the Leadership Team, know. We welcome your input.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN- Kathy Frantish, Chair

We are excited to announce the completion of our first project for the Capital Campaign. **Building our Legacy** is targeted for specific updates and improvements to our facilities that will allow us to embrace God's mission, faith and justice. Our new roof has been installed and the solar panels have been reinstalled. It looks great.

Our next projects will include the updates to our front entrance into the sanctuary and a new handicapped family bathroom. An architectural drawing of the new entrance is being drawn to present to the congregation, and we hope to have that within the next couple of weeks. Stay tuned!

We currently have \$182,000 of the \$200,000 goal pledged, but we still have a few more dollars to raise in order to turn our last two leaves and achieve our total goal. Thank you to everyone who has given generously and remember that this is a new year and you may consider a 2020 tax deduction. Again, thank you for all the generous pledges we have received.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

God be with you,

Kathy Frantish, Chair

Melissa Brown

Elden Wick

Kathy Reed

Bill Klossner, Advisor

Pastor Mike Ford, Ex Officio

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

The framers of our Endowment Fund charted a course on investments that continue to serve us very well.

On Sunday, February 16, a distribution of Endowment Funds was made to the Military Heritage museum to be used for assisted listening devices for their Gulf Theater. This facility is being upgraded to provide a community environment where programs, productions and similar theater events can be enjoyed. The ALD's will enhance the experience of attendees that might otherwise not be able to hear the event. Gary Butler, executive director of the museum, was presented with the \$2,500 check.

Additional distributions are under consideration funding and will be announced when approved. If you are connected with or volunteer at an organization that might be in line for Endowment Fund support, please contact me or any team member.

TREASURER’S REPORT – Melissa Brown



Operating Budget Financial Results	Jan-20 Actual	Jan-20 Budget	Variance
Donations and Other Income	\$15,652	\$14,549	\$1,103
Expenses	<u>13,872</u>	<u>14,549</u>	<u>677</u>
Actual Net Income	<u>\$1,780</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$1,780</u>

These are the financial results for January 2020. I am very pleased with the donations in January. Not only did they exceed budget, but they were up \$3,838 over January 2019, which was \$11,814. Thanks to all! Expenses in January were also less than budgeted, but compared to last year, were \$1,247 higher. January 2019 expenses were \$12,625.

February 2020 operating income is estimated to be in around \$29,700 compared to \$15,203 in 2019. This is a huge increase and can be attributed to some members paying their entire annual pledge in February (\$12,300). At this point we don't have final expense numbers, but February certainly will not be in the red!

Overall, I think this is a great start for what I anticipate is going to be a wonderful year in the life of our church.

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

When I first arrived in Punta Gorda in December of 2018, I never thought that just over a year later I would have so many friends and church family. I really and truly cannot thank you all enough. I feel privileged to be here in the position I am. I'm just sitting here on a beautiful February day as I write this and am thankful. While I'm thankful, I can't help but be so appreciative of the choir...they have grown in leaps and bounds, also, in numbers, I thank them for

trusting me with their beautiful instruments of voice. Our choir accompanist, Melissa Brown has put so much effort in giving us the beautiful arrangements for piano week after week, we wouldn't be able to do it without her.

This month's hymn story is of one of my favorite hymns of the passion, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. Isaac Watts first published it in his Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1707). Designated a communion hymn, it appeared under the heading "Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ; Gal. 6:14." One of the first English-language hymns to use the word "I" and to focus directly on personal religious experience, "When I Survey" holds an important place in the history of hymnody. It offers an example of how Watts, sometimes called the father of English hymnody, enlarged the boundaries of English sacred song beyond the metrical psalms to include freer verse that readily lent itself to new musical settings. Watts fused two traditions of sacred song that had been developing side-by-side-metrical psalms and hymns-in texts characterized by unusual clarity and force in the choice of words.

The son of a Congregationalist minister, Watts was born in 1674 in Southampton, England. He followed his father into the ministry, accepting appointment to Mark Lane Chapel in London in 1702. His health broke soon after, forcing Watts to retire from public life. Until his death in 1748, he fulfilled ministerial duties as possible and devoted much time to study and writing. His books gained him wide repute, but Watts regarded his hymns as his most enduring contribution to the church. "When I Survey" is generally cited as the best these, though others remain in use as well.

In its first publication in 1707, "When I Survey" had five stanzas. Its second line originally read "Where the young Prince of Glory died." In an enlarged edition of the hymnal in 1709, Watts changed the second line to the familiar "On which the Prince of Glory died" and offered the fourth stanza for optional use:

His dying Crimson, like a Robe,
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree;
Then am I dead to all the Globe
And all the Globe is dead to me.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion: March 1-SandyJames-Nogaj and Sue James- 10 a.m. at Gilchrist Park!
April 5- Linda and Glenn Weaver (Palm Sunday)
May 3- Bev Honkola and Joe Larson

Mark your calendars:

Palm Sunday-April 5
Maundy Thursday-April 8-Soup and bread supper-5 p.m., service at 6:00 p.m.
Easter-April 12- Sunrise service at the church-7 a.m. with regular service-10 a.m.

Short Sets: We are collecting short sets for the children at Baker Street Center. Please Sign up on the size sheets on the table at the back of the sanctuary. When you purchase the short outfits, just put them on the same table. We will deliver the shorts to the school near the end of March! Thank you.

Book Talk Tea: Some of the women from BTT are going to partner with Muslim women from the Islamic Community of SWF mosque for a Habitat Build on March 21. Please pray that we keep all our fingers!

STEWARSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

Hello Beacon readers and greetings to a new budgeted year of worship, missions and service within the family of God as centered, for us, at Congregational UCC Punta Gorda.

Praise God! Especially we lift our praise for this opportunity to provide witness for what we do and how we go about it as disciples in Christ. Our Leadership Team has developed a budgeted set of ministries for we Congregants to fulfill in service to our God. As we have almost completed the pledging portion of Stewardship2020 **BUILDING AN ALTAR TO GOD**, the pledges showed that you Congregants appreciate and support those 2020 ministries planned.

Yes, hallelujah for your responses in pledging, as you have committed yourselves to financial support for God's Glory. Yes, in this congregation, and you who have pledged will receive mailed grateful confirmation.

Let me again refer, as last year, to Stewardship as a three-leg STOOL tool constructed by the Body of Christ to support our precious God's Kingdom on Earth. 1) Financial/ monetary resources (reference pledges, offerings and money gifts for God's work); (2) time - our 'time', God given and freely so in abundance in our lifetime, yet short in years; and (3) talents - the skill sets that we seek out, possess and perfect as we go about finding satisfaction and fulfillment in what we do to God's glory. So, now what?

One suggestion is for Congregants to commit themselves for study of God's WORD, perhaps within opportunities now available at our CUCC: 1) Pastor Mike's Bible Study every Thursday 1pm, 2) Living the Questions on Monday 3:30-5pm, 3) Great Decisions on Tuesday 1:30-3pm. I further suggest using those study times as a means to discern how you reader's time & talents can be applied on ministry(s) within CUCC 's "bucket list" for the glory of God. Ah yes, I recall a Pastor Mike's sermon theme, enhanced of course by our "quire's" song: "HERE I AM LORD, SEND ME."

Perhaps or surely, we Congregants will be blessed by God for these tasks on this year's roadmap. God! Let it be so!

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Ann Barker

I would like to thank the February hosts:

February 2	Ian & Sandra McLauchlan, Ann Barker & Chrystal Reichard
February 9	Carol Nickerson, Diane & Elden Wick, John & Carol Schmuhl
February 16	Deb Grenzow, Barb Smith, Val Moran, Jerry Oscarson, Dave Cramer John Casey and Ron Logel

We appreciate your willingness to host a coffee hour. Just a reminder that we are always in need of coffee hosts. Please sign up for a week at the table in the back of the church.

I must share my sadness that Coffee Hour on Sunday, February 23 consisted of coffee and a cold beverage, but not the usual treats. Despite efforts to recruit people to provide food no one signed up. The first sentence of the Mission Statement of this congregation expresses that we believe in an “extravagant welcome to all of God’s children.” There are many ways to express this welcome that include our Sunday morning coffee hour.

The Fellowship Ministry Team is charged to “coordinator congregational activities, fellowship events, connectional social media, and the assimilation of guests and members into congregational life.” Clearly, that is a tall order and Coffee Hour is only one small part of it but has taken an inordinate amount of time and effort for years. I know there is a better way to do this.

So, I am asking about four persons to join the Fellowship Ministry Team in a discussion of how we, as a community, might fulfill that mission on Sunday mornings. No, this is not a trick to get anyone to bake cookies or make coffee. It is an opportunity to prayerfully consider how we might better fulfill this mission of welcome and inclusion in a way that is reasonable and sustainable.

If you are interested in attending one or two meetings to work on this please call Ann Barker at 941-235-0269 or email her at revannbarker@gmail.com. A mutually convenient time and date will be arranged.

CARING FRIENDS – Neoma Remiger

The Caring Friends held their annual meeting on February 12th. This committee consists of Linda Greenfield, Molly Hall, Nadine Sommerfield, Neoma Remiger and two new members, Darcy Hall and Norma Hasselbacher. The purpose of the committee is to visit, phone, send greeting cards to the homebound and those who have lost a family member during the past year. We are asking the congregation if they could donate birthday, anniversary, sympathy, get well, and thinking of you cards. Many of you receive cards in the mail from organizations and do not make use of them for your personal use. Why not donate them to us. You can give them to Mary Tulip, the church administrative assistant and she will see that we get them. Also, if you know someone from this church who could use a visit or other services, please contact Pastor Mike or a member of this committee. Thank you!

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Our March ladies' luncheon will be at 12:00 noon on 27th at Monty's on Tamiami Trail. We would love to have you join us. We have a great time of conversation and fellowship! A sign-up sheet is available on the table in the back of the church.



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogai



Thank you, Linda Weaver, M.E. Steele-Pierce and Gretchen Smith, for hosting our Valentines Book Talk Tea! The refreshments were delicious. Our group is continuing to grow. Here are some recommendations for you to read: "A Choice of Angels" by Charles Sobczak; "Exactly as You Are" by Shea Tuttle and "The Hate You Give" by Angie Thomas.

March's Book Talk Tea is in Faith Hall on Friday March 13 at noon. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

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

Have you noticed? Members of the Social Justice team demonstrate once a month at our local Wendy's fast food restaurant, as part of our economic justice ministry on behalf of the Fair Food Alliance. Why do this?

In 2018, 42 CUCC members visited the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, two hours south of us in Immokalee FL. There we about learned working conditions on Florida's tomato farms: low pay, long hours, few benefits, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and even slavery. At the same time, we learned about the Coalition's 20-year fight as a worker-led human rights organization and their success in combating these ills.

Today, 14 major food retailers participate in their Fair Food Program. These retailers agree to purchase only from growers who meet a worker-designed Code of Conduct and a zero-tolerance policy for slavery, violence and child labor. Retailers also pay a "penny-per-pound" premium passed directly to farm workers. All major fast food companies participate in the Fair Food Program except for one—Wendy's.

We remember when Dave Thomas started the fast food chain Wendy's, named after his daughter, and the restaurant's family focus. Now, however, the chain is held by billionaire Nelson Peltz who values corporate profit over farmworker field conditions. He refuses to meet with representatives of the Fair Food Program.

This is why we join the United Church of Christ, the Alliance for Fair Food and the Student Farmworker Alliance to demonstrate.

The following retailers SUPPORT the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Fair Food Program: Taco Bell, KFC, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Chipotle, Subway, Whole Foods, Fresh Market, Trader Joes, and Walmart. Give them your business. Learn more at boycott-wendys.org and join us on the third Thursday of each month, 11 am to 12:30 pm at the Jones Loop Wendy's.

Thank you to the Endowment Team for the \$5000 grant to Social Justice Ministry activities for the 2020 season and beyond. Our current focus areas include economic, environmental, immigration, and racial justice. Our work will align with three Endowment Fund tenets: education, community service and outreach, and the wider mission of the United Church of Christ. We thank our leadership teams for this opportunity to "love with kindness and work for justice that all may be set free" in Southwest Florida and the Punta Gorda community.

Our 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. You're invited to join us as we plan for 2020 and beyond. Speak with any of CUCC's Social Justice Ministry team: co-facilitators Glenn Weaver or M.E. Steele-Pierce, Jim DeGood, Lori Larson, Jerry Larson, Elizabeth Pitcher, Carol Schmuhl, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick. Join us!



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

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

ANNIVERSARIES

March 25 Keith & Sandy Weber

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