

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



FEBRUARY 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Perfect Love

1 John 4:18 reads, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love."

This verse has been running through my mind lately. For a while, I spent time in the Pentecostal tradition. That was quite an experience for a New England Congregational kid! I had great relationships with the folks I sat near. We were a church of around 1-3 thousand on a given Sunday, so I only knew the folks I sat next to each Sunday. I remember there were regular teachings about fear and love. The Pastor would regularly tell us that the only tools the devil has are fear and lies. Made sense to me, more so now a days.

I am beginning to learn how these tools are used against us. I am learning in my classes of Sacred Conversations to End Racism that fear is a strong motivator. Fear can create the opportunity for "others" in our lives. Then when the "others" are created we can be taught to fear them. This is the state of race relations in our country right now. White Supremacists are taught that people of color are only trying to steal what we of European descent have; power, wealth, and privilege, and that this is a country only for people of European Descent and should always be that way. Fear makes much more sense now. God knows we have been fed these lies long enough. Isn't it time for some Agape, God's love?

Then I read 1 John and find the teachings the church has at its disposal to combat the fear we have swallowed. These writings expose the real meaning of fear, punishment. People of European descent

are taught that they will be punished if they allow for the rights of ALL people to be equal. That their place in a society of privilege will be taken away when those rights are freed up. Fear of that prospect arises to overcome common sense and decency. That describes fear to a “T” for me. It is never that we do not want to grant equal rights. It is because we are afraid to do so, afraid of the cost to us. That is the lie we have been taught.

This past year of Pandemic and racial unrest have brought these issues to the front of our society. They are now occupying the space where we are FREE to examine the roots of racism, fear of others. People have always had the choice to not dine on lies but have decided to anyway because of fear.

Now is the time for the church to offer the alternative meal of love. When that love is free to work among all people, fear will be cast out and replaced. When that day arrives, millions of people in our country will be free for the first time in our country’s history. I am not referring to people of color. I am speaking of people of European descent being free for the first time, of fear. We will be FREE to recognize our common humanity and that God created ALL PEOPLE in God’s own image.

I feel strongly this is what John was writing about. This is what Jesus taught, that love is the motivation for his life and for God’s creation. We were never created to hate. We had to be taught that. We were created to express love, that is in our DNA, as humans and people of faith.

The time has arrived when churches of European descent must come forward to offer the love intended for all. It will be challenging. We have over five hundred years of being taught to fear and feel superior. It will not happen overnight, but it must happen, one step at a time. When people hear a message of love rather than hate, it will begin to infuse their souls. It will change the world. Let us get to work loving, shall we?

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR’S REPORT – Melissa Brown

As the newly installed moderator, I am looking forward to continuing to serve as a member of the Leadership Team. Many thanks to the outgoing members of the team (Linda Greenfield, Kathy Reed, Bill Ringelstein and Linda Weaver), and welcome to our new members (Isaac James, Michael Robinson, and Bil Tucker). Thanks also to Bill Colson, Kathy Frantish, Dick Michael, and Elden Wick for agreeing to continue to serve on the Team.

In my opinion, COVID will continue to impact our church community and will be our biggest challenge in 2021. All of us are suffering from COVID burn out. We just want things to be the way they were. We want to worship together in person. We want to have a choir again. We want to share God's peace by greeting our fellow worshippers with a handshake or an embrace. We want to gather in fellowship in Faith Hall. Those of us on the Leadership Team would love not to have another meeting via Zoom!

If COVID were not our biggest challenge, what would I hope to see as some top priorities for the Leadership Team in 2021?

- Fill the open positions on the Leadership Team: assistant moderator and fellowship team lead. What better way to contribute your time and talents than by serving on the Leadership Team? Please reach out to me, Pastor Mike, or anyone currently on the team or who has recently been on the team to find out more.
- The positions of discipleship, fellowship and stewardship members are TEAM leads. We need to develop the teams to support each of these areas and enable additional members of the congregation to share of their time and talents.
- Expand the role of the Pastoral Relations Team to serve as a liaison between the congregation and the pastor. With the training that is planned for this group, it is hoped that church members will take advantage of the processes and procedures that will be in place to share both positive and negative impressions about the pastoral relationship with the congregation as a whole and with individual members.
- Continue to find ways to improve our financial resources by looking at new revenue streams and expense reductions.
- Stay with the tried and true but also seek to change things up a bit. This is a very broad goal, but I challenge the Leadership Team and the congregation to start to ask, "What if we were to...?" Sharing ideas is integral to this process. Whatever we come up with, it may not be able to be implemented until we turn the corner on COVID. In the meantime, we can start to lay the groundwork for new and exciting ways to worship and to share our faith with our fellow members and our community.

Blessings to all and thank you in advance for your support of the Leadership Team.

CAPTIAL CAMPAIGN – Kathy Frantish, Chair

We are excited to announce the construction project for our new front entrance is complete. This was made possible because of the generous pledges that have been made to our Capital Campaign. When we kicked off the campaign a little over a year ago, we had four items on our list to complete. The new roof was installed, and the new front entrance completed. Our outstanding items are a new ADA approved family bathroom and a contingency fund for the replacement of our HVAC. Below you will see our current balance sheet. At the current time, we are on hold for completing the family bathroom. Remaining funds will be held for future use.

Total Expenses Incurred to Date	<u>164,932.44</u>
Campaign Balance Available for Remaining Projects	44,620.54
Pledges Not Received to Date	<u>(9,415.00)</u>
Cash Available for Remaining Projects	<u><u>35,205.54</u></u>

Thank you to everyone for your support.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Thanks to all of you for support of my installation as the new Endowment Team Chair. I do not accept this position lightly, particularly as it means following and trying to fill the able footprints of Bill Ringelstein.

I am taking this opportunity to provide my bio, just the short version. I moved to Punta Gorda in 2008 and joined CUCC shortly thereafter. We have been members since that time. However, we lived and worked in Ukraine almost continuously from January 2010 until February 2015. Since returning to CUCC full-time in 2015, I have served on the Pastoral Relations Team for four years.

I am active in several other organizations and entities in the area: PGICA Car Club, and Dive Club; Peace River Woodturners; City of Punta Gorda Utility Advisory Board; and Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens Board.

I look forward to working faithfully and with discernment with the dedicated group of our fellow CUCC members who serve on the Endowment Team.

TREASURER’S REPORT – Mike Robinson

Hello all!

Melissa handed off the treasurer’s baton to me yesterday and I am so “green” that there is really nothing yet for me to report. I would observe, however, that through all of the disruption, deaths and grief brought on by *COVID-19* since last March, PGCUCC monthly missives and Mike’s messages uniformly have been upbeat and positive. Likewise, from a stewardship point of view, it has been

amazing that folks have been so faithful in their giving, despite not being able to attend live, in-person worship. Notable, unlike most churches, we wound up 2020 in the black!

By way of contrast, in 2009 when I became treasurer of the Interchurch Council of New Bedford (MA), my presentation at the annual meeting delivered the gruesome news that our endowment fund had declined by over \$ 300,000 from the prior year balance of \$ 1.2 million. Groans and gnashing of teeth.... Unlike that very unpleasant meeting, last Sunday's PGCUCC annual meeting was a model of comity, unanimous votes, and brevity.

I commit to serving you to the best of my abilities and only hope I can uphold the standards set in recent years by Dick Michael and Melissa Brown.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



When Bill Ringelstein approached me about discipleship at PGCUCC, I immediately said yes. Normally, that is not how I roll. I get too busy by saying yes too many times and spread myself too thin. However, I have felt, since joining this church family, that it is such a priority in my life and anything to further it towards a better future is worth it.

Thank you to Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver for your leadership and dedication to this position. I have big shoes to fill, but thankfully they are willing to give advice where needed. Please stay tuned for upcoming articles with more information about discipleship

in our congregation. Blessings on you all!

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



In December and January, Stewardship and our congregation completed the Pledge Campaign in support of CUCC Punta Gorda ministries for 2021. At this time, we are substantially under the pledges offered for last year, but just barely ahead of the 2019 results. For our friends and

congregants who have NOT completed a pledge commitment form for this year, we prayerfully request your attention to do so during this month of February!

To those “saints” that have pledged, your promise directly assists our church’s financial planners and Leadership Team in accomplishing the ministries this year that will be affordable. Many of those ministries and mission efforts are identifiable in our ministries identified and listed last year, and which will likely be continued in some form this church year.

You may obtain the ministries/missions listing from the church office by requesting “**Ministries of the Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda**”.

May our ‘God of Love’ bless and inspire these ministries in fulfilling His Works this 2021 year.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

Hello everyone! We are now into our second month of 2021-hard to believe. Also, black history month. I am a lover of gospel-spiritual music. The African American culture we find in the lyrics to any spiritual opens a vision to us of their life in slavery and seeing hope for the future, that one day they may be equal to the white folk and given freedom. Also, their love of God and neighbor. It is immensely moving to me.

Here is an article written by Mark O’ Connor, a well-versed musician and lover of African American folk music.

“Deep River” is a classic example of an African American “spiritual” – an immensely important genre of music born from the “plantation” and “sorrow” songs of the African American slaves in the Deep South in the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s. Like all spirituals, “Deep River” is a song of hope and longing, expressing a desire for peace and freedom both in the present and in the afterlife. Through these melodies, slaves held on to the hope of survival. The songs were created vocally by groups of slaves working in the fields and gathering at camp meetings, the more popular melodies then being passed from one plantation to the next. Over time, slaves also developed songs that carried coded messages containing plans for escape - especially during the time when the Underground Railroad seemed like the only hope for freedom.

There are three general categories of spirituals, two of them being up-tempo. Today, “Deep River” belongs to the third group: slow, haunting melodies filled with emotion and faith and embodying the soul crying out in the universal longing for freedom. Through the melodies and lyrics of their spirituals the slaves expressed not only their own personal weariness and sorrow but also their hope and determination to overcome and live on. These songs of hope were partially engendered by the slaves’ newfound belief in the teachings of the Christian Bible. Differing from African cultures they knew, the Christian doctrine of a Heaven promising a glorious afterlife for suffering people was new to them and

provided much-needed hope. It was not unusual for slaves and their masters or owners to attend daily or weekly church services together. In time, the slave populations embraced Christianity and believed that the religion of their European American captors would provide “deliverance” for them as well.

Most of the lyrics contained in the now-documented over 6,000 traditional spirituals echo the language of the Old Testament. The creators of spirituals quoted the Bible often in the lyrics, perhaps identifying with the Israelites in Africa whose enslavement and persecution was vividly portrayed in the Old Testament. The lyrics of this song - “deep river....my home is over Jordan.... deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground” - imply that the Jordan River in the Bible symbolizes the Ohio River, a dividing line between the slave states and the free states. “Campground” implies a place for camp meetings, a type of gathering that, even though illegal in some areas, served as a vehicle for slaves to commune and share their sorrows and hopes. These camp meetings were among the rare occasions during which slaves could experience feeling free for at least a little while through singing, playing instruments and sharing stories. Some of the lyrics most likely have a double meaning as well suggesting that the camp meeting they looked for was in Heaven, the place where they would truly be set free.

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



We had 7 people at Gilchrist Park for the first Book Talk Tea. It was so good to see everyone again and to share the books we have read over the past 9 months. Everyone wore masks and social distanced and it worked well.

The next Book Talk Tea is Friday February 12 at noon. Please meet at the gazebo in Gilchrist Park, bring a lawn chair and brown bag lunch. If you wish to attend, please call Sandy at 941-639-

2770. Look forward to seeing you there.

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

NO REPORT THIS MONTH. BE SURE TO CHECK BACK IN MARCH



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 Mon-Thurs between 8:30 am-12:30 pm.

2021 CHURCH ENVELOPES are available in the Church Office Mon – Thurs between 8:30 am – 12:30 pm.

Updating Your Information

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

Send Changes To: office@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

Feb.	4	Gerry Blandford
Feb.	9	Mary Cassidy Anger
Feb.	15	Brook March
Feb.	16	Deb Grenzow
Feb.	23	Ron Jankowski
Feb.	24	Judy Wood
Feb.	26	Joanne Arvid

ANNIVERSARIES

Feb.	2	Mike and Kelly Ford
Feb.	11	Glenn & Linda Weaver
Feb.	24	Denny & Kathy Reed

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