

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



JULY 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

What I Will Do on My Summer Vacation

I remember as a kid (yes, even though it was a thousand years ago, I still remember) when we returned to school after summer break, the teachers would go around the room and ask us to tell everyone what we did during the time away from school. Many of the kids would talk of trips to the beach or to Summer Camp or Vacation Bible School. When my turn came, I would tell of my solo walks in the woods looking at critters or my days spend fishing for the trout my grandmother just loved to eat, or the hours spend laying on a raft in the lake looking at the clouds or helping my dad with the haying. I never “went” anywhere on vacation. So, my time was spent satisfying my curiosity with the natural world and just generally “goofing off.”

As I sit here writing I am readying myself to head to Vermont for two weeks. I have not returned to my ancestral state since attending my father’s funeral in 2018. I do miss the mountains and quiet rivers and green meadows with lazy Holstein cows grazing. I miss spending hours floating down rivers in a tube or in a canoe listening to the loons sing and the lap of the water on the side of the canoe. Do not get me wrong, I love being here too! I would not trade anything for my walks along the Harbor and the amazing sunsets. But when I return to Vermont the little kid encased within comes back out and wants to explore.

This trip will be more adult oriented though. We will get to spend time with our grandchildren and perhaps even take an adventure to Santa’s Village (okay, that part may be more for me than just them). We will spend time catching up on repairs to our house in Vermont that have been left until now. Yes, I will probably even get to mow a lawn while I am there (oh joy). Kelly and I will visit the graves of my parents. Having recently lost her father-in-Law, this will be a bitter sweet moment. We

are told that the visit will be very short as the Black Fly season is in full swing. Unless there is a gale force wind, we will rush in, pay our respects, and run back to the shelter of our car.

It also seems that most of my siblings will descend on Vermont for a family reunion of sorts. We have not been together since my dad's funeral, so we are looking forward to a much happier gathering. I am certain there will be a grill in operation, which my brother Steve will INSIST he tend (he is of the impression that he is the only family member capable of cooking a burger to the right consistency). There will be lots of one-on-one conversations and some loud ones at the dinner table. There will be the ubiquitous golf game that three of us will be mandated to play. Actually, I do not mind that as much. Though, that there will need to be some confessional component after the language slips a bit over errant shot!

What I shall relish the most is that all of this will happen without a schedule dictating our moves. Vacation is the time when I allow myself to not be aware of time or location, but when I can simply let go and live life at a different pace. Do not get me wrong again, I LOVE our time together and the ministry we mutually achieve! I do need to do what Jesus did at times, though, step away. As has been said, "absence makes the heart grow fonder." That is something I look very much forward to. No matter how full or fun vacation is, there is an indescribable joy when one comes home.

So, my friends, be well and enjoy the different voices and worship styles you will find in my being away. Please be kind to Dick and Ann :) I know you will anyway. That is just who you are. Until we see one another again, may God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you. And may God grant you peace.

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown



I love Florida, but these summer days can be unbearable. I just do not feel like doing ANYTHING, especially if it is outdoors. Any excuse not to go outdoors—even if it is writing my Beacon report—is a good thing.

Our June Leadership Team meeting was our first meeting with our newest team members: Dennis and Jessica Danner, Fellowship Team Leads. They moved to Punta Gorda from Springfield, Illinois, in 2019. They quickly found our church, and not too soon after that, Dennis joined the choir. They are both retired registered nurses. Dennis worked in emergency medicine whereas Jessica worked in oncology, hospice, and medical-surgical care. Outside of work, Dennis was a volunteer fireman, and he also founded a Guatemalan medical mission organization called ER Abroad. Jessica was a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity. They both love to travel and are looking forward to new adventures. The picture below is from their wedding day in October 2016.



Dennis is an avid photographer, and he has offered to help us put together a new church directory. Stay tuned for more on that!

If you have the time--in the dog days of summer--to offer up your time and talents, we have many ways that you can contribute. Last Sunday, for the first time since I started to attend the church, I

served as a greeter. I loved seeing the many members that I have gotten to know over the years, but I particularly liked putting unknown faces with names from our directory. We also had a first-time visitor who was “church shopping,” and I had to restrain myself from overselling. She left with one of our tasty breads and a promise to come back.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Recommendations from the Endowment Team regarding distribution of Endowment Funds were approved by the Leadership Team.

The following distributions of Endowment Funds will be made:

- a. Military Heritage Museum to receive a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$1,500.
- b. Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens to receive a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$1,000; and,
- c. CUCC Living the Questions Group to receive a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$1,000.

The Endowment Team will consider possible additional recommendations during 2021 for requests a. and b., above.

At the request of the Scholarship Team, the Endowment Team recommended to the Leadership Team that the Scholarship Fund receive \$5,000 every year, to minimally fund the Scholarship Fund. The Leadership Team also approved that any remaining undistributed Endowment Funds available for distribution at the end of the calendar year shall be ‘swept’ from the Endowment Fund and deposited in the Scholarship Fund.

TREASURER’S REPORT – Mike Robinson

I pen this as we are wending our way through the lush green, twisty, up, and down of western VT in the shadow of Bromley and Mt Equinox; and it is 91 degrees! So much for escaping the FL heat.... A new appreciation of “The Green Mountain State.”

Our Church finances remain sound, even though we experienced the usual “Snowbird Summer Slump” in contributions in May. Please remember that expenses all continue even while some of us are “cooling off” up North.

We continue to solicit insurance quotes and hope by September we might have a firm basis to revise coverage or change insurer to save the Church some significant premium \$’s.

Have a great 4th and enjoy your summer wherever you might be.

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Robinson

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Team Member



I was very pleased when I learned the Pastoral & Parish Relations Team has been re-established. It was also gratifying to be asked to serve in this ministry following my maximum term on the Endowment Team. I first came to our church in 1989 and it has been home ever since. It is vitally important that we, as the Pastoral Relations Team, know of both your concerns in addition to those items you look forward to having in your church family. You can trust the confidentiality of all of our team members. I look forward to hearing from you.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



We are nearing the middle of summer already! With that in mind, we need communion preparers, servers and greeters to fill out the remainder of the year. Please get in touch with me if you are interested and I will place you on the schedule.

We thank Reverend Dr. Dick Tulip, Reverend Dr. Ann Barker and the Rt. Reverend Chrystal Reichard for filling in for Pastor Mike as he is away on a much-needed vacation. We pray for his safe return to us!

A reminder that Indivisible meets the first Saturday of the month at 2:00 pm if you are interested in attending.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



“To the Congregation of God Lovers, Christ Faithful, and Holy Spirit Dwellers:

As Stewards of God’s Creation, we collectively are called to seek God’s Creation Justice (CJ) and be true, as possible for us, in our individual actions and behaviors that perpetuate a) our planets healthful survival, b) environmental/economic/racial and social justice, and c) enhancement of principles to make us a Creation Justice church congregate. From a stewardship aspect, that is my view on a CJ declaration! What’s yours?”



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

During the summer of 1893, a teacher named Katherine Lee Bates encountered a sight she would never forget. As she told it:

“One day some of the other teachers and I decided to go on a trip to 14,000-foot Pikes Peak. We hired a prairie wagon. Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.”

Americans have been singing about that view ever since.

“O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For purple mountain majesties Above the fruited plain! America! America! God shed his grace on thee and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!”

Pikes Peak is in central Colorado. Rising, as it does, along the spine of the Rocky Mountains, the view from the mountain’s summit inspired Bates to write a poem in tribute, which she promptly did upon returning to her hotel. But it was not a mountain alone that motivated Bates. Her experience on Pikes Peak was the pinnacle of a long journey through the heartland of America to the top of Pikes Peak.

It was a journey that prompted one of the most beloved songs ever penned: America the Beautiful.

As a result, there are few countries on Earth that contain as much diverse beauty as ours does. From the purple mountains of the Rockies to the amber waves of grain on the Great Plains. From the magnificent desert canyons of the southwest to the tall, broad forests of the northeast. From the warm, wet Everglades in the deepest south to the lush rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. You could travel for hundreds and hundreds of miles, exploring hundreds and hundreds of different regions with all their different climates and cultures—and still find yourself under the same spacious sky.

Perhaps that is why I love America the Beautiful so much—because it captures something I love about America itself. Whoever you are, wherever you go, there is always something beautiful to see. There is always something to love.

Two years after writing America the Beautiful, Bates published it in The Congregationalist, calling it: “America: A Poem for July 4.” It did not take long for the words to catch on. By the time Bates released a new version in 1911, it had been set to music (Samuel Ward’s familiar tune, “Materna”) and become, if not the national anthem, an anthem for Independence Day.

I think many Americans like the song because it expresses what they themselves feel every Fourth of July. Because it describes many of the things, we as Americans must be thankful for. Our freedom and liberty, for example.

“O beautiful for pilgrim feet, Whose stern, impassioned stress. A thoroughfare for freedom beat. Across the wilderness! America! America! God mend thy every flaw, Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!”

Or the sacrifice so many men and women have shown while defending our country:

“O beautiful for heroes proved, in liberating strife, who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life! America! America! May God thy gold refine, till all success be nobleness, And every gain divine!”

Fortunately for Bates, she lived to see her poem become a national treasure. Fortunately for the rest of us, she never sought to profit off people’s patriotism. While she did hold the copyright, she never charged royalties from any publication or performance of the piece. As Bates saw it:

“[The] hold it has upon our people is clearly due to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood.”

This Independence Day, you will probably hear America the Beautiful played at some point. Perhaps it will be while listening to fireworks, or while watching a parade. But wherever you hear it, I encourage you to sing along. And I encourage you to reflect on what you find most beautiful about America. It is easy, sometimes, to get caught up in all the things that divide Americans. But the more we focus on the things that unite us; the more we focus on the things we all love and cherish; the more we focus on the same spacious sky that covers all our heads, the more we can fulfill the song’s ultimate promise:

I am so happy to live in this nation of ours. For all its problems, for all its challenges, it is still America, home of the free and the brave. It is still America, sweet land of liberty.

It is still America, the beautiful.

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

Due to an overwhelming response of book donations to our library, I am requesting that everyone please hold off on donations until my return in October. Your support is very much appreciated.



SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Weaver

“And what does the Lord require of you? To ACT justly and to LOVE mercy and to WALK humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

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.

Environmental Justice

*As our team begins the process of letting our church family know and understand the importance of environmental justice, we began our June meeting with a Prayer for our Earth by Pope Francis from the encyclical prayer *Laudato Si* (“Praise Be to You”):*

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love, and peace.

We also saw a video of this prayer read by Rev. Brooks Berndt, Minister for Environmental Justice in the United Church of Christ. Spoiler alert: you, too, may get to see and hear him for a future Social Justice Moment in worship!



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.

PLEDGES AND OPEN DONATIONS: Thank you for sending in your pledges and donations. Please send them **ONLY** to Congregational UCC, P.O. Box 510838, Punta Gorda, FL 33951, **NOT** 1201 Aqui Esta Drive. It has come to our attention that checks are being stolen from street side mailboxes. You may still drop them off in the church office, if you prefer, **Mon-Thurs from 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

July	5	Bill Carroll
	10	Linda Harkness
	12	Elizabeth Pitcher
	17	Fred Benson Jr.
	22	Cameron Ford
	24	Vicki Getz
	27	Susan Zakeer
	30	Evelyn Swinamer
	30	Glenn Weaver
	31	Sandy Weber

ANNIVERSARIES

July	1	Bob & Paula Gair
	16	William Tucker & Judy Minier

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