

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



APRIL 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

New Growth

You may remember that last Fall, as a visual sign of our Capital Campaign, we planted a tree on the lawn outside the office. We were told to water it every day for two weeks. We dutifully did that. When the two weeks ended, we figured that it was firmly rooted and needed only nature's watering. Well, after a couple weeks the leaves started to turn yellow and fall off! The owner of the nursery we purchased the tree from was driving by one day (coincidence, I think not) and saw the condition of the tree. He called and left a message in the office that we needed to water the tree frequently during the dry season or it would die. So, dutifully again, we started watering the tree three times a week. For the next month, the leaves continued to fall off.

Not being one to surrender very easily, I took it upon myself to be the one to water, though many kind souls offered to do so. I call the practice "drowning" the tree. I consider it one opportunity to get outdoors even for a few minutes to make sure the right amount of water is flowing to the root ball of the tree. This has been going on for nearly four months, three times a week! We did notice that the leaves stopped turning yellow and falling off. Nearly half of the leaves had left the tree.

Something amazing started happening just this past week. We started to notice new growth on the tree. Foliage has begun to spring from every bud and branch. It is a bright green. Low and behold, our tree is showing signs of flourishing! For all the leaves that fell off, ten times that amount have begun to bloom on the new shoots. Our tree has survived the dry season! I can hardly wait for the frequent rains of summer to nourish it even more (and I can stop watering it every week).

It is not lost on me that I had given up hope for our Hope tree. Yes, we called it that when we planted it. It was to be a symbol of our legacy of faith in this place and a sign for the future generations that we believed enough that our church would continue on into generations to come, that we planted a tree for them to tend.

It was also not lost on me that our tree began to show new signs of life right around the time that life changed for our church because of the Covid-19 virus (coincidence, I think not). For all the diligence we showed in caring for this Hope tree, we are given a sign of hope for our future.

Things may be bad for a while. We are doing things in a way that we haven't before. This past Sunday we went live on Face Book for our morning worship service. Next week we will be beginning three new ventures on Face Book. Next week we will be live on YouTube as well. And a miracle will happen this week. After years of resistance, I will be opening a Face Book account so that I can interact with folks on that medium! I hope you were sitting down when you read that part.

We now have a beacon of Hope springing to life on our lawn AND we are a beacon of hope in our community of faith. Who would have thought that over 300 people would view our service on Sunday from our Face Book page! Perhaps there are even more people looking for signs of new life in our world. We can still offer Hope as a church. Praise be to God!

Don't forget to tune in each Sunday. Stand by for how we will be doing Communion on April 5th and celebrating Holy Week! Be well my friends.

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson

My Goodness! The Leadership Team has been involved in a huge amount of activity since the last Beacon was published. Most of the activity has been in the last three weeks. Here is a short synopsis in bullet point format.

- The LT was given notice of the regular March LT meeting. An agenda was published, consisting mainly of revisiting Old Business left over from prior meetings. The various Committee and staff reports are shared, and read, before the meeting, and questions are answered during the meeting. The only special given during the meet was from the Capital Campaign team. You may read the report from the Capital Campaign team later in this Beacon.
- Normally, each month there are issues that need discussion between the scheduled LT meetings, and these are usually handled by a series of round-robin emails addressed to all LT members. The issues are discussed via text, rather than verbal. If the issue requires a motion, one is made, and then seconded. After final discussion, a vote is taken, and the results are

then tabulated and the Moderator announces whether the motion passes or fails. It may take two or three days to conclude the issue, but the LT does not have to call a special meeting. One such email meeting occurred this month after the regular meeting. The Leadership Team was informed by the Endowment Team of the requirement for a Corporate Resolution to permit the sale of certain stocks that were given to the Congregation during the Capital Campaign. After discussion, a motion to authorize the sale was made and seconded. The vote was passed by a majority of the LT members. The minutes were produced, the Resolution signed by the Moderator, and Bill Ringelstein was happy. I bring this to the Beacon as an example how the Leadership Team conducts business, other than at regular meetings.

- Later in the week after the LT meeting, Pastor Mike sent a email to the LT members voicing his concerns about out congregants assembling on Sunday the 15th. His concerns are for exposure of attendees to the Corona virus. After a long series of emails back and forth, the consensus was that services should be cancelled, out of an abundance of caution. A vote taken about cancelling services until April 5th, and it passed. All activities of the church, including Choir and Bell Choir were cancelled for this season. All church members were emailed about the cancellations the next day. Those without email were telephoned.
- The next day, Friday the 13th, Pastor Mike again sent an email to the Leadership Team asking for a special meeting to address how to keep our church members connected to the Church. Cancellation of services for an extended length of time will have a loss of engagement by the members. At the Saturday meeting, we discussed and approved the calling of all members that did not respond to the email notice of cancellation. Also approved continuing to pay salaries to all staff. Notices of cancellation were to be sent to various TV and news sources. It was decided that Holy Week Activities were to be outdoors, to prevent having to disinfect/sanitize the pew chairs. New Member induction and Communion outdoors. (Later actions have cancelled all activities of Holy Week.) The Sunday service for March 15th will be recorded and posted on the Church's website.
- Bill Ringelstein met with the Bicycle Ministry leader to present a check for \$1,000 toward the purchase of bicycle locks. The Endowment Team continues their outreach.
- After the Sunday March 22nd broadcast on Facebook Live and recorded to our website, Pastor Mike circulated a message to the LT outlining the need of equipment to livestream the Sunday Service. We had been borrowing equipment from Isaac James. He also asked that a Zoom account be purchased for use by the church. After much discussion and explanations, a motion made and seconded, the vote approved the purchases. The equipment will allow much better sound quality for recordings of worship placed on our website, and possibly on YouTube.
- At the end of his message to the LT, Pastor Mike wrote these words of encouragement that I think our members should hear: "... the staff continues to work to create what ever community can be until we meet again. We are in the office five, sometimes six days a week planning alternatives. I am making phone contacts with folks that aren't email capable. I am spreading those contacts beyond to folks I know are recovering or under treatments. **Bottom line, the Church has not stopped working to serve our congregation.**"
- To those that wonder about 'Zoom', it is a video conferencing app for computers and phones that allow people to meet virtually. Teachers across the US are using it daily to check on students that are working in home school situations. Offices are using it to allow workers to meet via video from their home. We the leadership of CUCC-PG hope to use to meet virtually, eliminating the need to assemble in the library for physical meetings. We hope to start with the next meeting. I circulated an email seeking information about how each LT member would

attend a virtual meeting, whether by phone, or by computer. Also, the make and model of any computer equipment they might use.

A lot of changes have occurred to our congregation in the last two weeks. We the leadership need your support. Our Church's staff especially need your support and prayers.

If you have concerns, questions, or something you think the Leadership Team needs to know, please contact me.

Bill Colson

Moderator

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

The distribution of \$1,800 to the Bicycle Ministry at Edgewater Methodist Church was approved by the Leadership Team and we made plans to make the presentation on March 29th at our worship service. You have heard the old tune that "If you want to make God laugh, just let Him know you made plans!" Edgewater has also suspended worship services, so I met with Tom & Elaine Ballard, Bicycle Ministry Leaders and presented the check. This is an outreach that touches nearly 600 people every year and provides locks for the bicycles they distribute.

Our Endowment Fund has taken a hit from the down market, but we do not need to liquidate any holdings to meet a good portion of our anticipated distributions. Now is not the time to sell good stock market positions. We will stay the course, to be sure.

In the meantime, if you are sitting on a bag of cash and want to leave a legacy to your Church through the Endowment Fund, NOW might be the time. Consult your financial guru!!!

TREASURER'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

March 2020 Treasurer's Report



Financial Results	Feb-20	2020 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$29,833	\$45,475	\$29,099
Expenses	13,770	27,642	29,099
Net Income	\$16,063	\$17,842	\$0

February 2020 was a VERY good month, and it could not have happened at a better time. But March was an extraordinary month! Even with suspension of services in mid-March, members continued their donations via mail, and our collections of approximately \$17,000 exceeded our

monthly budget of \$14,550. We do not yet know what our expenses for March will be, but I anticipate expenses will be close to budget, so we will have an operating gain in March.

April may be a different story. Historically, April is the year's highest month for collections. Last year, April collections were over \$19,000. Obviously, this is due to the attendance at Palm Sunday and Easter services. With services suspended for those dates and probably through the end of April, we must again rely on our members to make their donations by mail.

If you have been watching the services on Facebook and/or YouTube, there is a time in the service to prepare your offering. Write a check, address an envelope, and put a stamp on it while listening to Isaac's lovely offering music. Then join Pastor Mike in the offertory prayer. The act of giving can still be a part of your worship experience.

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 wish I was writing under better circumstances, unfortunately, our country is being tested of our strength, unity and faith. Other than standard precautions for us to follow with social distancing the One to turn to is Jesus Christ. Prayers for all during this time of severe trial. No better hymn to discuss than one of my favorites, Abide with Me.

Abide with Me is one of the best-loved English hymns of the past 150 years. We see this both in its enduring usage in churches today and in its ongoing appearances in modern culture (for example, in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics).

The words, of course, have a lot to do with it. Each verse ends in the plea “abide with me,” making the hymn a sustained call for God’s personal presence in every stage and condition of life. The hymn resonates deeply with the hearts of those who feel their need of God.

Help of the helpless, O abide with me. . . .

Come, friend of sinners, and thus bide with me. . . .

Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me. . . .

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

One other aspect of the hymn which may also contribute to its significance is the story of its author and the context in which he wrote it.

The author of the hymn, Henry Francis Lyte, was an Anglican priest and vicar of All Saints Church in Brixham, England. He was also a published poet and accomplished hymnwriter who also wrote “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken” and “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven.”. For most of his life Lyte suffered from poor health, and he would regularly travel abroad for relief, as was the tradition in that day. Nevertheless, he developed tuberculosis and, at the age of 54, came near to the end of his life. His daughter, Anna Maria Maxwell Hogg, recounts the story of how “Abide with Me” came out of that context.

The summer was passing away, and the month of September arrived, and each day seemed to have a special value as being one day nearer his departure.

His family were surprised and almost alarmed at his announcing his intention of preaching once more to his people. His weakness and the possible danger attending the effort, were urged to prevent it, but in vain. “It was better”, as he used to say often playfully, when in comparative health, “to wear out than to rust out”. He felt that he should be enabled to fulfil his wish and feared not for the result. His expectation was well founded. He did preach, and amid the breathless attention of his hearers, gave them a sermon on the Holy Communion. . . .

In the evening of the same day he placed in the hands of a near and dear relative the little hymn, ‘Abide with Me’, with an air of his own composing, adapted to the words.

Just weeks later, while on holiday in Nice, France, Henry Lyte went to be with Jesus. It was November 20th, 1847.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion: **Keep checking your email for updated ways to creatively worship God and stay safe during the Coronavirus Pandemic.**

Mark your calendars: Palm Sunday-April 5 (Facebook and You tube)

Maundy Thursday-April 9 (Facebook and You Tube)

Easter-April 12 (Facebook and You Tube)

Short Sets: We are collecting short sets for the children at Baker Street Center until March 29. Please bring them to the office. We will deliver the shorts to the school sometime in April. Thanks for your loving generosity!!

Living the Questions and Great Decisions classes had to be suspended due to the government’s guideline restrictions to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus.

Lenten Thoughts: Now we have a GREAT opportunity to sit back and meditate about the GREAT love of our God and His Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who is guiding us now. A time to be thankful for all our blessings and to pray for justice for all!!!

Right now, there is a major concern about knowing the truth-literally-as it could be life or death for many innocent people! In John 18:38, Pilate said to Jesus, God’s walking

example of truth and love, "What is truth?". Listen to my Lenten devotion, from Michael Card's, *A Violent Grace*, "Pilate asked, "What is truth?" and then turned and walked away, not waiting to hear an answer. Little did he know that the answer was standing before him, bloodied. The result: Even though Pilate found no reason to press charges against Jesus, he washed his hands of Him. Then he turned the Truth over to be flogged and within hours, he condemned Him to be crucified.

Unfortunately, getting at the truth was not what any of these people were interested in." Wow! Doesn't that sound like today?! We could add another question, "Where is truth?"-both on earth and in our souls? Wishing you a blessed soul-searching Lenten season as we look forward to Holy Week and Easter!

Books: Recommending the Book of Psalms for comfort, courage and strength!

STEWARSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

No Report this month.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Ann Barker

As you well know personal distance is the order of the day for the foreseeable future. Therefore, all Fellowship activities at CUCC are cancelled until further notice.

This new and unusual circumstance turned my thoughts to the 14th century mystic and anchoress Julian of Norwich who lived through times not unlike our own and shared her visions and great insight into the nature of God in her written work *Revelations of Divine Love*. This book is recognized as the first work in English written by a woman. Following a life-threatening illness, she voluntarily was enclosed into a small cell attached to the church in Norwich for the remainder of her life. Strange to us but common in that period and well defined and supervised by the Church.

Her cell had three small windows we might learn from today. First was the window into the church where she could hear and see the Mass and receive communion. While we are enclosed during this time, we are blessed to have access to a plethora of media sources bringing us spiritual comfort and wisdom as we have sequestered ourselves in our homes.

Secondly, there was a window that brought her food, water and other necessities and where waste was removed to keep her healthy. Remember to pray for those who assure us our needs will be met such as workers in grocery stores, pharmacies, sanitation workers and health care workers who take risks to their own health to safeguard ours.

The last window faced outward to the city. Many, many persons came there to seek out Julian's wisdom, spiritual guidance and prayers in a deeply troubling time. The Black Death took one in three persons in England, a never-ending series of Crusades destabilized society, and The Avignon Papacy brought conflict to the Church and tortured the souls of many. Julian was a voice of reason and comfort to those seeking to make sense of a senseless time.

A quick online search about Julian will provide much food for thought and prayer now. Let me leave you with just one quotation from her. "God is nearer to us than our own soul," Julian wrote. Jesus spoke to her with these words, saying: '**All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.**' ... This was said so tenderly, without blame of any kind toward me or anybody else".

May God hold you in the palm of God's hand until we can see each other in person.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, our ladies luncheons are on hold. If things are better by the end of April and restaurants are back opened we will consider resuming ladies' lunch. We will keep you posted so keep reading your email updates from the church



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogai



Thanks to Mary Ellen Nielson and Sue Blaisdell for co-hosting our St Patrick's Day Book Talk Tea. The food was delicious. Here are some reading recommendations: "The Splendid and The Vile" by Erik Larson; "The Alice Network" by Kate Quinn and "The Dutch House" by Ann Patchett.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the remaining Book Talk Teas of this season are cancelled. When I receive the new reading list for 2020-2021, I will forward it to all members of the group. Please stay healthy and safe.

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

Social Justice Ministry Team — M.E. Steele-Pierce and Glenn Weaver

As we move into the "new normal" of shelter-in-place and social distancing, our physical work on behalf of social justice in our community goes on pause. However, we seek new ways to serve our most vulnerable and we remain devoted to our goal to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). You're invited to join us as we plan (via virtual platforms) how to serve our marginalized brothers and sisters. Write or call 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 Schmul, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick.

Join us in prayer for environmental, racial, immigration, and economic justice.

Prayer for a Pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced, remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable.

May those who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May those who have the flexibility to care for our children when schools close remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel a trip remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market remember those who have no margin at all.

May those who settle for quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose love during this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us find ways to be the loving embrace to God and our neighbor.

(Prayer by Cameron Wiggins Bellm)

Social Justice Ministry 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.



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

April	1	Joanne Arvid
	5	Bill Colson
	6	Dick Tulip
	7	Melissa Brown
	11	Virginia Bowker
	15	Barbara Campbell
	17	Juanita Maher
	22	Carolyn Kvam-Hansman
	23	Lou Stayner
	26	Lori Larson

ANNIVERSARIES

April	29	Richard & Suzanne Cleveland
	30	Lucille & Larry Begin

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