

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



MAY 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Vacation in the Time of Pandemic

I am wondering just how sick we are of that word, Pandemic. At a certain point, it must recede into the background and other concerns come forth. I intentionally didn't write this article until I was into my vacation time. In some ways, I feel guilty stepping away during these times. In other ways, I knew it was necessary to remember to rest. We have had a very hectic schedule since the end of November last year. I knew it would be important to come back at least partially energized. This past month has proved challenging for all of us.

So, I want to write about something I've rediscovered while away, Sabbath keeping. With half a week away, it already feels like a mini-Sabbatical. I have engaged devotionals in a different way. I can really be in the present moment when reading and praying. Thoughts of life in our church still circulate, but they become just as important as other considerations, not more. I was really thrilled to be able to worship this past Sunday. I gained a perspective that I rarely can partake of, from the "pews". I began to understand why virtual worship has become so relevant to so many these days. In some ways, it is even more intimate than being in person. In others, it is far less than connective. I want to thank Rev. Tulip for having such a meaningful presence and message to me that day.

I am currently working my way through the reading of Sabbath, Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight In Our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller. Muller was a student and friend of Henri Nowuen. If you know Nowuen's writings at all, they are calm and thoughtful. Muller took good notice of that style, I assume. I am blessed to have found this book on the "Free" table in the library. Its arrival into my life was timely. Whoever donated it to our library, thank you. It is one of those books that begs to be loaned to others. The kind you don't expect to be returned. I can tell when a book is that good, I never get it back.

Anyway, this book has become my morning devotional reading in addition to, Daily Feast, Meditations on Feasting on the Word, Year A. I've had this book on my shelves for at least five years and had never cracked the binding. Well, the binding is well broken in now. A strange thing has happened since I included these readings, I seem to have altered my morning patterns. For nearly an

hour after my devotions it never occurs to me to pick up my phone, check Face Book, or watch television! It is a miracle. They have helped me to disconnect to all of the electronic noise I partake of, at least for a short while. I have noticed, however, that I am more likely to take a walk than turn on the television. What this has afforded me is the opportunity to NOT hear more droning on or about the Coronavirus. I'm more attuned, these days, to watch the Animal Planet channel or History Channel or nap.

I've wandered again. The Sabbath by Muller is reminding me of the importance of rest and reconnecting with God. That might sound like a strange revelation for a Minister. It is more difficult these days to attend to our own spirit, than those of others. That's not a bad thing though, it is necessary. In our busy culture, Sabbath seems to be an afterthought most of the time. It is really meant to be a time of celebrating what has been created and appreciating God's hand in it. I want to quote a bit from Sabbath. It was an important thought to whomever was caretaker of it before me as it was highlighted. It communicated a concept I had never been made aware of. Mueller writes, "Here (in Exodus), the word typically translate as *refreshed* (in reference to the seventh day of Creation when God rested and was refreshed), literally means *and God exhaled*. The Creation of the world was like a life-quickenning inhale; the Sabbath is the exhale."

Right now, where you are sitting, take in a deep breath. You are taking in the life-giving oxygen which powers muscles and makes hearts beat. If you hold that breath long enough, you will find a NEED to let it out. When you do, you can hear the blood thumping in your ears. That exhale allows your body to prepare for receiving the next life-quickenning breath, starting the life of muscle and blood and organs and thoughts all over again. Every exhale is a Sabbath rest for our body and mind. So, this week, in most ways, I am learning to breathe again! A good exercise for all of us I'm thinking. Blessings and health to all of you. Be safe!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson

Has your lifestyle changed during the past 6 weeks? Mine certainly has! Stay at home. Stay safe. Observe social distancing when you come in contact with others. If possible, wear a mask when around others. Sanitize, disinfect! Group activities and public facilities closed. On, and on it goes.

Now the new question is: Is it safe to start 'normal' activities? Can we assemble at the church for worship and fellowship? This is precisely the question your leadership team discussed this past week. The consensus is that the time for assembly has not come yet. We, the Leadership Team, will address it again in May. In the meantime, the new normal is, continue to worship and meet remotely.

Have you 'tuned in' to CUCC-PG's Sunday worship on Facebook live, or viewed a service on YouTube? What do you think? Can you get used to worshipping at home? Do you invest the time to prepare for Communion, and partake after the corporate blessing? Don't abandon the elements of worship that make it personal. Sing along with the hymns as they are played. Pray with, and for, others. Yes, we miss the time of fellowship together. Hang in there, we shall assemble again.

What has the Leadership Team done this past month? We held our first two remote meetings via the Zoom app, on our individual computers, tablets and phones. The first time was a trial run to acquaint every one with the specifics of 'how to' and get the electronic connections sorted out, and set the ground rules for meeting; i.e. raise your hand to vote, don't talk over others when discussing. The next day, we met remotely to conduct our scheduled monthly meeting.

The April meeting had no new items of business on the agenda. Only the routine staff and committee reports, along with approval of minutes from previously held special and monthly meetings in March. During the meeting one item came up for discussion: repair and/or maintenance of the lighting in the parking lots. We agreed to get a proposal from Kennedy Electric, to cover repairs with existing types of bulbs, and possible replacement with LED type bulbs.

Let me hear from the members of the congregation. How is the Leadership Team doing? What can we do better? When do you think we should start to assemble for worship? Or for meetings? What do you want to see in in our on-line worship service?

Until we meet again; Stay Safe, Stay Healthy. And, may God bless us all.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

There has not been any Endowment activity to report. We are in a "stay the course" mode until this virus mess is over. We will still receive and evaluate applications, but our distributions will be based on severe community need. It is anticipated there will be a year-end balance in the authorized distribution amount that may be applied to the Capital Campaign. Everyone, please stay safe!!

TREASURER'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

April 2020 Treasurer's Report



Financial Results	Mar-20	2020 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$17,045	\$62,530	\$43,650
Expenses	12,845	40,487	43,650
Net Income	\$4,200	\$22,042	\$0

Thank you for continuing to send in your operating account contributions. Through March, our income is at 36% of budget. Last year, March YTD revenue was a little over 25% of our actual total operating income, so we are in very good shape for the months ahead when our snowbirds start to go north.

It's been awhile since I included information about our savings on electricity compared to when we hadn't gone solar. Since we just celebrated Earth Day, here's a recap of our electrical savings through March 2020:

Electrical Service	Charges		
	Current	Before Solar (Nov 16 - Oct 17)	(Higher)/ Lower
Year 1 (11/17 - 10/18)	\$5,088.69	\$6,798.01	\$1,709.32
Year 2 (11/18 - 10/19)	\$5,439.54	\$6,798.01	\$1,358.47
Nov-19	\$288.75	\$367.98	\$79.23
Dec-19	\$357.78	\$417.55	\$59.77
Jan-20	\$338.94	\$269.00	(\$69.94)
Feb-20	\$350.85	\$465.25	\$114.40
Mar-20	\$333.69	\$476.17	\$142.48
Year 3 thru March	\$1,670.01	\$1,995.95	\$325.94
Since Installation	\$12,198.24	\$15,591.97	\$3,393.73

A savings of \$325.94 in the first five months of our "solar" year may seem rather lackluster, but remember that most of the savings are generated in the summer months and that we also didn't have the solar panels on the roof while it was being replaced earlier this year.

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 would be remiss if I did not confess that I miss seeing all your faces at church each week. These are certainly times that are difficult for all of us. I pray we can be on the other side of it soon.

I would like to thank the members of the choir from the bottom of my heart. We had such a great choir season with a lot of growth, both in numbers and in quality. Unfortunately, our season was cut short, but they worked so hard and strove for excellence. I am very excited to see what next season brings.

This month, I would like to talk about the story behind the hymn, Just as I am.

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man . . . and he said to him, 'Follow me.' ” (Matt. 9:9) She could not believe the cold, hard facts. The prognosis of her disease was eventual paralysis. Born in Clapham, England, in 1789, Charlotte Elliott had experienced an active and normal life for thirty years, so the verdict about her future resulted in a very despondent and frustrated young woman. As the months grew into years, her frustrations grew into anger. Why would God allow such a thing to happen?

But one day, in 1822, a very special visitor came to the family home. The well-known Swiss evangelist, Caesar Malan, sat by her bedside. Seeking his wise counsel, Charlotte explained her hopelessness and despair. The question that got to the source of her anguish was "You speak of coming to Jesus, but how? I'm not fit to come."

Malan patiently explained the all-knowing, but all-forgiving and loving Savior. He told Charlotte that Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life; that whoever comes to him will not hunger (John 6:35). As they prayed, she recognized her hungers. She wanted freedom from the depression that plagued her. She longed for peace and hope in her circumstances. It was a relief to say "Yes" to the simple request of Jesus: "Follow me."

The immediate change in her attitude was lasting. Each year she celebrated that day as the beginning of her new life— her spiritual birthday. On such a birthday in 1834, she captured her new insight on paper in the poem "Just as I Am." It expressed her "formula of faith" as she lovingly explained it to others. The music for her poem was later composed by American gospel musician William Bradbury.

For the remainder of her life, poetry was an expressive witness of her Christian faith. There were more than a hundred poems published in *The Invalid's Hymnbook*. Profits from its sales built a school for needy children. The director of the school, who was her brother and a minister, said: "In the course of my work, I hope to see some fruit of my ministry. But I feel more has been done by the single poem of my sister, 'Just as I Am.'"

Could it be that one little poem touched more lives than many sermons or a school for needy children? It would not seem possible. But multiplication can be a miracle in God's plan. After Charlotte's death at age eighty-two, more than a thousand letters were discovered in her papers from

people around the world, expressing thankfulness that their lives had been redirected by this one hymn.

Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Worship-Many thanks to Pastor Mike and Isaac James for such uplifting and inspiring Easter season worship services! Hallelujah, Amen!!!! Thanks also to the Zoom team: Susann, Kevin and M.E.!! You are helping us reach so many people and helping all of us who are staying at home feel so connected!

Mark your calendars:
Communion-May 3
June 7

Social Justice Ministries Committee-The committee is now meeting via Zoom and working on various projects. They involve helping the homeless, meals for school children, Brownsville, Creation Justice activities, CIW farmworkers. We are asking people to write letters to the editor regarding any social justice topics and looking at social justice hymns to share with the congregation. Look for upcoming Social Justice Moments on our Facebook page!

Caring Friends-A temporary committee has been formed under our Caring Friends Group (Neoma Remiger). It is called Caring Circles. Members are calling local members to keep in touch until we can meet together again. If you haven't been called and would like to receive a call, please contact Myra Nagel (941-769-5678) or LindaWeaver (616-516-1896). Thanks to Sandy James-Nogaj, Judy Minier and Bil Tucker for sorting and taking us

Short Sets:

109 donated short sets to the Baker Street Center! A fun and much needed outreach project for our whole congregation.

During this time of "stay at home safety", most of us have time to, "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10.

STEWARSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

With all the craziness we may, and likely are, experiencing during these times of self and family protection from Covid-19 effects, let us pause and experience the peace of Christ. 'You' being a CUCC worshiper are selected to do a Stewarding thing and reach out and touch someone — electronically, of course!! Perhaps, within the next 24-hours, bravo.

Stewardship means acting to share whatever your resources available, including the peace that Christ brought for us.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7 NRSV

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Ann Barker

It goes without saying there are no planned Fellowship events until it is again safe to gather in groups. We miss being together in worship, for Coffee Hour, and for other church events. God is not practicing social distancing but offering us an opportunity to learn new ways of expressing our faith and developing new habits of spirituality.

The example of the very earliest followers of Jesus may offer us hope and encouragement. Read Acts of the Apostles 12:1-17. Sense what was happening to this first community of believers in Jerusalem. Fear of Herod's has them locked behind doors. Then we meet Rhoda the young slave girl who has a remarkable encounter with Peter, first among the believers. A humorous and touching story not to be missed.

As I write we are still advised not to gather. What can we do? Read scripture and talk to God about all that concerns us and all we are grateful for. Envision the time we will be together again. What familiar things will we return to and what may be different as a result of our experiences? God will watch over us until we meet again.

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



If you are at the church and need something to read, please feel free to use our library. There are some new arrivals as well as the Social Justice, non-fiction and fiction bookshelves

The Punta Gorda Library contacted me and wanted to know if we were interested in books that they had cleared from their shelves. I accepted and now we are on their list for future donations. Thanks to Linda and Glenn Weaver for helping me sort through the books. The books are located on the "New Arrivals" bookshelf in the library.

Thanks to Molly Hall and Judy Minier for donating some books also. They are also on the "New Arrivals" bookshelf.

Please stay healthy and safe during this scary time.

Happy reading!!

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

At our last ZOOM meeting our committee responded from various locations!

Members checked in with their current locations:

Jim DeGood - Muskegon Michigan

Elden Wick – in Punta Gorda, but enjoying Dunkin Donuts drive thru

Carol Schmul – in Punta Gorda, may stay the whole year

Elizabeth and Betty Pitcher – still in Punta Gorda, also may stay the whole year

Jerry and Lori Larson – back home in the Minnesota countryside (tapping maple sap!) May

Beacon-SocialJustice,2020

Pastor Mike – in Punta Gorda, Kelly in Vermont teaching via internet

M.E. Steele-Pierce – in Punta Gorda, leaving late April for doc appointment for Bob

Glenn and Linda Weaver – in Punta Gorda at least until June

Members shared their Social Justice concerns during our time of shelter-in-place:

Is the social gospel dead? If we cannot articulate it and ritualize it, it will die.

Feeding the hungry children of Charlotte County, schools providing meals.

Carbon emissions are down 5%! How can we sustain this post pandemic?

People are not responding to the census.

Election 2020 – advocacy for vote by mail – voter suppression – voters' rights

Concerns about shelter and food for our local homeless

Projections about next climate disasters (Dr Robert Sheets) warnings fall on deaf ears —

Politicians wait for disasters because that's "where the money is"

CIW farmworkers and produce supply chain

Lack of urgency among politicians, uneven response to COVID 19 testing

How do we relate to each other when we cannot be together physically?

Homestead and Witness at the Border

We then proceeded to finalize some action steps. One was the environmental video (in celebration of Earth Day) that was shown on Sunday, April 26 for our Social Justice Moment.



WHY GOD MADE MOMS

Hope you Moms enjoy this. Answers given by 2nd grade school children to the following questions:

Why did God make mothers?

1. She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is.
2. Mostly to clean the house.
3. To help us out when we were getting born.

How did God make mothers?

1. He used dirt, just like for the rest of us.
2. Magic plus super powers and a lot of stirring.
3. God made my Mom just the same like he made me. He just used bigger parts.

Why did God give you your mother and not some other mom?

1. We're related.
2. God knew she likes me a lot more than other people's moms like me.

What kind of little girl was your mom?

1. My Mom has always been my mom and none of that other stuff.
2. I don't know because I wasn't there, but my guess would be pretty bossy.
3. They say she used to be nice.

What did mom need to know about dad before she married him?

1. His last name.
2. She had to know his background. Like is he a crook?
- 3.. Does he make at least \$800 a year? Did he say NO to drugs and YES to chores?

Why did your mom marry your dad?

1. My dad makes the best spaghetti in the world. And my Mom eats a lot.
2. She got too old to do anything else with him.
3. My grandma says that Mom didn't have her thinking cap on.

Who's the boss at your house?

1. Mom doesn't want to be boss, but she has to because dad's such a goof ball.
2. Mom. You can tell by room inspection. She sees the stuff under the bed.
3. I guess Mom is, but only because she has a lot more to do than dad.

What does your mom do in her spare time?

1. Mothers don't do spare time.
2. To hear her tell it, she pays bills all day long.

What would it take to make your mom perfect?

1. On the inside she's already perfect. Outside, I think some kind of plastic surgery.
2. Diet. You know, her hair. I'd diet, maybe blue.

If you could change one thing about your mom, what would it be?

1. She has this weird thing about me keeping my room clean. I'd get rid of that.
2. I'd make my mom smarter. Then she would know it was my sister who did it and not me.
3. I would like for her to get rid of those invisible eyes on the back of her head.



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

MAY	3	Edward Schuckman
	7	Joan Lyons
	9	David Cramer
	10	Easton Klossner
	11	Brian Rowlands
	17	Carol Salisbury
	20	Judy Lyon
	21	Anne Swift
	23	Diane Wick
	25	William Ringelstein
	28	Myra Nagel
	31	Cindy Trudeau
	31	Tom Cartwright

ANNIVERSARIES

MAY	4	Kevin & Kathy Rivadeneira
	28	Bill & Hazel Klossner

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