

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



DECEMBER 2019

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Greetings from the frozen north! I am writing this from 22 degrees in Vermont. I realized, after I arrived, that I hadn't seen snow for four years! Needless to say, it was a little while before I felt comfortable getting behind the wheel of a car.

I was able to do one of my favorite things, walk in the woods while the snow gently fell. I was walking along a riverbank watching all the squirrels who felt I was intruding on their space and letting me know in no uncertain terms! The river was partially frozen and the snow under foot crunched as I walked. Aside from the squirrels, it was the only sound that mingled with the flowing river and the sound of my breathing. It was a far cry from the sirens and tires I hear when walking back home. I had forgotten how quiet the world could be. I dearly love living in Punta Gorda, but it is nice once in a while to feel nature and smell rotting leaves. We live in a fairly manicured world for the most part.

It was just nice to be "away" for a bit and commune with my children and grandchildren, and, oh ya, Kelly!

To be totally honest, I'm looking forward to coming home and settling back into the routine of church life and warm weather. It has been said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. I realize I have that in two different places. It will be good to be home in PG, but I leave part of myself back in Vermont.

I pray your time away from me was good for us all 😊. Thank you for letting me get away and come home too.

Mike

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT- Bill Colson

Leadership Team Meeting (held November 12th, 2019)

There were several items on the November Meeting Agenda. The following is a synopsis of the more important items that were decided by the Leadership Team.

Old Business- Gift and/or Fuel Cards for Benevolent Use.

To keep from using personal funds or credit cards, it was decided to keep a limited number of gift cards, and fuel cards, in the office safe. This will be on a trial basis, with the expectation of including a budget line item for the 2020 year. Before giving the cards to those asking for financial help, they must be interviewed by Pastor Mike.

Action and New Business Items

- The date of the Annual Meeting was set for the last Sunday in January. That is January 26th, 2019, immediately following worship service.
- A Compensation and Performance Review for the church's two non-ordained employees was held. The results of the reviews will be discussed privately with employees before the end of November. Any changes in compensation are subject to approval of the 2020 budget during the Annual Meeting.
- A panel of potential members of the Nominating Committee was discussed, and Susann Luckenbach was named the Leadership Team representative. The Nominating Team will return for the December meeting for confirmation, and then the Team's selections for Candidates will be announced prior to the Annual Meeting.
- The Pastoral Relations Team for 2020 were approved by the Leadership Team after Bill Colson circulated an announcement via email. The following people have agreed to participate on the Pastoral Relations Team and associated ministerial review during the next two years: Ann Barker, Stacy Scarrow, and Lee Swift. They will follow, participate and learn during the 2019 ministerial review, while not voting; alongside the current Pastoral Relations Team headed by Bil Tucker.
- The Leadership Team approved the Sponsorship of a Program page for the upcoming MLK Breakfast Program. They also approved a subscription to Sojourner's Magazine for use by church Staff and the Social Justice Team.

- The installation and use of security cameras within the church building was discussed. Potential costs and operation were discussed. Among the benefits to be received from the cameras will be identifying and recording who enters the building, where they go within the building, and who is on the property. Approval was given to proceed with purchase and installation of four cameras, with picture storage and viewing on one of the office computers.

Committee Reports were received from Standing Committees and approved where appropriate.

- The Treasurer is preparing a 2020 budget for approval at the Annual Meeting.
- The Endowment team is preparing a proposal for distribution of remaining 2019 funds.
- Letters for the Stewardship Campaign are being prepared and the first letter is scheduled to be mailed by November 30th

The Leadership Team meeting was concluded after prayer.

If you have anything that you feel is needed to be discussed by the Leadership Team, please contact Bill Colson, Pastor Mike, or any team member. Remember, we are here to serve you.

The next Leadership Team meeting will be held **December 10th, 2019** in the church library.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

Endowment distributions for 2019, that were on hold, are now under active consideration by the Leadership Team. Announcements and distributors will be made pending the decision of the Leadership Team. The residual of the 2019 funds will be considered for the Capital Campaign.

Hopefully, the strong stock market will produce good capital gains earnings and dividends in 2019 for distribution in 2020. The Endowment resolution provides that 50% of the combined earnings can be used for distributions based on recommendations of the Endowment Team and then approval of the Leadership Team. We will know the distribution total by the middle February.



TREASURER – Melissa Brown

December 2019 Treasurer’s Report

Operating Income/Expenses	19-OCT	2019 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$11,651.74	\$126,013.03	\$126,250.00
Expenses	\$13,092.55	\$129,087.39	\$134,637.48
Net Income	-\$1,440.81	-\$3,074.36	-\$8,347.48



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

It is hard to believe that December is upon us already. The hustle and bustle of the holidays and all that comes with it. It can be so difficult to remember what the basis for Christmas is, the crazy and hectic life of the season can unfortunately, at times, take precedent and focal point. It is so

humbling to think that the King of kings and Lord of lords could come as a child. To become flesh and live a life as we do in order to give us hope and an eternity with Him.

Please come to the performance on Sunday, December 29th at 4:00 pm. The Gulfshore Opera will be putting on a spectacular performance of Amahl and the Night Visitors. This opera company, based in Naples, is of utmost quality and brings in stars in the opera industry from around the country. You will not be disappointed. Please go to their website for tickets: www.gulfshoreopera.org

This month's hymn I would like to focus on is Joy to the World. Sung millions of times a year, it is one of the most popular Christmas Carols ever written. At this point in history, most songs sung in European church services were the Psalms in the Old Testament. Though Isaac Watts loved the Bible, he felt that these songs felt unnatural to sing in their modern-day English translations. After one Sunday service, Isaac Watts, at 15 years old, complained about the atrocious worship. One of the deacons challenged him with, Give us something better, young man. He went home and penned his first hymn, and the love of hymn-writing stuck with him the rest of his life. In 1719, his book "Psalms of David Imitated" was published, not as a new paraphrase of David, but as an imitation of him in New Testament language. Watts' perspective was the Psalms bursting forth in their complete fulfillment. Joy to the World is the "imitation" of the last half of Psalm 98.

Watts transformed the old Jewish psalm of praise for historic deliverance into a song of rejoicing for the salvation of God that began when the Jesus came "to make his blessing flow far as the curse is found."

Music is from George Frederick Handel, and some scholars say it resembles his greatest work, Messiah.

I hope you all have a magnificent Christmas season and wish that the Christ child comes to you in such a special way. God Bless You.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion Set-Up Schedule:

Dec.1-Melissa Brown

Jan. 5-MaryAnn Farnquist and Lou Stayner

Feb. 2-Sandy and Keith Weber

***Please note that the small loaf of bread for the Communion Table has been made by Linda Greenfield and is in the freezer. Also, please check for any remaining gluten-free bread in the freezer before buying more.

Please mark your calendars for these ADVENT/CHRISTMAS activities:

Dec.1-Hanging of the Greens-following the morning service

Dec.5-Christmas with the Celts-7pm

Dec. 15-Christmas pageant-10am

Dec.24-Christmas Eve service-6:45pm

Dec.29-Amahl and the Night Visitors-4pm (tickets \$24)

Education- As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior and remember that his parents were “evicted” from inn after inn until they were given a stable for His birth, we remember that he identified with the poor and suffering the minute He entered planet Earth! Now, fast forward to today!

Read the book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, by Matthew Desmond. It is a non-fiction book set in the poorest areas of Milwaukee, WI. The book centers on eight different families struggling to pay rent to their landlords during the financial crisis of 2007-2008. It focuses on the horrible living conditions and the reasons why these landlords evicted suffering, poor people-especially women facing very difficult challenges. Main motive: money...not compassion or fairness. As we comfortably listen to the Christmas story, ask yourself, “What would I do as the innkeeper in Jerusalem or a landlord in Milwaukee?”

We, the Lindas, want to wish our church family a very blessed Christmas season

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jan Tulk



I would like to thank the November hosts:

- Nov. 3 Barb Smith, Val Moran, Dave Cramer, Jerry Oscarson & John Casey
- Nov. 10 Ann Barker, Chrystal Reichard, Ian and Sandra McLauchlan
- Nov. 17 Diane & Elden Wick, Ann Barker, Chrystal Reichard
- Nov. 24 Ann Barker & Chrystal Reichard

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Just a reminder that our next luncheon will be our annual “High Tea” on Friday, December 6 at Zoetz Sweet Boutique at 12:00 noon. Zoetz is located on Hwy 17 in the Winn Dixie plaza on Bermont Road. Everyone is asked to bring their favorite china cup and saucer. If you don't have one, not to worry, as we will be sure to have extras on hand. Just let Neoma Remiger or Mary Tulip know that you will need one. Looking forward to seeing everyone!



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogai



Thanks to Linda Greenfield and Joanne Arvid for hosting the November Book Talk Tea. Our group is growing! We discussed books that we have read in the past month. The next Book Talk Tea will be January 10, 2020 at noon in the church library. If anyone is interested in participating please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

The first book on the Reading for Renewal list for 2019-2020 is "Evicted" by Matthew Desmond. This is a "**UCC - All Church Read**". The author follows eight families in Milwaukee, WI as they struggle to keep a roof over their heads. "Evicted" transforms our understanding of poverty and economic exploitation while providing fresh ideas for solving one of 21st-century America's most devastating problems. There is a copy in the library. If you need assistance finding it please contact Sandy Nogaj after church on Sunday.

I want to thank Lori and Gerry Larson for donating "Great Decisions" periodicals and DVDs. They are available in the library.

I also want to thank Annie Robertson, Melissa Brown and Joanne Arvid for their book donations. They are welcome additions to our growing library.

For your reading pleasure, there will be Christmas Books on display in December.

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

The Blanchard House Museum of African American History which is located at 406 Martin Luther King, Jr., Blvd. is open from Mon.-Fri. from 10am-4pm. Their new exhibit, African Origins of Modern Healthcare, opened in September and is open to the public. A worthwhile experience on a sunny day in December!

On Sat., Dec.7 at 5pm, the Punta Gorda History Center will recognize Berniece Russell, founder of the Blanchard House and induct her into its History Hall of Honor. The celebration will be held at Hurricane Charley's at 5pm. "This year's honorees have played key roles in shaping the community into what it has become today."

Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast- Please mark your calendars for the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast to be held on Saturday, Feb.18th, 2020 at the Punta Gorda Middle School. Our Social Justice Ministries Committee recognizes that this is an important event for nurturing multi-racial justice and relationships in our community. Please make plans to attend. Watch the Beacon for more details!

GREAT DECISIONS – Jerry and Lori Larson

The Great Decisions discussion group will be meeting again in February and March. Topics for discussion this year include:

Climate Change and the Global Order

India and Pakistan

Red Sea Security

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

U.S. Relations with the Northern Triangle

China's Road into Latin America

The Philippines and the U.S.

Artificial Intelligence and Data

These topics, as in previous years, will be timely, well-informed, and thought provoking. We invite you to add your perspectives to our discussions. Further information regarding the Foreign Policy Association, the secular, non-partisan group sponsoring Great Decisions, can be found at fpa.org. Sign-up sheets will appear in January in the kiosk at the rear of the church. More information will be included in the January Beacon. For questions, call Jerry and Lori Larson at 715-781-0657.

THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk



It is with great sorrow that we share the passing of Joyce Schenk with you. She has been our church scribe for several years and, we have all enjoyed her wonderful stories. Our love and prayers go out to her family and friends. A memorial service will be held for Joyce on Saturday, December 14 at 2pm at the church.

The following is the article that Joyce wrote for the December 2017 Beacon. We thought you might enjoy it again.

CAN YOU IMAGINE IT?

At this time of year, our world is caught up in the rush and crush of the season: gifts and parties, cards and long-distance calls, cooking and cleaning. From morning till night, the days simply slip past with little thought of the meaning behind it all. We've become increasingly removed from the simple story of that long-ago first Christmas. But today, I'm inviting you to slow your personal merry-go-round for just a moment. Right now, right here. Stop and consider how it all began.

Let your imagination take you back.

It all happened more than 2000 years ago. Mary, an unmarried teen, was in her 9th month of pregnancy. She and her betrothed, Joseph, were making a long journey to the small town of Bethlehem. No comfortable, cushioned car carried these two over the rough and rutted roads.

There were no rest stops along the way to help a pregnant woman relax and refresh. Instead, Mary rode a donkey, bumping and swaying with every twist and turn. By her side walked strong, silent Joseph, helping Mary to keep her place on to the donkey's bony back. They exchanged few words. Each was thinking of the amazing assignment for which God had chosen them. When at last they reached Bethlehem, they were tired and hungry. But the town was crowded. Despite Mary's condition, the couple was turned away from the inn. There was simply no room for them.

Can you imagine it?

Joseph led the donkey, bearing Mary, to the stable. There, among the livestock, on the hay-covered floor, Mary's time came to deliver her baby. There were no comfortable beds dressed in clean sheets. No gloved hands reached out to help. No doctors were present. No nurses stood by.

There were only Mary, Joseph, the animals....and God. With no crib, no cradle, no baby blankets, the young parents gently wrapped this precious new life in "swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." In the fields nearby, a group of shepherds rested among their flocks. Weary at the end of the day, they might have been dozing.

But, can you imagine it?

Suddenly, the heavens were filled with a magnificent light. And, above, an angel appeared to the frightened shepherds. This wasn't CNN. This wasn't the New York Times. This wasn't a "breaking news bulletin." This was a message sent from the Lord God Almighty directly to a group of humble workingmen. There in the field, with their restless animals looking on, the shepherds were given news of the greatest miracle of all. God had sent them a Savior. And He came in the form of a baby.

Can you imagine it?

The shepherds were told where to find this miracle child. And, the men didn't hesitate. They didn't check the postings on Facebook to see if others had shared this odd experience. They didn't call 911 to report a strange sighting. Instead, they simply believed God's messenger and followed the angels' instructions.

Can you imagine it?

The shepherds made their way to the lowly stable and quietly joined the little scene. They gathered around the tired young mother, the protecting form of Joseph and God's son, that glowing baby boy, lying contented in the humble manger. That setting--not the glittering Christmas lights, not the presents piled under the trees, not Santa in his sleigh--but that simple, unforgettable scene in the stable reminds the world that Christmas marks the birth of God' son.





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

December 10	Elaine Erickson
12	Emily Klossner
15	Mary Tulip
17	Armondo Mascarenaz
18	Lee Swift
22	Sally Benson
24	Steve Brown
29	Susan James
31	Elden Wick

ANNIVERSARIES

December 15	Don & Myra Nagel
18	Bob & Joyce Baskovic

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