

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



AUGUST 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Synod 33 Reflections by Rev. Michael Ford, Delegate

I have an assignment. In 200 words or less, describe my reflections on General Synod 33! Wow, what a challenge! This was my third Synod as a delegate, but it was by far the most interesting for me. The virtual format allowed me to visit more workshops and Optional Events than I could have in person. I have to admit, the virtual format was also more challenging. Since we were at home, our regular lives were lived, and ministry was done. It sure was nice to sleep in my own bed every night but being in a virtual room until late into the evening was exhausting. I am hoping that there will be a hybrid experience in the future. The in-person format was intense, but time is limited. I felt like a kid in a candy shop being able to partake of more content!

And what content there was. I expect worship at Synod to be extraordinary and unique, but this was over the top. Worship was pre-recorded by professional film crews, so the presentation was exquisite, but that's not what blew me away. I was taken on an adventure, experiencing traditions I have only heard of but not experienced. The music and visuals took brought me into the center of the spiritual nature of our home plant. Indigenous singers and dancers wove the message of care of earth I could not have begun to imagine. I even heard an Indigenous rapper who danced in native attire while offering prayer! This was mixed with choirs that I have heard all my life. We were teased into a combination of traditions blurred together effortlessly and all of it inspiring. Our preachers were the kind that have you on the edge of your seat or shouting AMEN! All of the time.

Our keynote speakers have given me sustenance for a thousand sermons. I was awed by Valerie Kaur. I have seen her before, but this time she spoke to me directly, sitting in her house, engaging the camera as though we sat across a table over a cup of coffee. What stick with me first and which I have dwelt upon since is that she proclaimed that the darkness we are experiencing can represent two things, either the tomb or the womb. She led us along the path of the tomb and all of

the dangerous rhetoric of today and where that takes us. Then she said that we are in a place of birth, that a new world is ready to be born from love, radical love.

Adam Russell Taylor, the new Executive Director of the Sojourners organization, inspired us with, and I quote from the UCC News, “urged “beloved community” as an antidote to the “twin viruses” of “systemic racism and toxic polarization.” Adam comes to Sojourners from of all places, the World Bank. He was an advisor to the Bank of the ethical use of monetary resources, among other faith aspects of money. He is definitely a rising star in the leadership of that new world that Valerie envisioned. Some exciting futures were spoken of, and listeners were challenged to become part of those futures.

The business, well let’s say it was not without controversy. For the first time I saw a defeated resolution brought back to the floor by the people who voted against it! It dealt with the occupation and colonizing of the Hawaiian nation by the Christian Missionaries sent by the UCC (before the UCC existed of course). It was almost totally rewritten but was found to not represent the views of all the native Hawaiian populations. It was realized that furthering the conversation was the path forward and it passed on the second vote. Now the harder work begins of implementation. We’ll see if the UN takes notice.

Suffice it to say that my Synod experience was exceptional. I can’t wait to pour over the recorded speakers and worship to glean further insights on how to become that Beloved Community birthed in uncertain times. Thanks for sending me!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR’S REPORT – Melissa Brown

It was with very sad hearts that the Leadership Team decided at our July 20, 2021, meeting that we needed to once again take steps to protect our congregation from COVID-19. With cases rising and increasing positivity rates in Charlotte County, Florida and throughout the country, we felt we needed to protect our members. On Sunday, July 25, we had members who were without masks, and we had members who were wearing masks. Sharing of the peace was limited and asking for peace on earth was less exuberant, but we were still able to gather in worship. These are trying times, and we ask

for divine guidance for all in the days, weeks, and months ahead. As Mike said on Sunday—not specifically related to COVID—as individuals we may not be able to make a difference but as a unified and supportive group of believers, WE can.

I will rely on the other members of the Leadership Team to report on issues related to their ministries, and I will do the “fun” stuff and share another biography from two more of our 2020 new members: Mary Cassidy-Anger and Scott Anger:

Scott and Mary Anger (with a soft “g” – like Angie) sold their home in Great Falls, Virginia, and moved to their house in Port Charlotte this June. Although they have been coming to the Punta Gorda area since 2012, they are excited about making it their home base. They have been married 26 years and have five children and six grandchildren. Scott’s two sons and daughter live in the Washington, D.C., area with their children. Mary and Scott have a daughter in D.C. and a son in Houston. After retiring from work on Capitol Hill and then the oil and gas industry, Scott became a part-time art collector. He enjoys boating, reading, and good food. Mary currently works with a non-profit that has a school in South Sudan (Abukloi.org). She enjoys kayaking, reading, and attempting to create art. They are both looking forward to getting to know more of the CUCC family.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



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

The following distribution of Endowment Funds will be made:

- a. CUCC Social Justice Ministry to receive a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$2,500.

A \$1,500 check was presented to Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens Executive Director Tanna Horner during services on July 25.

The Endowment Team is pleased with the continuing generosity and caring of the Congregation as we continue to receive contributions for the Endowment Fund. Thank you!

TREASURER’S REPORT – Michael Robinson, Treasurer



Through July we are in good shape financially with an unspent (but committed) \$ 51,097 in capital funds (earmarked for a bathroom renovation) and \$ 40,162 in our operating account, of which some \$ 9,000 is earmarked for Social Justice and Scholarships, leaving \$ 31,000 for operating expenses.

However, donations in July took a \$ 2,100 hit compared to June. Note to Snowbirds: Our expenses continue even while you are cooling off up North.

Please remember to send in your pledges.

Expenses continue to come in below budget through June, running some \$ 6,300 under budget.

On a personal note, it sure feels good to be home after our 6 ½ week sojourn to NY and ME and points in between—15 stops up and down with family and friends. It was sad, however, to be confronted once again with the scourge of Covid, which has now struck so close to home. We were so looking forward to worshipping at our church once again only to learn that the virus had infected one of our own, we were back to virtual services....and that Florida is now a “hot spot.” However, we must remain positive in outlook. We *will* come out of this.

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Janis Tulk, Chair



No report this month.

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 while he was away on a much-needed vacation. We

thank God 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.



MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jessica and Dennis Danner



Hi all, we have had three fellowship Sundays since resuming our fellowship time following church. They have been increasingly well attended and enjoyed. We have volunteers signed up through August and will ask for more people to sign up for fall. We hope to plan some other activities for the fall as well. Thank you to all who have helped so far!

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



Borrowing somewhat from Pilgrim Press, A.B. Robinson.

1Cor 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the SPIRIT for the common good.”

Here Apostle Paul is affirming a truth affecting each of us, as well as our individual ministry (stewardship), indeed not only within our church, but to the wider church body of Christ as well as the community. Paul writes that, “*each...given...*” [by the trait of God which empowers you, me, each of us] a “*gift*”.

Now is that not beautifully *amazing!!*

And for what(?) is it given?!

I suggest, to USE it, for gosh sakes, “*for the common good*”. This given gift of yours and mine are not to sit idly by. They are to be manifested in building up the church and it’s *common* life and mission (ministries). Hence our stewarding of God’s Creation requires our hands/brains/our all to respond for God’s works – whatever this giftedness permits.

When teenagers, probably you were told, “You are very special, unique and important; and you are part of a family.”

WELL! God provides this same amazing message for us every day through the *gift* provide by His Holy Spirit. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

It is an unfortunate turn of events when a young boy is forced to grow up without a loving father. Thus was Robert Robinson's fate. His dad passed away when he was only eight years of age. Robert was born on Sept. 27, 1735, to Mary Wilkin and Michael Robinson, a customs officer, in Swaffam in the county of Norfolk, a market town and civil parish in the English countryside.

To make Roberts circumstances much more difficult, his maternal grandfather, Robert Wilkin, a wealthy man, who had never reconciled himself to his daughter's lowly marriage, disinherited his grandson and provided an inheritance for him of only ten shillings and sixpence.

As soon as Robert was old enough, he secured a job as an apprentice to a barber. Even in his youth he endured the hardship of having to be the breadwinner for his widowed mother and himself. His formal education was limited. However, his knowledge was varied and extensive because he spent many hours in study. There was an adult-like quality deeply ingrained in him, and it allowed him to accept the responsibilities of adulthood, even as a teenager.

As he grew older, he came under the influence of the famed evangelist, George Whitfield. On Dec. 10, 1755, Robinson could not push from his mind a particular phrase used by Mr. Whitfield in one of his sermons: "Oh, my hearers! the wrath to come! the wrath to come!" He was wondrously converted and became a minister of the gospel; first, in a Baptist church, then in a Methodist church, and later in other denominations.

In one location his congregation grew to 1,000 in attendance.

Unfortunately, and for some unexplained reason, he became altogether unstable and unhappy. His Christian beliefs and training seemed of little importance to him.

On one occasion, years later, he found himself the fellow passenger of a young lady on a stagecoach. It is reported that she began to sing to break the monotony of the trip. And what did she sing?

*Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it, mount of thy redeeming love.
Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I come,
And I hope by thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.
Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God.
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.*

*O to grace, how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.
Seal it for thy courts above.*

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

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



CARING FRIENDS

Every month we send out birthday, anniversary, get well and thinking of you cards to our congregation. If anyone has any cards that they are not using and would like to see them go to good use, we would appreciate your donation. Right now, we are especially in need of anniversary cards. Please leave them with Mary in the church office. Thank you!

LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj



The 2021-2022 Reading for Renewal list and books are now available in the church library. Please be sure to sign out the books before you take them! A big "Thank You" to Sue Blaisdell and Mary Tulip for organizing the books in my absence. Book Talk Tea will meet in person in November in the church library. Details will follow as the date gets closer.

I hope everyone is having a good summer and reading a lot of good books!



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.

Social Justice Hymn

On Sunday, July 11, for our opening hymn, we sang “Let Justice Flow Like Streams” and my favorite verse was the middle one:

Let righteousness roll on
As others’ cares we heed,
An ever-flowing stream of faith
Translated into deed.”

Thank you, Isaac, for including this social justice hymn in our worship.



Environmental Justice- A Creation Justice Church

Our SJMT has been learning about Creation Justice churches in our UCC denomination. Saving our environment is at a critical point in our planet Earth’s history and UCC churches are seeking God’s calling. We would like to let you know the process we have been studying.

WHAT are Creation Justice Churches?

Churches which have committed to a process of discerning ways to best care for God’s creation.

HOW do we become a Creation Justice Church?

Our UCC denomination has a 5-step process for churches to follow. A Creation Care Covenant is developed by each individual church.

WHY should we do this? To quote the UCC website:

- “1. It’s our first calling!
2. It’s what Jesus would do!
3. Clean air, clean water, preserving the creation—those are good things!
4. It’s about justice - relationships of love and care for all God has made!
5. It’s in our denomination’s DNA!”

Check out the website: UCC.org for more detailed information.

You will hear more about this in the upcoming Social Justice moments. Stay tuned!



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

Aug	1	John Casey
	4	William Remiger
	13	Jessica Danner
	16	James Grunden
	23	Chrystal Reichard
	25	Richard Cleveland
	27	Dylan Klossner

ANNIVERSARIES

Aug	3	Ron & Louise Jankowski
	7	Jim & Jane Provencher
	20	Jerry Oscarson & David Cramer
	29	Ian & Sandra McLauchlan
	30	Don & Carolyn Winslow
	31	Neoma & William Remiger

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