

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



APRIL 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Coming Home or Staying Home?

Well, things are changing once more. By now, you have all probably heard that some of our "restrictions" around worship have relaxed a bit. We are mixing together those fully vaccinated and those still in the process. This allows more of our church family to be together for In-Person worship at 10 am on Sundays. For the past year, we have been denied this blessing. Beginning on Palm Sunday, more of us can be in church together.

Also, for the past year, I and most every church leader I know, have had a secret worry. After so long away, would people return to church? We must admit the level of comfort of being able to sit in our pjs with a cup of coffee or a snack to watch the services on our devices. We must also admit the level of anonymity of watching from home. And the third level is the convenience of watching the recorded service at another time or even another day.

I had a conversation with someone in church on this past Sunday that said she was used to watching on her phone and was able to concentrate on the service better and now needed to get used to the distractions that are a constant in the In-Person worship experience. Frankly, I had not even considered that possibility. Perhaps that reason will bring us closer to the generation that only interact screen to screen. These are all powerful reasons to NOT return. When we include the concern that the continued spread of COVID-19, it becomes even more powerful. We certainly understand.

Our Leadership Team has been constantly monitoring the levels of new infections in our county. We have also been closely watching the availability of the vaccine for members of our congregation. To be honest, there have been some very discouraging moments and some of great joy. It has been like riding a roller coaster at times. But overall, we have had the safety and health of our members first in all decisions that have been made. We feel the time is right to begin coming home to church.

Now we ask you to trust us even more. We are not abandoning our safety measures or guidelines. Masks are still worn. Temps are still taken. Social Distancing, though altered a bit for the fully vaccinated, is still being followed. We will continue to do our best to keep everyone safe.

Truthfully, it will be odd to gather in larger numbers. After a year of not seeing one another, we struggle with sitting together. The worries of the year do not fade so easily. And there is the new found skill of recognizing one another from the eyes up! Name tags will be needed again. We are looking forward to the day when we can start to gather after worship for refreshments. That is still a long way off, but the tunnel is at least coming into view.

This is a long way round to try to encourage us to come together again. It will take some getting used to, but it's kind of like riding a bike. Once you start to pedal, it all comes back to you :) Trust me! I hope to see you soon.

Political or Prophetic?

I have had some disturbing conversations with folks recently who are ready to cash it in, as far as church goes. The reasons are simple, people are tired of hearing all the bad stuff that is going on in the world. Amen! It is expressed to me that some folks are just tired. Amen again! After the past five years of crisis moments, we are left empty and wondering if it is all worth it. Amen times three!

But (and this is a big one) what do we do when the Gospel and life intersect? Do we not examine our communities and reflect on what the Gospel is commenting on? These are tough questions for us to ponder.

Often though, I hear the intersections of Justice and life described only as political concerns, not faith concerns. For the life of me, I am unable to say these events are NOT faith questions as well as POLICY ones. I feel that, often, they are so intricately interwoven we cannot separate them without destroying the whole cloth. Where I see prophetic, others are seeing political. Most often that statement is used to push away the concerns of Covenant health and turn away from relationship responsibilities. That is happening now.

So, I have come to language which describes what is happening in my life and ministry with you all. I have found that when these elements blend (Gospel and politics) I have found a prophetic moment is presented. There are few who doubt that bad things are taking place in our society. Do we ignore them? Do we engage them? For me, it depends on what the scriptures are saying to us AND what the Spirit is urging us to do.

As for me, I took vows to be a prophetic voice among God's people. The role of prophet is to name

the brokenness within the community of faith as it relates to their Covenant with God. That role does not ever change. I also remember being told by Dr. Ann Johnston, Professor of Old Testament Studies at Bangor Theological Seminary, that the covenant community usually reacted with hostility and violence toward prophets. Great! It led to many of the prophets on ancient times either to be banished from the community or murdered for telling truth to power. Great!

Some folks are concerned that I am too political in the pulpit when I am addressing prophetic concerns. I get it, the two can seem to be one much of the time. However, the bible is a political statement. Jesus spoke truth to power about the state of affairs in the Temple community and the life of Israel as they related to God. Things were broken, people were doing nothing for the oppressed, Jesus spoke to that brokenness. Jesus died for that, as prophets before him had. Jesus commissioned his followers to continue speaking truth. The message and ministry did not stop.

As part of Lenten Study some have engaged this year, we are working through a book by William Willimon entitled, "Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross." As part of the discourse on John 19:30, "It Is Finished", Willimon writes, "I confess that when I think of my church family, the Methodists (we can include UCC as well), at worship, the image that pops up in my mind is that of a group of people who come to church with notepads in order to get our assignment for the week.

"This week, church, work on your racism, your sexism, and your manners. Come back next week, I'll give you another assignment, says the preacher. No wonder we leave worship more depressed and burdened than when we arrived. It's all about us. *It's up to us to settle the accounts between us and God or they won't be paid. It's all about us.*" (My emphasis) (Pg. 66)

What the preacher in this story addresses are prophetic AND political issues. The church has its work to do and the government theirs. However, the church often is the conscience, that little voice perched on one shoulder, which speaks prophetic truth into the ear of politicians. Personally, I feel they have stopped listening, but the people haven't! An important bridge for me is that we are not being blamed for the message, but we are being asked to examine our role in it, whether we have acted on what we know the need to be.

I am tired too, but my question is, if we stop hearing the prophetic message, how well are we living our Covenant relationship with God? If something is wrong, should we turn the channel to cartoons and while the hours away? Are we supposed to stop hearing the voice of prophetic truth? We are tired of crisis mode. I am too. Perhaps we can switch gears into a place where we repair the breaches we find. Perhaps we can hear the prophetic voice and turn back to God.

I have felt less need to be so insistent in prophetic messaging these days. I don't feel that the needs have changed, nor the intersections with the Gospel, but perhaps we are coming closer to our prophetic role being accomplished. What do you think?

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

Where do we go from here? It has been over a year since we have been able to “throw wide” the doors and worship in the ways we enjoy. At our March 16 meeting, the Leadership Team voted to further expand in-person worship. With more and more people becoming fully vaccinated, we took another baby step toward returning to “normal” worship. We will still be wearing masks, social distancing, taking temperatures, requiring people to sign in (just in case we must do some contact tracing), and limiting social interactions within the sanctuary.

No fellowship time yet, but that could become a possibility soon. ***If only we had a Fellowship Team Lead to get us set and ready to go when the time comes.*** 🐦 🐦 🐦

Last month, I gave a shout out to Guy Greenfield and Dick Michael for spreading landscaping stone in the church flower beds. I understand that Harry Hinrichs also helped with this project. Belated thanks to you, Harry.

I hope you enjoyed the new member bios in last month's Beacon. This month, snowbirds Carol Nickerson and Donna and Jay Sidmore are sharing their stories.

Carol Nickerson

I was born and raised in Philadelphia, where I was an elementary school teacher. Currently I divide my time between my home on Cape Cod and Punta Gorda. On the Cape, I am a member of the Federated Church of Orleans, a Congregational UCC church and have joined this congregation as an associate member. I am semi-retired but continue to work when I'm home as a front desk clerk, two days a week. My husband, Tom, and I moved to Punta Gorda in September of 2019 after living in several other Florida locations including St. Petersburg, South Pasadena, Sun City Center, and Key West. Tom passed away in December 2020. My rescue fur baby, Carmelita, and I love living in Punta Gorda. She is a Havanese and the light of my life.

I enjoy walking to town and the library, attending shows at the Gulf Theatre, and cooking. I would like to thank the members of the CUCC-PG for welcoming me into your church family. From the first service I attended, even before we relocated here, people have been friendly and supportive. A special thanks to Evie Swinamer, who invited me to coffee time and made me feel so welcome, and our pastor, Mike Ford, for hosting a grief support group which I am currently attending. I look forward to many spiritually fulfilling years as a member of this congregation.



Donna and Jay (Earl) Sidmore



Donna and Jay are retired snowbirds who escape the ice and snow of Aurora, Illinois, every winter to enjoy the sun and warmth of Florida. Jay enjoyed Punta Gorda so much while visiting friends in 2007 that he decided it was the perfect place for a winter home. After their marriage in 2013, they have happily made the trek together.

Education:

Donna - Bachelor of Music, Northwestern University, 1970; studied Interior Design at Harrington College of Design, 1974-1976

Jay - BA, Northern Iowa University, 1959; MA in Education, Northern Illinois, 1972

Former occupations:

Donna - Interior Design

Jay - Middle School teacher

Personal:

Donna's son Reid, wife Gena and Donna's granddaughter Isabel live in Virginia.

Donna and Jay share their home with Murphy, the dachshund, and Carly, the calico cat.

They share a love of fishing and travel north to Canada in the summer for Northwoods fishing trips.

Donna and Jay feel so fortunate to have found the CUCC-PG. Although they've been attending for a few years, they're happy to officially make it their church family. Donna especially enjoys sharing her love of music as a member of our choir.

Easter blessings to all. Hope to see you soon!

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Now that the Endowment Team is at full strength, it is time for our Team's snow-bird contingent to head back north for the summer. However, we will all stay in contact via email or other electronic means.

Your Endowment Fund is invested in a portfolio held by Vanguard. A recent development is our ability to deposit checks to our Vanguard account. This seemingly easy process has presented some problems in the past. However, we can now receive contributions to the Endowment Fund via designated contributions made in the Sunday offering, or mailed or hand delivered to the Church office. Checks can be made out to "CUCC", but the memo line on the check, or an attached note, should indicate "Endowment Fund". We can then use a mobile phone app, take a photo of the check and fill out the simple online form, and make a direct electronic deposit to Vanguard. This will allow us to accept Endowment Fund contributions at any time!

If you are connected with or volunteer at an organization that might be considered for Endowment Fund support, please contact me or any team member.

SCHOLARSHIP TEAM – Kathy Frantish, Chair

Twenty-nine applications have been received from Charlotte High School, and we have narrowed these down to 12 students that we will interview. There are 4 from the Scholarship Team that will conduct the interviews using the list of questions the team compiled. Once we make a determination of who the recipients will be, we will determine how the \$8000 we have will be split. Congregants are welcome to contribute to this fund at any time. Checks can be sent to the church office, and please denote on them that they are for the Scholarship Fund. They will be added to your yearly donations. Let us invest in our future and help these very ambitious students reach their goals.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Mike Robinson

Many, if not most now, have had our second "jabs" and can see light at the end of this tunnel of Covid Gloom. Soon we will be back worshipping together just like the "Good Old Days." (Somehow that expression rings more true with each passing year....)

Good News on the financial front this month. Receipts in March were very generous (over \$ 27,000) and for the First Quarter of the year we are thriving. Notably we have received the following Missions donations:

One Great Hour of Sharing.	\$ 1,225
Veterans of the Cross	250
Paul Simpson Music Ministry.	250
Immokalee Fair Housing	50
Short Sets	<u>50</u>
	\$ 1,825

In addition, the church has recently made the following Social Justice contributions to two very worthy causes:

Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance.	\$ 2,000
RIP Medical Debt.*	<u>1,100</u>
	\$ 3,100

*An organization dedicated to retiring medical debt for poor folks and those who may be insolvent

Kudos to our Social Justice Team !

We have just initiated a review of our UCC insurance policy, the premium of which went up this year by some 25%. Melissa and I met yesterday with a representative of Church Mutual Insurance Company. Both Pastor Mike and I have related to the Leadership Team how we were able to save premium dollars by insuring with them instead of the UCC Insurance Board. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



Happy Easter to all! He is Risen! It is so good to see so many in the congregation on a regular basis. Prayers that we are able to continue this and open for more in the coming months.

The Leadership Team has decided that April 18th be Volunteer Appreciation Sunday. (more details to come) There are so many in our congregation who offer their services on a regular basis, we are so thankful for them and all the work they do. There is so much of it. Here is a list of those who give freely of their time to the church, thank you to all of you!

Here is a list in no particular order of those who give their time to the church.

If I've missed any I sincerely apologize, please email me so I can get you on the list for April 18th.

Melissa Brown, Dick Michael, Michael Robinson, Bill Colson, Bil Tucker, Judy Minier, Elden Wick, Kathy Frantish, Bill Klossner, Kathy Reed, Emily Klossner, Mary Cassidy Anger, Kathy Rivadeneira,

Kevin Rivadeneira, Lucia Rivadeneira, Ana Rivadeneira, Lee Swift, Linda Greenfield, Guy Greenfield, Susan James, Nadine Somerfield, Myra Nagel, Linda Weaver, Glenn Weaver, M. E. Steele-Pierce, Neoma Remiger, Susann Luckenbach, Clif and Cindy Trudeau, Charlie and Carol Salisbury, Beverly Honkola, Mary Ellen Nielsen, Joanne Arvid, Sandy Nogaj, Jean and Bill Ringelstein, Carol Schmuhl, Evie Swinamer, Diane Wick, Darcy Hall, Jean Mann, Donna Sidmore, Olin and Joan Lyons, Jerry Oscarson, Deb Grenzow, Dennis Danner, Barb Smith and Jan Tulk.

Many thanks to all who donated short sets for the Baker School. We needed 100 sets and we received that plus some extras! We couldn't have done it without you.



PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Jan Tulk, Chair

My name is Janis Tulk. I have been a member of this church since 2010. I have served in four different positions on the Leadership Team since then. I was also on the committee to change from the Church Board to the Leadership Team mode. Singing in the choir has been one of my main joys up until the pandemic. I am now wearing a new hat as the Chair for the Pastoral Relations Team. The other team members are Carol Schmuhl, Bill Ringelstein, Barb Smith, and Lee Swift. They will introduce themselves in future newsletters, so everyone gets a chance to know us, if you don't already. Please feel free to approach any of us with your concerns in the future.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



No report this month.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY

Charles Wesley wrote this hymn in 1739, less than a year after his Aldersgate conversion. It was first sung in the Foundry Meeting House, an old iron foundry in London that Wesley converted to religious purposes.

Wesley's original version had eleven stanzas but did not have the Alleluias that distinguish it today. Some modern hymnals include this hymn without the Alleluias (and sometimes without the verse that starts "Christ the Lord is Risen Today"). There are at least three different hymn tunes associated with that version: "Orientis Partibus," "Savannah," and "Resurrexit."

It is possible to confuse this hymn with "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today." The two hymns are different, but the first lines are similar. No serious musician will be confused by the similarity, but most people in the pews are not serious musicians.

I have not been able to determine which tune Wesley used with this hymn, but it was not the "Easter Hymn" tune that we associate with it today. "Easter Hymn" comes from the book, *Lyra Davidica*, published in 1708. In that book, "Easter Hymn" is paired with "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" rather than this hymn (see, I told you it was confusing).

Some hymnals include this hymn with the tune "Llanfair," a tune written by Robert Williams (1781-1821), a blind basket weaver from the Isle of Anglesey in Wales. Williams composed tunes and dictated them to a scribe. "Llanfair" is an abbreviated form for the name of a Welsh village with a very long Welsh name, which means "Church of St. Mary in the hollow of white hazel near the rapid whirlpool of the Church of St. Tysilio by the red cave."

Some hymns perfectly capture the spirit of their season, and that is true of this hymn. Both hymn tunes associated with this hymn ("Easter Hymn" and "Llanfair") have strong, driving rhythms that make us want to "raise the rafters" with joyful singing. The first line, "Christ the Lord is risen today," sets the tone and tells us what we are celebrating. "Raise your joys and triumphs high," suggests how to celebrate. The Alleluias soar.

The hymn portrays not only the resurrection, but also the crucifixion. It tells us that "Love's redeeming work is done, Fought the fight, the battle won." It says, "Death in vain forbids him rise." But the resurrection is the dominant theme, as we would expect in an Easter hymn. (NOTE: The words vary from hymnal to hymnal.)

But the hymn that we have today is quite different from the one that Charles Wesley wrote. The original hymn had no Alleluias. It seems as if the hand of God directed what came next. Someone whose name has been lost in time decided to set the words to the tune that we now use—a tune by a composer whose name has also been lost in time. But the words didn't fit the tune, so he added the Alleluias to make it fit. The perfect Easter hymn, then, came into being through the work of three

different people who probably never met. It is unlikely that any of the three had any idea how much their hymn would add to our celebration of Easter.

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

Book Talk Tea will be on Friday April 9 at noon in Gilchrist Park by the gazebo. Please bring a lawn chair and brown bag lunch. Masks will be worn, and social distancing practiced. See everyone there!

Thanks to Bill and Neoma Remiger for the book donation. For James Patterson and Stuart Woods fan there are some new books on display. Please check out the "New Arrivals" section in the library. Happy reading!

BUTTERFLY GARDEN – Bill & Hazel Klossner

Caterpillars, chrysalises and butterflies, Oh my! Far less frightening than lions and tigers and bears, but something that will bring beauty to our church property.

As the design for the beautiful new front entryway emerged, it was clear that the planting area to the right of the doors was the perfect place for something other than bushes. Because I have the privilege of serving as the President of the Board at the Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens, where we opened a butterfly pavilion last summer, an idea was born.

Hazel and I proposed to church leadership the planning and funding of a butterfly attracting floral garden in that space. Not only would the flowers provide a rainbow of color against the building, but what better symbol for the church but the resurrection image of the transformation of caterpillars to butterflies. Gratefully, the leadership agreed and now the flowers are planted.

The caterpillars and chrysalises have been ordered from a Florida company and will be delivered the middle of April. That will give us "ready-made" occupant of the plantings.

If you are not familiar with butterfly attracting plants, there are two types needed to support the life cycle of these beautiful creatures. **Host plants** are needed because they provide the appropriate and specific site for the laying of eggs and feeding of caterpillars. Different types of butterflies and caterpillars want particular plants and will only lay eggs on those plants, so the developing caterpillars won't have to travel far for food.

Once the butterflies emerge, they require **Nectar plants** for their source of food. So, a butterfly garden requires both types for a successful garden.

Because caterpillars are voracious eaters they prepare to transition to chrysalis and butterfly forms, many of the host plants will be replaced on a regular basis, so if you pass by and see plants that look ugly and eaten up, that's a good thing!

In future newsletters, I'll share with you the specific plants that are in the gardens and the caterpillars and butterflies they attract. It is our hope that church members and friends will enjoy this addition to our property as we continue our Love for the Environment, one of the 3 Great Loves of the UCC.

I must thank members of the Peace River Butterfly Society for their guidance and encouragement in the planning of the garden.

Blessings, Bill & Hazel Klossner

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

No report this month.



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.

2021 CHURCH ENVELOPES are available in the Church Office.

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	5	Bill Colson
	6	Dick Tulip
	7	Melissa Brown
	11	Ginny Bowker
	15	Barbara Campbell
	17	Teen Mendillo
	17	Juanita Maher
	22	Carolyn Kvam-Hansman
	23	Lou Stayner
	23	Guy Greenfield
	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 does not happen again: office@puntagorda-ucc.com