

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



October 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

BACK TO "NORMAL"

So, I held off writing this piece until after worship took place on September 20th. Why? Because it was the first Sunday when we had a limited number of folks back in the sanctuary for worship. We had stopped gathering in person in March. We had been having virtual worship, in a few different forms, through the end of Lent, through Holy Week, Pentecost and beyond. Each week I had been "pretending" like our sanctuary was as full as it normally would be at the height of our In-Season times. We would have had around one hundred sixty in worship each week. Instead, we had empty chairs and a camera. The flurry of events we would have normally had were cancelled. Silence.

This led us to improvise, something not many churches can do quickly. We began having worship on Face Book live, powered by an iPad. When we first started, the Wi-Fi would quit on us. It seems that every other church in the United States was having virtual worship precisely at the same time we were. The internet couldn't handle the traffic! We debated going to a Saturday service, or recording on Fridays and going "live" on Sundays. This would have taken away the spontaneity of getting live Concerns and Joys, so we decided to not do a recorded service. Then we had to deal with the usually live portions of scripture and liturgy readings. So, folks had to record and email their pieces to Kevin. We adapted and did a pretty good job at offering a worship service on Sunday morning. Over time, we upgraded our technology, with a matching grant from the Florida Conference, to allow us to live stream on YouTube and Face Book simultaneously. We were rolling!

I want to stop for a second to acknowledge a great group of partners that made all this happen. Kevin Rivadeneira assessed what we would need to be able to offer a higher quality technological

platform to have seamless streaming. He partnered with Pro Audio, the company who installed our current service, to acquire the right pieces to make the media magic happen. He spent countless hours troubleshooting the system and learning how it worked. He devised ways to hook in the audio system to the video streams. He wired the “Cave” with a hardwired cable to have direct access to the broadband signal. Kevin’s go to phrase was “no worries” and he proved that.

Next Susan “Skippy” Luckenbach had to deal with the bugs of going live on the internet and changing screens and cameras on cue while Kevin turned microphones on and off at the appropriate times. When we first started, it was like watching a ballet in the Cave as Susann and Kevin switched places and tried not to run into one another. Susann had to deal with video links that sometimes were balky and needed to be spoken to “sternly” in order to work. The computer system didn’t always like the live streaming and would crash in the middle of the service. Interestingly, this usually happened during the sermon. The problem would be fixed before the sermon ended and usually folks never noticed anything different. To top things off, one of the hard drives on the computer decided to quit. Unfortunately, it was the one with the stored materials used to put together the media product for worship. Consequently, most of the library for hymns was lost. That didn’t stop Kevin and Susann. They are rebuilding the library from scratch!

I mentioned the pieces that needed to be recorded every Sunday. Lucia and Ana Rivadeneira stepped up to continue the pieces they regularly contributed before we went virtual. This was on top of all the schoolwork and extracurricular activities they were still trying to accomplish virtually for school. It was like adding another layer of homework for them to accomplish. They made it work and still do while continuing to attend classes virtually from home and keep up with teams they are a part of.

Probably the hardest part to arrange are the long list of folks willing to sit in front of a smart phone or iPad to record the scripture readings for each Sunday. You may know there are two each week. We have had an intrepid group of folks volunteer without complaints (or at least to me ;). For a while I was driving Mary crazy in the office, okay more than usual, with changes to the liturgy and getting all the names in the right place. Then Isaac had to deal with losing all the music he had been working on with the Choir in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Instead, he needed to come up with alternatives, which sometimes meant doing the music himself in place of the Choir. He had some help from congregation members who stepped in to offer pieces themselves. There were the times that Melissa filled in when Isaac needed to be away for family obligations or just some down time from the stress of being church in these times. To ALL of these folks I offer a LARGE Thank You! We are a good team!

Now that all of those changes have been figured out, we decided to try a “soft” opening of the church to outside groups and our congregation for Sunday worship. This involved the Leadership Team figuring out all the moving parts. What protocols needed to be in place to ensure safety and cleanliness were observed? In essence, we needed to figure out how to reversal all of the changes we had put into place and ADD some more! In addition, our custodial service left us, so we were searching for a replacement. Thankfully, Guy stepped forward and offered to fill the void until we could hire another firm to clean the church! What a lifesaver. Once the LT had the pieces in place, we needed to invite the congregation back. Of course, we only have limited space to offer, so we had to

ask folks to make reservations.

This past Sunday, we had fourteen worshipers and four staff in our sanctuary for the ten o'clock service. After six months of just the four of us in the church, it was weird and delightful to have others with us! I actually could once again look folks in the eye while leading worship. Isaac had actual people to offer sacred music to in person! We needed to remember that we still had a virtual congregation to respond to and lead. We still had M.E. Steele-Pierce posting the liturgy on Face Book and monitoring the comments during the service to pass on prayer requests. It certainly was a situation of divided attentions. Usually, I am not that great at that part, but on Sunday it worked. I was told that I laughed a lot more and looked around the room more. It was like coming home from a long vacation. We will keep the virtual experience going as long as people are joining us, forever, I hope. We will gather in person to Worship too, forever, I hope. We will still be trying to work out all the "kinks" of being in two places, not forever, I hope.

I look at these experiences and see how we have adapted and grown in these past six months. At first, there were a lot of doubts, but none expressed out loud. There were a lot of changes to adjust to, something we just LOVE doing. In the midst of all these hurdles, we are pushing forward on our Capital Campaign and building projects. Hopefully, we will have the front of the church redesign finished and be welcoming folks through our brand-new front entrance. It really is going to be quite lovely. We will move on to installing a new all abilities bathroom as the next step. Thank Kathy Frantish and the Team she leads for this.

We are taking into stride a lot of change. I am not the least bit surprised at how well we have and are handling it. This is a testament to how deeply we feel for our church. It's not a building, it's a home for us on Sundays and beyond. Thank you to everyone who is working so hard to fit all the pieces together. We can be proud if all that has been and will be accomplished! Peace!



FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson

Here it is, the last week of September. We have dodged several named storms and hurricanes, been in more rain showers than normal, and are experiencing a slight moderation of temperature during the daytime. So, what other CUCC news has happened since the last newsletter? Well.....you may already know most of the “church” news, here is what has been happening with the Leadership Team.

The LT voted in late August to reopen the church for in-person worship, to begin September 20th. This was to include our tenant groups, as well. The LT approved mandatory guidelines for protection of the attendees, based on the CDC guidelines for group assemblies. We published our guidelines to our congregational membership, and to our tenants. Since the initial opening attendance is to be by reservation, with restricted total attendees, we opened the first two worship services with 14 and about 23 attendees. Our tenants are allowed to resume meetings using our current guidelines. They are to meet using the sanctuary for their meeting space, without refreshments, and adhere to our guidelines for maximum attendees and wearing of masks during their presence in the building. They are not allowed to rearrange the placement of the chairs, which limit proximity to adjacent attendees. To date, only one group has resumed weekly/daily meetings. To enable the resumption of worship/meeting, a Janitorial Service had to be secured and started. Burch Cleaning Solutions started service the week of 9/22. To reach our members who normally worship via the broadcasts on Facebook Live and YouTube, the online worship broadcasts will continue indefinitely.

T'is the season.... Election season. All the Election Campaign ads currently on radio and TV should remind us that it is time to think about filling Leadership Team positions at the next Congregational Meeting. According to Pastor Mike and Mary Tulip, we will need nine new members for the Leadership Team, in various positions. And, before that, three new members for the Nominating Team, to present the candidates to the CUCC membership for a vote during the January Congregational Meeting. If you are contacted to consider serving on the Nominating Team, and or the Leadership Team, please prayerfully consider and agree to serve to the best of your ability.

Before concluding this short article, let me offer my thanks to Guy Greenfield, for his much-appreciated efforts each week to clean the church. He has cleaned the restrooms, emptied the trash cans, vacuumed the carpet, mopped the floors, weekly since early June. And, stripped and rewaxed the tile flooring throughout the building. Did I mention the chair rail in Faith Hall? And relocating the outside plantings prior to the beginning of construction for the new stairs and ramp in front of the church. Look around the building and grounds, and you will see Guy's handiwork. I for one, am especially grateful and thankful for his efforts. If you concur, please tell him.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN - Kathy Frantish, Chair

We are excited to announce the construction project for our new front entrance should be completed in the next 2 weeks. Painting has started, block caps need to be installed, and the railing put in. All of this is possible because of the generous pledges that have been made to our Capital Campaign. Included are a few pictures of the new entrance, and I will continue to share more pictures as the project progresses. Stay tuned and Thank you to everyone for your support.





ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

The Endowment Team has been tasked by the Leadership Team to establish a Scholarship Program as support to graduating seniors who might not otherwise be able to attend schools and training after high school. Funding would come as distributions from your Endowment Fund, and a separate Scholarship Team would deal with the administrative functions.

The Scholarship Team would initially consist of 7 members with representatives from Endowment, Leadership, Social Justice and our congregation. Perhaps this is something you would be interested in exploring. If so, just let me know (941-637-9979) and I'll be pleased to fill you in on how you might be a part of this important outreach.



TREASURER'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

September 2020 Treasurer's Report

Financial Results	August 2020	2020 YTD	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$10,557	\$120,437	\$116,400
Expenses	12,568	106,144	116,400
Donations Above/ Below Expenses	-\$2,011	\$14,293	\$0

Financial Results	August 2019	2019 YTD	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$7,351	\$102,165	\$101,000
Expenses	12,828	103,782	107,710
Donations Above/ Below Expenses	-\$5,477	-\$1,617	-\$6,710

2020 versus 2019 (Better/Worse)	August	YTD
Donations and Other Income	\$3,206	\$18,272
Expenses	260	-2,362
Donations Above/Below Expenses	\$3,406	\$15,910

August expenses exceeded our donations by \$2,011, but we still have a YTD surplus of \$14,293 to get us through to the end of the year. We are ahead of last year's August YTD net of donations over expenses by \$15,910. Donations YTD exceed 2019 YTD by \$18,272. We have the most awesome members!



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.



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Communion: Oct.4

Nov.1-Daylight Saving Time Ends

Dec.6

Worship: In person worship resumed on September 20 and we had 14 attendees, plus 4 staff at that service. We also had 101 attendees on Facebook and 25 attendees on YouTube. Praise the Lord, His Word is spreading!

Education: In September, our nation mourned the loss of a Supreme Court justice, Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Ruth was known for fighting for equality--(Pastor Mike's sermon 9/20- God's equal love and grace for everyone) --especially for women's rights. Here are a few of RGB's famous quotes that attest to her high moral character.

"My mother told me to be a lady. And for her, that meant be your own person, be independent."

"Fight for the things you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

"We are a nation made strong by people like you." (new citizens at a Naturalization ceremony)

"When a thoughtless or unkind word is spoken, best tune out."

If you'd like to learn more about the diminutive lady with a big heart, two movies were produced in 2018 and are now available on either Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Prime Video.

RGB is a documentary and *On the Basis of Sex* is a biographical legal drama, starring Felicity Jones as Ginsberg.

Social Justice: Again, a hearty thank you to the three granddaughters of Lori and Jerry Larson, who have picked up the cry/ gauntlet from their grandparents for changes to save and protect our environment for future(their) generations! As Pastor Mike mentioned in his September 20 remarks, we are in a Climate CRISIS!!! These young ladies and others give us "grand" hopes for our loved ones' future.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

When it comes to church worship music, I have particular tastes. I'm a millennial, but I love church pipe organs and classical music. I prefer Victorian hymns and Stuart Townend songs over Hillsong and Bethel. I dislike "modern renditions" of old hymns, where the melody is slightly tweaked or a new chorus is added in between original verses. A simple piano, organ, or acoustic guitar accompaniment to "Be Thou My Vision" will do just fine; an EDM version of it sends me for earplugs.

I like to hear the voices of the congregation singing; I like choirs and four-part harmonies; I like Isaac Watts, Fanny Crosby, and a bellowing Bach toccata for an organ postlude.

Different Preferences, Same God

We shouldn't let our worship preferences get in the way of our worship participation.

What I realized is this: We may have different worship-style comfort zones, but we're worshipping the same God. That's why, whether we're Presbyterian, Catholic or Pentecostal, we shouldn't let our worship preferences get in the way of our worship participation.

God is too glorious to not worship enthusiastically, even if the style of worship stretches us beyond our comfort zone.

Don't Just Tolerate. Participate.

Putting aside preferences and embracing common, unified, God-centered worship, however uncomfortable it may be, is part of what it means to follow Jesus together. Worship in a "just me and Jesus" sense may be more comfortable, but it's not the biblical ideal. Corporate worship is the ideal, and that is always going to be a bit messy.

Instead of lamenting that something isn't our preference and folding our arms in protest, perhaps we can humble ourselves and participate anyway. Perhaps we can be open-minded to the diverse ways God's people worship him, and not just tolerate but even participate in this diversity, learning to love it.

Putting aside personal preferences and embracing common, unified, God-centered worship, however uncomfortable it may be, is part of what it means to follow Jesus together.

What would happen if we put aside our pickiness and just sang our hearts out?

Glorify God by Submitting to Others

We glorify God by loving and serving each other in the messiness of worship. This is what Paul tried to communicate to the Corinthian believers, whose worship was often selfish and inconsiderate of others in the community (e.g., eating food sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8 or Lord's Supper abuses in 1 Corinthians 11). A humble and submissive posture is the heart and soul of Christian worship, because it reflects the deferential character of Christ himself. If worship is ultimately about angled-mirror reflection of God's glory, both upward to him and outward to the world, then the self-giving, others-focused love of our worship is a huge part of this; a love that has no problem bowing the head in deference, opening the hands in release, and relinquishing one's rights for the sake of the King.



STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

Our PG-CUCC initiative to support our National UCC program on STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH (STC) was completed on September 21 and an astounding donation of \$700 will be sent to our National UCC program. Thank you so much to all who contributed!!!

The STC program is a financial resource sharing effort by which all settings of the United Church of Christ join together to cooperatively build up our denomination. UCC conferences and the national office equally share the gifts given by members and friends through our local denominations. Those funds support leadership development, new church starts, youth ministry, and innovations within existing local congregations.

Stewardship is supporting the PG-CUCC reopening of our building on September 20 as we pray for and encourage conscientious following of the Safety Guidelines established. Our intent is to seek compliance by congregation members, friends, visitors and staff with the various safety-based rules to prevent COVID-19 (as well other infectious diseases) from insidiously infecting building users and tenants; thus inhibiting success in steps taken for full and intended church building use. Thank you for what you 😊 do! Be safe - Stay safe!

Finally (re: Tony Evans, author of *KINGDOM STEWARDSHIP*), “God is the owner of ALL things; You are the manager of these assets.” In Kingdom Stewardship are three distinct areas to manage, [Time](#), [Talents](#), and [Treasures](#). Since we each are apportioned these in varying degrees, seek God’s counsel and guidance in your managing skills, methods, and decisions.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – No report this month

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



Books for the 2020-2021 Reading for Renewal list are now in the library on the RFR bookshelf. Please be sure to sign out the books before you take them!

A big "Thank You" to Mary Tulip for organizing the books in my absence. Book Talk Tea is still on hiatus until January 2021.

I will be back in Florida the week of Nov 1. Look forward to seeing everyone.



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.

UPDATES:

ELAINE ERICKSON has been released from the hospital to her new home. She is very excited and enjoying her new place and feeling much better. Her new address is: 7220 South Ballpark Drive, Franklin, WI 53132.

JACKIE (SZEIFERT) CHANDLER: We received a note from Ted and Laura Lee giving us an update on Jackie. She is doing well and is very happy in her living environment. She especially enjoys the cards that all of you have been sending. They thank everyone for keeping in touch with her. They say she keeps all the cards and notes she receives with her and reads them over and over. Her address is: Jackie Chandler, Manorhouse, 13500 N. Gayton Rd., Apt. 145, Henrico, VA 23233.

Ed Schuckman: As many of you know, Ed has been at Life Care Center and will be there for awhile. One of our Caring Friends members spoke with Ed on the phone and thought he would enjoy receiving some cards and even phone calls. As visitors are not allowed at Life Care, we can keep in touch with him in this way. The address is: Life Care Center, 450 Shreve Street, Punta Gorda 33950. The phone # is 941-639-8771.



BIRTHDAYS

Oct.	5	Kathleen Reed
Oct.	8	Jean Mann
Oct.	10	Kathy Rivadeneira
Oct.	11	Cathy Ann Colson
Oct.	11	Jerry Larson
Oct.	13	Pat Blandford
Oct.	15	Ann Barker
Oct.	19	James DeGood
Oct.	19	John Schmuhl
Oct.	21	Dick Michael
Oct.	23	Jenna Klossner
Oct.	25	Kathy Frantish
Oct.	25	Bob Wood

ANNIVERSARIES

Oct.	2	Dennis & Jessica Danner
Oct.	7	Gerry & Pat Blandford
Oct.	8	Scott Anger & Mary Cassidy Anger
Oct.	14	Fred & Sally Benson Jr.
Oct.	14	Olin & Joan Lyons

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