

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



MAY 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Deeds and Actions

On the 25th of April, Good Shepherd Sunday, we encountered a passage from 1 John 3:16-24, which in part reads, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." Powerful words to the faith community. Powerful effect on the lives of faith we lead.

We have heard many times in the past few years, "thoughts and prayers" going out to those who have lost their lives from violence and disease and to their loved ones who are left to pick up the pieces of shattered lives and "move on". These platitudes always feel and are empty gestures to someone in pain. There is no assurance that another human being has empathy for what one is facing. Often times they, too, are words to deflect one from taking action.

This sacred text from 1 John shines a light on the response of a community of faith when confronted with threats and sorrow, we take action. We do not offer empty words that take no effort to offer. We do not sit wringing our hands thinking how awful it is that so many people are suffering, but instead operate in the truth that God has put a sacred trust upon us that we **MUST** act.

Now this can be challenging, but it is what communities of faith have done throughout history. When slavery was within our borders, brothers and sisters of faith spoke out and marched in streets to end this immoral practice. When Hitler was decimating whole communities of Jews, the mentally and physical challenged, Gypsies, people of color, LGBTQ or anyone else he decided was inferior, the church in Germany spoke out, the Confessing Christian movement. When land mines are left littering the country sides of war, the church speaks out for the victims. When, in our own times, people of color, LGBTQ, and those of other faiths are oppressed, the church takes to the streets to proclaim this immoral action as against God's plan for humanity. When Creation is plundered for profit and threatens lives, the church takes action. In just about every circumstance of injustice, the church takes action. It is our job!

When the Pandemic hit, our leadership needed to fashion a response. Often the actions we took to protect ourselves and others were considered an overreaction. That did not deter us from closing the church and finding another way to offer worship. One of the parts of response I asked for is that our worship service be virtual AND that it happen on Sunday morning, live. I have many colleagues who record services on Friday, edit out all the mistakes, and run it on Sunday morning. I smile when I think of how that might have worked for me. There would not be enough time to edit out the mistakes, lol! When we considered opening up for limited in person worship, we insisted that strict protocols be practiced. This was seen by colleagues as an overreaction. When we began to account for attendee's vaccination status, it was not popular with other churches in the area. All of these steps were taken deliberately to protect us and those around us from COVID-19. You know what, so far it has worked! We need to invite other faith communities to consider their actions too.

Truth and action do not always come with a guarantee of safety or comfort. In our day and age, they usually come with criticism. But I look at the alternative and have no doubt that we have done taken the right actions. This could not have been true if we were not of the same mind set. We have had no one object to the precautions we have taken. To me, that is a sign that we ALL believe in what was written in 1 John, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." God bless you all!!!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown



I am so enjoying sharing worship with more and more of our members in the sanctuary. Unfortunately, just as we start to gather anew, we will be saying goodbye to many of our members for the summer. Safe travels to all of you as you head to your summer locations. Hurry back!

I was out of town on Volunteer Sunday and hated missing the opportunity to participate. Many thanks to Isaac for "emceeing" the event and to Kathy Frantish and Mary Tulip for fellowship. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to all who give of their time and talents to support this fabulous church community.

Pastor Mike referenced in the April 25 service that the Leadership Team continues to look at ways to lessen the constraints that we have had on worship over this past year. He mentioned that we will no longer be using the pre-packaged communion supplies next Sunday (May 2). We also have discussed restarting fellowship. Having fellowship outside worked on Volunteer Sunday, but as it

gets hotter, that is not going to be an option. Currently, Faith Hall is not large enough to allow for social distancing, which is important when we are unmasking while consuming food and drink. If anyone has any suggestions, please feel free to offer up your ideas.

Following are the last of the autobiographies of the new members from February 2021. I hope you have enjoyed them.

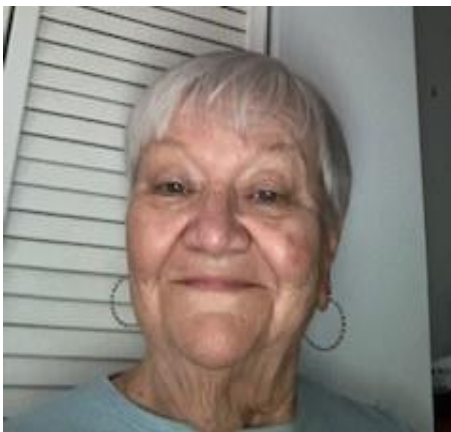
Lucia and Anamaria Rivadeneira



Ana and I have been attending the Congregational UCC in Punta Gorda since I was about two years old and since Ana was born. We have truly seen the church go through changes, we have met some of the kindest people, and they have embraced our childhood amongst all. They have watched us perform plays, dance, read, light candles, participate in Halloween parties, Easter egg hunts, Christmas pageants, Christmas Eve programs, civil rights protests (anti-gun and LGBTQ), and that's just a few. As teenagers, we have become more adept to understand the true meaning of church

community, and we have been able to apply this in our lives at school or around the community in our daily activities. We are grateful to be a part of this church and will continue (even when we are off to college) to come back and remember the life we have spent here.

Birdie Tiistola (Given name: Helen Tiistola)



About a "Bird"

I was born in a blizzard in Brocket, North Dakota (fitting for a girl of Finnish heritage) and lived there until I was graduated from Valley City State with a degree in elementary education. I taught kindergarten in Minnesota, first grade in Washington State, and then flew the coop to Florida. I married a banker/minister from St. Petersburg and lived there until January 2011 when, after teaching for 30 some years at the elementary level at the same school for almost all my teaching career, I flew off, back to North Dakota. By then I was divorced from my husband, my two sons had gone to college in Texas and were back in St. Pete, and my

daughter had graduated from FSU and was teaching middle school in Hialeah.

I couldn't take the winters in ND, so in Arizona and Florida I spent my winters and lived back in Brocket when the snow was gone. Then in 2019, I came to Punta Gorda and decided this would be my home. It is close enough to all my grandchildren and far enough away that I don't have to cook or babysit. And I love my new church!

I grew up in the church coming from a community that put the church as a center of activities. I sang in the choir, taught Sunday School, was the office girl who did the bulletins, did two summer stints at Bible Camp as assistant to the council, was Luther League officer, chaperone for summer Luther League trips after college. My ex-husband is a Baptist minister, so I was a PW (pastor's wife) for many years and learned to pray in public, raise hymns and sing gospel music with rocking and handclapping. I did foot washing every communion service and planned programs and meetings as all PWs did. Being a teacher was a big help.

I was raised by my parents to look beyond the exterior of a person and to look at their heart and soul. I am not impressed with show but with the inner being. I have some strong political views since all my family is multi-ethnic. Because I was the "white lady" in the black church, I know the feeling of being the minority. My late father-in-law, who was also a minister, would have some great conversations with me about race and life, and he would often refer to me as his black/white daughter-in-law. I have our representatives in Washington and Tallahassee on my phone contact list. My thought is "you can't complain if you aren't willing to speak up." As I have more birthdays, I am learning to appreciate where God guides me and not what people think. I hope my Parkinson's doesn't interfere with my plan to live until I am at least 95! I know God has a plan!

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Our Endowment Funds are held and invested in a portfolio managed by Vanguard, an internationally recognized banking and investment management firm of high repute. Our endowment funds are invested so that we can grow our dollars to benefit our long-term community ministry goals and efforts as a church.

A recent development in adding to these funds is our newly established ability to deposit checks quickly to our Vanguard account. This 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 and put the money to work even faster!

The Endowment Team has received two grant requests so far in 2021. We are in the process of reviewing them and waiting until we are able to make announcements of grant distribution awards to an in person live congregation as well as to our loyal and patient virtual congregation. We feel that the time to do such an announcement and presentation is fast approaching!

In the meantime, if you are connected with, or volunteer at, or know of an organization that might be eligible for Endowment Fund support as described in the following categories, please contact me or any team member.

Distributions shall be made in one or more of the following categories:

Category 1. Education

Grants or scholarships for the purpose of attending college, seminary, nursing or medical school; for church related camping or leadership conferences; or such other training which enables members of this congregation to grow in Christian faith and service to God's people.

Category 2. Community Service and Outreach

Programs and services through social service agencies, community action groups, and ecumenical agencies relating to the spiritual, social and economic needs of persons in the community the church serves.

Category 3. Wider Mission of the UCC

Providing for work of the UCC in the USA and overseas in such areas as new church development, professional leadership, educational ministries, evangelism and world mission.

Category 4. Capital Improvements (as amended 7/14/2019)

To provide for major capital improvement of facilities, building programs and debt reduction in addition to annual giving and capital campaign efforts.

SCHOLARSHIP TEAM – Kathy Frantish, Chair

I am happy to announce that we will be awarding \$8,000 to 7 Charlotte High School seniors. These students were chosen on a needs basis through applications and interviews.

The CUCC Scholarship Fund was created in September 2020. This came about from the study the Leadership Team did on the Poor People's Campaign. How can we, the Congregational United Church of Christ, make a difference in the lives of people in our community? Keeping in mind our mission and stewardship, it was decided that investing in our future and promoting the general welfare of our young talent for seniors was the path we would like to take, and an easy one to establish. So, we went to work.

The Endowment Team established a Scholarship Fund with a Statement of Purpose. It reads: *The purpose of the Scholarship Fund is to help promote a more just society by helping recipients with financial needs to further their education in ways that will ultimately enable them to better provide for themselves and their families and to participate more fully in our Democracy.* This was submitted and approved by the Leadership Team.

The Scholarship Team includes 1 person from the Endowment Team, 1 person from the Leadership Team, 1 person from Social Justice Ministry Team, and 4 people from the congregation. The Endowment Team will be responsible for filling these positions.

Funding for this is through both the Endowment Fund and the UCC Congregation.

We are very excited about awarding these 7 outstanding and deserving seniors. It has been a pleasure and honor to have these students interview with us, and the CUCC wishes them continued success as they reach their goals. Our future is brighter because of them.

Thank you to all of the team members who diligently worked with me through this process: Emily Klossner, Linda Greenfield, Kathy Rivadeneira, Lee Swift, Mary Cassidy Anger, & Susan James.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Mike Robinson

Good News this month.

Working in the business world for some 40 years before becoming an ordained minister, the “Eye on the prize” for me was always orders and sales.

Churches are not businesses, for sure; but to remain solvent, it is necessary for the Church that resources coming in (that would be people and financial support) at least equal, if not exceed, those same resources “going out.”

This last year of *Covid* has been, since 1918, a once-in-a-century people disaster. Norms of socialization, including church attendance, have been disrupted and it is hard to discern—as we stick our heads above water and survey the landscape “post *Covid*”—just how our religious institutions have weathered this scourge.

Well.... We are in good shape: Upwards of 200 views of Pastor Mike’s messages every week and in March I am very happy to report that giving exceeded budget and, annualized, put us on track to meet our 2021 year-end budget!

Hooray! Let’s keep it up, troops!

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Carol Schmuhl, Scribe



It is important that the congregation know who the members of this newly formed team are. I am Carol Schmuhl, serving as scribe for the team. You may already know me as a member of the Social Justice Ministry team and also as a sometime violin soloist. I have been a member of this church since 2006 and normally attend regularly from October to May. Last year virtual church allowed me to do that also while I was in Wisconsin for the summer—a blessing in disguise! Please be assured that each of our team is available to hear your concerns for the group to consider.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



NO REPORT THIS MONTH. BE SURE TO CHECK BACK IN JUNE

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH SPECIAL MISSION OFFERING

As we approach Pentecost May 23, 2021, how can we move from a mindset of *scarcity* to a mindset of ***abundance***?

A congregational conversation can be a way to engage us at PG-CUCC in this mindset shift. Let us continue following local health department recommendations as we gather together in service or planning church activities. We already use different technologies, such as Zoom (which also features breakout rooms to create virtual small groups).

As our groups gather, we can acknowledge that experiences like the Covid-19 Pandemic can push us into a place of scarcity thinking. But, recalling the first Pentecost story (Acts ch 2), we joyously must proclaim that God moves us to a place of abundance.

So, if you will, consider three questions:

- What has been the most challenging aspect of the pandemic so far?
- Where do I see hope amid it?
- And what have I learned about myself that I want to hold onto moving forward?

As you come to service or groupings of CUCC members, share your thoughts with a few folks on challenges confronted, how hope supported you, and what was learned from these experiences of the last year. We might even discover that we have discovered skills of more abundantly living.

CONSIDER THAT!

Listening to one another's stories helps us move as a community from **scarcity to abundance**.

That is a gift from God.

In response, please consider how you can support our United Church of Christ with abundant giving to the **Strengthen the Church** Special Mission Offering on May 23. This is a call to renewal.

Please make your donation to Strengthen the Church Special Mission Offering to Congregational United Church of Christ with a notation at the bottom as to what it is for. It can be sent to the church or left in the offering plate if you attend in-person worship.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

One of the most notable "Spirit Songs" of the twentieth century is "There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place" by African American gospel songwriter Doris Mae Akers (1923-1995). Born in Brookfield, Missouri, Ms. Akers connected with some of the most important gospel songwriters of her era until her death in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"Sweet, sweet Spirit" expresses in simple, heartfelt language the work of the Holy Spirit as it works in the life of the church. It is a fitting hymn for Pentecost Sunday or any Sunday where God's people gather to worship.

When the United Methodist Hymnal was published in 1989, "Sweet, sweet Spirit" immediately became one of the favorite new hymns, and for many congregations, it became a staple during the greeting time in worship. Because it is easily memorized, the song is often played and sung as parishioners shake hands and embrace others gathered for worship.

One of ten children, Dot Akers, as many called her, demonstrated her interest in music at the young age of six, teaching herself to play the piano by ear. By then, she had composed her first song, "Keep the fire burning in me," and by age twelve had organized a five-piece jazz band, "Dot Akers and Her Swingsters."

In 1945 Akers moved to Los Angeles where she met some of the important names in gospel music of that era, including Sallie Martin, J. Earl Hines, and Eugene Douglas Smallwood. Soon after arriving, she joined the Sallie Martin Singers as a pianist and singer, formed the Akers Singers, and established her own publishing company, Akers Music House. In 1958 Akers formed the Sky Pilot Choir, the first interracial choir in Los Angeles. This choir was devoted to African American gospel music. She formed a relationship with Manna Music in the mid-1950s, just a few years before she composed "Sweet, Sweet Spirit" in 1962.

Many famous singers have recorded Dot Akers' songs, including George Beverly Shea, Mahalia Jackson, the Roberta Martin Singers, Aretha Franklin, and the Stamps-Baxter Quartet. Other collaborations included recordings for the Gaither label and appearances at their concerts and TV productions. In the late 1990s she was featured in Bill Gaither's gospel videos "Old Friends" and "Turn Your Radio On."

Lindsay Terry comments on the origins of this song in an interview with Doris Akers in the late 1980s: "[S]he related to me that one Sunday morning in 1962, while directing the Sky Pilot Choir, she said to her singers, 'You are not ready to go in.' She didn't believe they had prayed enough! They were accustomed to spending time with her in prayer before the service, asking God to bless their songs. She said, 'I feel that prayer is more important than great voices.' They had already prayed, but this particular morning she asked them to pray again, and they did so with renewed fervor. "As they prayed, Doris began to wonder how she could stop this wonderful prayer meeting. She said, 'I sent word to the pastor letting him know what was happening. He was waiting in the auditorium, wanting to start the service. Finally, I was compelled to say to the choir, We have to go. I hate to leave this room and I know you hate to leave, but you know we do have to go to the service. But there is such a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place.'"

The phrase stayed with her and she wrote the song the next day. Matthew 3:16-17 inspired the specific line "Sweet heavenly Dove." This text focuses on the baptism of Jesus when "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

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

I want to thank everyone that attended our "modified" Book Talk Tea this season at Gilchrist Park. It was wonderful to reconnect with members of our group and to have great discussions about all the books we read during lockdown.

The November Book Talk Tea will be Friday Nov 12 in the church library. I will send out a notice when it gets closer.

I will e-mail everyone the new Reading for Renewal list when it is available.

Thank you, Bill and Neoma Remiger for your generous book donations. Please check out the "New Arrivals" section in the library. We have new books by Jodi Piccoult, John Grisham and James Patterson as well as some new Social Justice books.

Sue Blaisdell will be covering for me during the summer while I am in North Carolina.

I hope everyone has a wonderful and safe summer. See you in November! Keep reading!!!

CALLED TO CARE/CARING FRIENDS - Neoma Remiger

The Called to Care/Caring Friends group consists of Linda Greenfield, Darcy Hall and Neoma Remiger. At this time, we are not doing personal visitations due to Covid 19, however, we do take requests for prayers, phone calls and continue to mail out get well, thinking of you and sympathy cards. If you know of someone who is in need of prayer or a phone call, please call the church office and Mary Tulip will get the names to us.

Speaking of cards, we can always use extra cards (birthday, anniversary, get well or sympathy) which you might have and are not using. This helps to cut down on expenses. Mary Tulip has been sending out birthday and anniversary cards to members and can always use extra cards. You can drop them off at the church office. They will be appreciated. Thank you!

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

Congregational United Church of Christ'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.

April's Social Justice Moment focused on Earth Day, a reminder of Psalm 26:11-12. "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

The United Church of Christ has long been a leader in the environmental justice movement. We invite you to read UCC's newsletter The Pollinator for news, inspiration, and resources for ways we as a church and as individuals can, together, care for all Creation. Find The Pollinator here: <http://bit.ly/UCCPollinator>.

The Social Justice Ministry committee is looking for new voices to join our team. Year rounders or snowbirds welcome! Please write or call any of us: Co-facilitators Glenn Weaver or M.E. Steele-Pierce, Mary Cassidy-Anger, Jerry Larson, Lori Larson, Betty Pitcher, Elizabeth Pitcher, Carol Schmuhl, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick.



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 still 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

May	7	Joan Lyons
	8	Scott Anger
	9	David Cramer
	10	Easton Klossner
	11	Brian Rowlands
	17	Carol Salisbury
	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 does not happen again: office@puntagorda-ucc.com