

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



**NOVEMBER 2021**

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

### Restoration

Recently, we encountered in the Gospel of Mark the story of Bartimaeus, 10:46-52. This is a fascinating story first because of the details we are given. Whenever names of places and people are included in the Gospel accounts, we are supposed to take particular notice. It means that the story isn't a generic teaching moment, it is a life description of someone who can be placed in time and identity. We know that Bartimaeus means Son of Timaeus. We know he was at the gates of Jericho, meaning outside the city. We know he is blind. We know he is a beggar, We know he has a cloak. We know he could once see. We know all of the personal aspects of his life and what his encounter with Jesus changed about his life.

Before we get to Barimaeus, I think it is pertinent to look at another healing of a blind man that happens in Mark 8:22-26. Scholars think that this healing is a "bookend" of the Bartimaeus healing.

In this first story of healing, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He is traveling through a fairly safe community, one which had a Jewish population in it. No name is given to the man. He could be any one of us. We know that this man lived in Bethsaida, most likely as a part of a Jewish community. This man was also a beggar. When Jesus is passing by, we are told that "some people" brought him to see Jesus. Jesus leads the man out of the village to a private place. He knows the man's need and proceeds to spit in the dirt, make a mud plaster, put it on the man's eyes and tells him to wash it off. When he had, Jesus asks him if he can see. The man replies that he can see, but everything is distorted. Jesus then lays his hands on the man's eyes. The man's sight is restored immediately. Jesus sent him on his way after telling him not to go even into his village.

Bartimaeus is outside the gates of a substantially populated city, Jericho. He is alone, begging on the side of the road. He hears that Jesus is passing by and calls out for mercy from the "Son of David" a Messianic title. The people tell him to shut up and to stop bothering Jesus. He calls out even louder, ignoring the crowd. Jesus stops and ask for him to come to him. Bartimaeus throws off his only possession and his identity. He goes to Jesus. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants. He replies, "I want to see again." Jesus tells him to go, his faith has made him whole. Bartimaeus follows Jesus, "on the way."

How are these two stories different? In the first healing, the man is part of the community, but

anonymous. He has people who want to care for him. They bring him to Jesus. Jesus needs two tries to restore the man's sight. Jesus tells the man to avoid people who know him and to go his way. Bartimaeus is known, but without a community. He is alone when he encounters Jesus. The people with Jesus sternly order him to be silent when he asks Jesus for mercy (the people around him show him none). He throws aside his only possession (identity), his cloak to come to Jesus. Jesus does not touch him. His sight is restored immediately. Jesus tells him to go, but Bartimaeus becomes a part of Jesus' community.

How are they the same? Both men are blind. Both are beggars. Both encounter Jesus. Both are healed.

What strikes me is how the communities respond to the needs of both men. In one, the man is helped to come to Jesus. He is in the midst of a community that feels for his plight and believes that Jesus can heal the man. For Bartimaeus, the community pushed him aside. They told him to shut up when he asked Jesus for help. They stood between Jesus and Bartimaeus and did not care about his restoration. The responses of both communities bother me.

This is not how the communities that Jesus encountered had been taught to behave by Jesus. Jesus constantly advocated for the marginalized and taught that they needed to be restored to the care of the community they had come from. In the Gospel of Matthew 10:7, when Jesus commissioned the disciples to go out into the towns to do ministry, Jesus offers important directions to the disciples (and to us). He says, "As ye go, proclaim the good news, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers...freely give as you have received." In Luke's Gospel, when a rich man wants to know how to inherit eternal life and is told to love God and neighbor, Jesus is asked, "who is my neighbor?" he responds by telling the parable of the Samaritan. When the actions of the Samaritan are accounted for Jesus taught, "go and do likewise." In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes in chapter 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." In the account of the blind men in the Gospel of Mark, the communities had made and demonstrated a choice. One was worth their time and effort, the other was not. This is what bothers me.

We face these same choices in our daily current lives. Who is worth our time and who is not? Where do our efforts and resources go to and where do they not? For me, the answer, as taught by Jesus, is clear. We don't get to make that choice. Our faith declares that we care for ALL as our neighbors regardless of gender identity, ethnic origins, politics, or religious practices. It is God who determines, in the person of Jesus, that everyone is worth our time and efforts. Still, we, in our culture, try to offer conditions for inclusion. My questions remain, "Is that an appropriate expression of our faith and is this how Jesus taught us to live in community?"

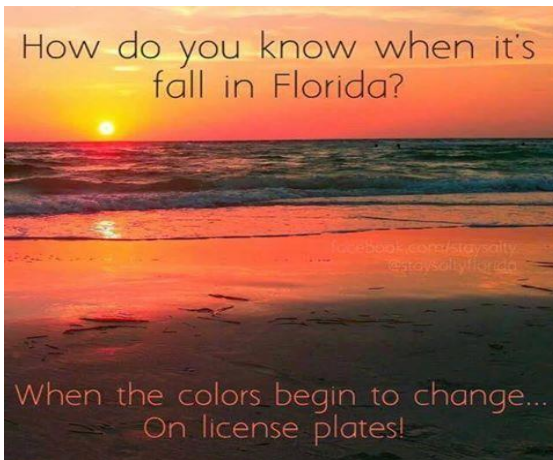
I offer you the opportunity to listen to the Gospel of Mark 10:28-34, our message for October 31<sup>st</sup>, "One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, *"Which commandment is the first of all?"* Jesus answered, **"The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'** *The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no other commandment greater than these.*" Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, **"You are not far from the kingdom of God."** After that no one dared to ask him any question." Blessings!

## FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



### **MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown**

Yes, I think “fall” is finally coming to Punta Gorda. While up north in early October, Steve and I were able to enjoy some of the fall colors and cooler temperatures. Down here, we are just happy to have days that aren't in the nineties.



Our snowbirds are slowly heading back, and it's so good to see so many of you (and your out-of-state plates) with us on Sundays. For some, it's been over a year and a half since we have been able to worship together. It is so uplifting to be together in worship. As most of you know by now, the church is no longer requiring that attendees wear a mask during indoor services, and on Sunday, November 14, we will begin to have fellowship on the second the fourth Sundays. We do plan to have weekly fellowship again soon.

I hope everyone enjoyed Laity Sunday. Many thanks to Isaac in his role as Discipleship Team Lead for recruiting participants and orchestrating the flow of the service. If you

would like to participate in next years' service, I'm sure Isaac will be happy to add you to the list of 2022 Laity Sunday volunteers.

In last month's issue, I mentioned the work that was being done, largely by Michael Robinson, to reduce our annual insurance costs, and the Leadership Team did vote to change our current policy, effective October 1, 2021, to a less expensive product that is offered by the Insurance Board. This will result in significant savings for the fourth quarter of 2021 and going forward. Michael deserves a round of applause for the time and effort he put into this project.

**ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair**



Expanding your support of CUCC community ministries by regularly contributing to the Endowment Fund is a fitting way to honor a loved one or memorialize special dates or events. All contributions are conservatively invested to produce growth and income.

The Endowment Fund received \$200 in new contributions during October.

Regular giving to the Endowment Fund, in addition to your pledge or offering to the general operation of the CUCC, is a simple and easy way to directly give back to our community.

Please note that our members can now make regular contributions to the Endowment Fund via designated contributions made in the Sunday offering. Endowment checks should be written to “Endowment Fund” and placed in the collection plate!

**TREASURER’S REPORT – Michael Robinson, Treasurer**



How did I get this job? Well, I was an Economics major in college and then got an MBA in Finance. I was treasurer of our family company. I was treasurer of the Interchurch Council of New Bedford. That all might have had something to do with it.

However, as a pastor of 5 churches, I remained mum on all financial matters. I am still a bit reticent to speak out on what may well be biased opinions on finances.

Hmmm. Does that have any relevance to the office of treasurer of our church? Well, yes. It gives me a certain perspective. I am not “green eyeshade bean counter.” I like to look at the “Big Picture.”

These are my concerns:

“Virtual Church” has led to a fall-off of contributions, not just in our church, but across the board. Is this a transitory or lasting trend?

I believe we need to focus on income to the church from sources other than contributions.

We would welcome suggestions from the congregation on how we might approach this.  
A “Brainstorming Session” might be a good start.

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The church is solvent, although contributions have been lagging budget and 2020 for the past two months. We hope and expect that once all our “Snowbirds” have come home to roost, this trend will reverse. During November it will be my responsibility to propose a budget for 2022. Please be thinking of what your commitment will be to the church next year so we can make a realistic projection of contributions. I intend to propose a challenging “Other Income” budget to the Leadership Team and congregation. Like the Busch Clydesdales, we all need to pull together on this.

Thanks.

***CAPITAL CAMPAIGN TEAM – Kathy Frantish, Chair***

The Capital Campaign team will be meeting over the next few months to recommend the next project we have with the funds that are in our account. Members of the team include Kathy Frantish – Chair, Melissa Brown, Bill Klossner, Dick Michael & Elden Wick. Our two outstanding projects are the HV/AC and a possible family handicapped bathroom upgrade. More information will be shared once the team starts their review process.

***PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Janis Tulk, Chair***



We would like to thank all those who responded to our survey. We have met and gone over the results to use in our evaluation of Pastor Mike. We know this is a difficult year to go by, with the quarantine shut downs. I want you to know that we have taken that in account in our discussions.

Blessings,  
Jan Tulk

## **SCHOLARSHIP – Kathy Frantish, Chair**

I am happy to announce the following members have agreed to serve on the 2021-2022 Scholarship Committee. They are Kathy Frantish – Chair, Linda Greenfield – Clerk, Mary Cassidy Anger, Emily Klossner, Kathy Rivadeneira, Bev Honkola, & Judy Minier.

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.



## **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James,**

It is so good to see so many of you back already in our weekly services!  
Welcome back!

The worship service each week happens with the congregation's help! There is sign ups in the back on the tables for greeters as well as communion preparers and servers. There will be a brief class after a service in January for those that may be reluctant to sign up due to maybe not knowing what or how to carry out

the tasks.

The choir is rehearsing Wednesdays from 6:00-8:00pm. If you are interested in joining, please email me or see me after service. The first Sunday worship service that choir will be singing in will be November 7<sup>th</sup>.

If you have signed up for Dr. Martha Bireda's class this coming season, your books are in the office and can be picked up during office hours.

The worship team met and planned out the coming few months. November 28<sup>th</sup> will be our "Hanging of the Greens" service. This is also the First Sunday in Advent.

Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup> will be our Christmas Pageant. Christmas Eve will be Friday, December 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm with special music starting at 6:45pm.

Blessings on all of you!

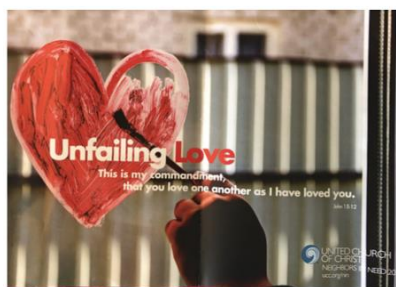
Isaac

## **MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jessica and Dennis Danner**



The Leadership Team has voted to allow fellowship to resume on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month. Volunteers are needed to sign up to host a Sunday. Sign-up sheets are in the back of the sanctuary. Please keep food items light and simple. So, if you feel comfortable, please join us for coffee and fellowship after church! As with the other church activities, masks are optional. We look forward to talking to each other again!

## **STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick**



### **Neighbors in Need “Unfailing Love”**

A special mission offering, Neighbors In Need “Unfailing Love”, is focused on supporting organizations and projects that are serving homeless and immigrant neighbors or communities. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM).

Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC’s Justice and Wellness Ministries (JMW) to provide funding grants to UCC churches and organizations leading Justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects in their communities.

Our **Congregational UCC of Punta Gorda** will collect the **2021 NIN** offering on **Sunday, November 14, 2021**, but contributions can be made at any time by designated on your check that it is for Neighbors in Need.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, elected officers of the United Church of Christ determined that the higher priority for churches was to offer relief where possible. Thus, they gathered monies from a variety of sources, which included NIN, and formed a Covid-19 relief fund.

Neighbors In Need grant recipients: Through your generous gifts to Neighbors in Need, the United Church of Christ is offering hope to millions; we are transforming lives, our nation, and the world. These grants support work for human and civil rights, environmental and/or economic justice in one of the following ways:

- Direct Service (\$1,000--3,000) – provides funding to meet the immediate needs to an individual or group (i.e., food, clothing, utilities).
- Advocacy (\$3,001-5,000) -offers funding to assist communities who wish to change policy on a state or federal level via an advocacy campaign.
- Grass Top (\$5,001-10,000) – is a highly competitive tier which seeks to award uniquely innovative programs which can be replicated in other settings.

In year 2020, CUCC-Punta Gorda received a grant to acquire technologies that we use in continuing our worship service and ministries by applying internet services. Your church's ministries' teams are most grateful that NIN gave us faithful rapid response opportunities. By so doing, we continue in successfully engaging communications methods for fulfilling our Christian mission is carrying Christ's gospel message far beyond our church building.

Remember your **Special Mission Offering opportunity** on Sunday, November 14, or as you are able in doing so, stirred by the Holy Spirit.

### **MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James**



"For All the Saints" has become one of the most popular hymns of the 20th century and used almost universally for All Saints Sunday.

The words were written by William How in 1864. The music we use by Ralph Vaughn Williams was not written until 1906.

How was the son of a solicitor and attended Wadham College, Oxford? In 1846, he was ordained an Anglican minister. He served as Curate at Kidderminster, then at Shrewsbury. He then became Rector at Whittington, Shropshire, near the Welsh border. In 1879, he became suffragan Bishop of London. In 1889, he was appointed Bishop of Wakefield, West Yorkshire. He was known for his work with the poor and with industrial workers. He also found time to write over 50 hymns, most of them during his stay in Whittington.

Williams is one of the best-known English composers of the 20th century. He composed symphonies, concertos, chamber music and film scores.

He was also a collector of English folk music and song; this collecting activity influenced both his editorial approach to the English Hymnal, in which he included many folk song arrangements as hymn tunes, and several of his own original compositions. In 1904 Vaughan Williams discovered English folk songs and carols, which were fast becoming extinct because the oral tradition through which they existed was being undermined by an increase in literacy and the availability of printed music in rural areas. He travelled the countryside, transcribing and preserving many himself.



Williams' music for "For All the Saints" was called 'Sine Nomine'. The tune wraps six unison verses around two SATB-harmonized verses, bridged with refrain-like Alleluias. Sine nomine is Latin for 'without a name,' reminiscent of the lectionary for the Feast of All Saints, "And there are some who have no memorial, who have perished as though they had not lived; they have become as though they had not been born, and so have their children after them." (Ecclesiasticus 44)

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;  
thou Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
thou in the darkness drear, their one true light.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

***LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj***



Book Talk Tea will start its new season on Friday November 12. We will meet in Gilchrist Park by the gazebo at 12 noon. Please bring a brown bag lunch, lawn chair and any books you want to discuss. Looking forward to seeing everyone again!

## **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.*

### Economic Medical Justice

#### **UCC tops \$71.2 million in medical debt relief ... and counting**

by [Connie Larkman](#) | published on Oct 18, 2021

The United Church of Christ, collaboratively, has now wiped out more than \$71.2 million in medical debt in a little more than two years. Through a partnership with the New York-based nonprofit [RIP Medical Debt](#), the church has bought up debt for pennies on the dollar in every one of the UCC’s six geographical regions. By this year’s [General Synod](#), 195 churches, nine Conferences, five UCC partners, more than 800 [Giving Tuesday](#) donors and the national setting had come together to abolish debt for 51,720 families around the country. At that point, \$67.6 million dollars had been erased. The Rev. Sekinah Hamlin, minister of economic justice, is coordinating the latest joint efforts. “Why medical debt?” Hamlin asked during a [General Synod presentation](#). “Because healthcare is a human right, and no one should be penalized because they are too poor to be well.” From our UCC website.

The Social Justice Ministries Team and an anonymous donor donated \$1,100, to this effort, for Florida. If anyone still wants to donate, we have until the end of this year. Please contact Glenn Weaver (616-516-1896).

### Economic Housing Justice

In the spring 2021, the SJMT gave \$2,000 to the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance, after meeting with their board and viewing a video presentation (Social Justice Moment). Their project is to build better housing for migrant farmworker families in Immokalee. The Ground Breaking Ceremony for their

project will be held on Nov.10. A member of our team will be attending. If anyone is interested, please call Pastor Mike.



**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.

**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](mailto:office@puntagorda-ucc.com) OR you can drop them off in the church office.

**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**

Nov	3	Louise Jankowski
	6	Molly Hall
	7	Neoma Remiger
	8	Herb Henry
	12	Sawyer Ford
	16	Donald Nagel
	17	Joyce Baskovic
	19	Ian McLauchlan
	21	Helen Coll
	24	Audrey Young
	29	Dianna Whitman

## **ANNIVERSARIES**

Nov	5	Lee & Ann Swift
	11	David & Rene Ley
	17	John & Carol Schmuhl
	29	Guy & Linda Greenfield

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](mailto:office@puntagorda-ucc.com)