

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



JUNE 2021

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Opportunity Knocks

I am using my space for an article this month to let you all know of an opportunity that is coming our way. A few weeks ago, I received our quarterly Florida Conference newsletter. I look forward to this to find out what our sisters and brothers are up to in our Conference. Highlighted in this issue were the churches in our Conference who have formed or are forming Restorative Racial Justice programs, notably, Sacred Conversations to End Racism. Our church is one of fifteen who have recently begun this soul examining work statewide.

Part of the article was an announcement that the Board of Directors for the Florida Conference has made scholarships available to facilitate the SC2ER work. These scholarships would total eight and would be awarded to churches that are engaging projects in anti-racism work. The next day I received an email from the Conference Administrator highlighting the scholarships and that applications had to be in within three days. I took this as a sign that we should apply. So, I hurriedly dashed off a note to our Social Justice Ministry Team with an idea that had been stirring around the back of my mind.

In February, Dr. Martha Bireda asked me if I would pen an endorsement of her new book, "A Time for Change: How White Supremacy Ideology Harms All Americans." Of course, I said yes! Martha quickly sent me a summary page of the content of her book and the Introduction. The book is meant to educate and spark conversation around the topic of White Supremacy. I read them over, then offered my written endorsement. This was certainly the first time I had been asked to do this and I'm fairly sure will be the last. But it introduced the content to me, and the idea began to swim around my mind for the Living the Question group that will start next February. The book has six chapters and Martha has offered discussion questions and exercises for each.

I contacted Martha and asked if she would consider leading a study of the book for our church next Spring. She was thrilled to be asked! Of course, she said yes! We talked about how it might happen. Along the way the consideration of offering it to folks beyond our congregation. I wanted it to be a community event that would engage folks across cultural distinctions. Martha loved that idea too. We talked about where. Martha insisted it be in our church building, but that we offer the community of color the chance to attend either in person or by Zoom. It was a VERY animated conversation!

Longer story short, with idea in mind, I applied for the grant and held my breath. Several weeks later I received a letter from Reverend Dr. John Vertigan, Florida Conference Minister, telling me that we had been selected to receive the Development Grant for Anti-Racism Programming! We are receiving a \$1,000 grant for the project. I was so proud to get that letter. I immediately called Martha and told her we are ON for the study. Subsequently, I applied for matching funds from our Endowment Fund. We are awaiting the result of that application.

The structure will be, we are offering scholarships to members of our church or the wider community who would like to participate but who cannot afford the cost of the book. In addition, we will be offering Dr. Bireda a stipend for leading the discussions. The book is due to be released on June 9th. It can be pre-ordered through Amazon as a paperback edition for \$29.00. However, I would like to order in bulk to avoid shipping costs for the individual.

If you are interested in participating, please let Mary know as soon as possible so that we may order the books we will need from the Scholarship Funds provided by the Conference. Let us know if you will be paying for your copy or if we can offer it free to you. I intend to advertise this in the near future for wider community participation. The reason why, we have homework over the summer! Martha would like us to read the book, but NOT do the exercises until the group meets to study together next Spring.

This is a very exciting project to undertake. I am hoping that we can have folks of color join our discussion. I feel it necessary to hear the perspective of those who are most effected by White Supremacy and for us to have conversation over our participation in this as persons of European descent.

Please consider adding your intellect and voice to this groundbreaking project. We have so much to learn, and our society needs us to learn it. My hope is that we will be able to lend our voices to the cause of eliminating the influence that WS has on our society and our churches. I hope you will join in. It will be a difficult topic to engage, but we will surround ourselves with folks who love us and support our growing closer.

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Melissa Brown



At the Leadership Team meeting on May 18, we again discussed our church's return to the new normal. Much of this you already know if you have been reading your weekly announcements but to recap:

We will continue to ask worshippers to sign in so that we can do contact tracing if necessary. No temperature checks anymore. Masks are no longer required if you have been vaccinated, but we politely request that you wear a mask if you are not fully vaccinated (one or two shots plus a two week wait after completion of your vaccine treatment(s)). We will once again be standing, if able, during certain parts of the service. We will again be turning to *those near us* in the sanctuary to offer God's peace. Hugs, fist bumps and elbow bumps are recommended over shaking hands. We will be passing the offering plates. On communion Sundays, we will again be passing the elements and serving both wine and grape juice.

We are also going to restart fellowship in Faith Hall. Initially, this will be limited to the second and fourth Sundays. To help us with all of this, Dennis and Jessica Danner have agreed to serve as the Fellowship Team leads and will be members of the Leadership Team. Our thanks to both for agreeing to serve. Many of you may not know the Danners since they were two of five people who joined the church on Easter Sunday in 2020 during our virtual service. Please take the time to seek them out and introduce yourself.

One traditional part of our service that we have not yet reinstated is sharing our joys and concerns during the service from the worshippers "in the house." To hear concerns in the past, we have passed a microphone amongst the congregation, but that is somewhat unsanitary. We have considered having a prayer slip that can be completed and shared during the pastoral prayer. We welcome other ideas, but until a decision has been made, please continue to share your concerns by contacting the office Monday through Thursday or through our Facebook or YouTube service. **If you have a suggestion**, please feel free to offer it up to Pastor Ford, the office or any member of the leadership team.

With all the things that are happening again, **we need volunteers!** The sign-up sheets for hosting and greeters and readers have miraculously reappeared at the back of the church. I hope those of you are here for the summer will be able to help.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Leaving a legacy for the future of our Church supported community outreach ministries can easily be done through the Endowment Fund. It is a fitting way to remember a loved one and all such endowments are conservatively invested to produce growth and income. Also, regular giving to the Endowment Fund, in addition to your pledge to the general operation of the CUCC, is a simple and easy way to directly give back to our community. Please contact me or any member of the Endowment Team if you have any questions.

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 to easily add to these funds is our newly established ability to deposit checks quickly to our Vanguard account. You can now make regular 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 quickly!

TREASURER’S REPORT – Mike Robinson

What a blessing it is to be back to a semblance of normality in our worship service!

Singing, mingling, welcoming new worshipers, passing the peace, holding hands for “Peace on Earth.” On the mundane side, as your treasurer I would share words of comfort that the state of our finances is sound. Unlike many congregations who have struggled to stay afloat through this Covid ordeal, our Congregational UCC craft sails on, trim on her waterline, well-captained and secure on her journey to save souls. Her crew and passengers have faithfully provisioned her, and her cash reserves are strong.

We continue to investigate ways to responsibly shave the cost of our casualty and liability insurance, the premium for which has increased by \$ 5,000 (some 25%) in 2021. Melissa, Dick Michael and I

have had a number of discussions with Church Mutual, who has submitted a competitive quote, and other agents and consultants. There are a number of factors to evaluate, and it is apparent that our UCC Insurance is a “Cadillac” policy, which in the final analysis, we just may want to keep. Stay tuned!

Pastor Ford announced in church this week that there has been a spate of checks being stolen from church mail boxes in our area and requested that if you mail a contribution to the church to send it to our P.O. Box 510838 **NOT** the 1201 Aqui Esta street address.

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Janis Tulk, Chair



**No Report this Month
Be sure to check back in July.**

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James, Chair



It is wonderful to see so many of you in the sanctuary once again. Many prayers that this may continue and the covid trends continue downward.

We need greeters as well as communion preparers/servers for Sunday services. I am putting together a schedule for the rest of the year. There will also be sign-up sheets soon in the back of the sanctuary. Please email me at isaac.james@icloud.com if you would like to participate, I would greatly appreciate it.

A reminder that Indivisible has started meeting at the church again on the first Saturday of the month at 2:00 pm.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



As a June 2021 update on activities completed for this year:

1. Pledge campaign to financially support 2021 budget on church programs and ministries;
2. One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering
3. Strengthen the Church special mission offering (SMO)

Stewardship will lead another SMO program for Neighbors in Need (NIN) leading to a special offering on October 3rd 2021. [Congregants, please plan on your special offering on or before the Oct. 3 church worship service.](#)

Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. 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 Witness Ministries (JWM)* to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

The Ninety and Nine

The great evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, and his song leader, Ira Sankey, were holding meetings in the British Isles. On board a train from Glasgow to Edinburgh, Scotland, Mr. Sankey discovered a poem in a newspaper. At the time, Sankey was looking for a shepherd hymn; and this seemed to fit the bill. The title of the poem was “The Ninety and Nine.” The author was a young lady by the name of Elizabeth Clephane—daughter of the sheriff of Fifeshire, Scotland, and a devoted Christian. It would be years later that Sankey discovered that she had written it about her prodigal brother. The meetings in Edinburgh proved to be very successful. Moody would preach, and Sankey would close with a special song. One night, Dr. Horatius Bonar was the guest speaker. His subject was “The Good Shepherd.” Sankey knew he would have to close the meeting, but he did not have a song. Then, he remembered the poem that he

had saved from the newspaper days before. Reaching in his coat pocket, he unfolded the paper and put it on the little pump organ that he carried with him. Sankey did not have any music to accompany the poem that night in Edinburgh in 1874, but a voice seemed to say, "Sing that hymn." That he did—composing the song right on the spot. Touching the keys, the notes came to him one by one, until, finally, the whole tune was written as it is sung today. The words of Elizabeth Clephane have been preserved for us because of the music. This young lady, of twenty-one, knew too well the heartache a prodigal can give. To ease the pain, she wrote a poem. To save the poem, God gave a song. To be blessed by the song, we need to sing the hymn. All of us, at one time or another, will feel the pain that an empty heart can give. There is solace and relief in these great hymns of the faith. Why not find The Ninety and Nine and see if the Lord has a message for you? In the words of Elizabeth, "Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!"

There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold; But one was out on
The hills away Far off from the gates of gold, Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care, Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
And all through the mountains, thunder- riven, And up from the rocky steep, There rose
A cry to the gate of heaven, "Rejoice, I have found My sheep!" and the angels echoed
Around the throne, "Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own, Rejoice for the Lord.
Brings back His own."

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

The Reading for Renewal program of Florida UCC Women still hasn't published the new reading list for 2021-2022. As soon as it is, I will e-mail it to the Reading for Renewal group. Hope everyone is doing well. There are new books displayed in the library. Please check them out. Happy reading!!!

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

Environmental Justice

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>.

Our Social Justice Ministry Team has been investigating the process of becoming a Creation Justice church. UCC churches in Sarasota, Sanibel and St. Petersburg have become Creation Justice churches. Our denomination has provided a detailed process to work towards becoming a Creation Justice church. For more information, check out more at: https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/environmental-justice/creation-justice-churches/how_it_works_becoming_a_creation_justice_church/.

If you have any questions, please ask any member of our team. Also, if you have any ideas for environmental projects or speakers, please let us know. You can look forward to future Social Justice Moments regarding Creation Justice Churches!

Racial Justice

Since the summer days are getting hotter, you can stay in your cool home and check out the informative exhibits at The Blanchard House (Punta Gorda’s own African American historical museum)! You can find these exhibits at: <http://www.blanchardhousemuseum.org/>

Dr. Martha Bireda, museum director, will be presenting our June Social Justice Moment during worship.

Linda Weaver



CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: The office will be open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm. We will be closed on Fridays. Phone # 941-637-8443.

Please note: To have an event listed on the Sunday bulletin, please have the information in to the church office by Tuesday at 12:00 PM.

PLEDGES AND OPEN DONATIONS: Thank you for sending in your pledges and donations. Please send them **ONLY** to Congregational UCC, P.O. Box 510838, Punta Gorda, FL 33951, **NOT** 1201 Aquí Esta Drive. It has come to our attention that checks are being stolen from street side mailboxes. You may still drop them off in the church office, if you prefer, **Mon-Thurs** from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm.

Updating Your Information

We are always trying to keep our information on members and visitors up to date. We need your help! If you have had a change of address, new email address, home phone or cell phone change, please let us know so we can keep our records current which will help us to keep good communication with all of you. If you are not receiving emails or the Beacon newsletter, please let us also know that. Thank you so much. Your help is very much appreciated.

Send Changes To: office@puntagorda-ucc.com OR you can drop them off in the church office.

Name Tags: Just a reminder, if you would like a magnet on the back of your name tag instead of the pin, just leave your name tag in the blue bin on the name tag rack and it will be changed and ready for the next week.

Birthdays and Anniversaries: Is your birthday or anniversary missing from the bulletin or screen on Sunday morning? Please let us know. It probably is missing because we do not have that information for you.



BIRTHDAYS

June	1	Hazel Klossner
	3	Linda Greenfield
	4	Susann Luckenbach
	5	Kevin Rivadeneira
	8	Jacob Klossner
	15	Lucia Rivadeneira
	16	Suzanne Cleveland
	18	Glenn Garrett
	20	Joanne Stoughton
	20	Linda Weaver
	25	Jean Ringelstein
	27	Caden Klossner

ANNIVERSARIES

June	5	Jacob & Jenna Klossner
	14	Jerry & Lori Larson
	14	Clif & Cindy Trudeau
	16	Melissa & Steve Brown
	19	Joe Lawson & Beverly Honkola
	22	Dick & Paula Michael
	25	Vicki & John McDonald
	25	Bob & Judy Wood
	29	Elden & Diane Wick

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