

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



September 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

### **Change of Heart**

I am captivated by an incident recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. The author describes an encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. Jesus had wandered into the region of Caesarea Philippi, a decidedly Gentile region. There is much speculation as to why Jesus took his band of disciples there. Perhaps it was to get away from the crowds who knew of him and his ministry. This crowd came with expectations for healing and teaching. The inhabitants of Caesarea Philippi would not know him or have the same level of expectations. Jesus wanted to “get away from the maddening crowd” to speak privately to his followers of what was to come.

Interestingly, not long after arriving, a woman, a Canaanite woman, calls out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David.” Jesus strolls on without even acknowledging her existence. Do not forget, she is a Gentile. The woman persists. Her daughter is being tormented by a demon. She begs the disciples to intervene with Jesus on her behalf. Instead, they ask Jesus to send the woman away, she is bothering them. Jesus makes a statement, “I came only for the lost sheep of Israel.” This makes it clear the woman is staying on the outside looking in.

The woman then does something extraordinary. She stands in front of Jesus, kneels in reverence, and begs him to heal her daughter. For the first time during this encounter Jesus looks at her. In that instant she becomes more than a Gentile, she becomes human. However, he does not give her a positive response. He says, “It is not right to give the food meant for the children to the dogs.” Ouch! You read it right, Jesus just called this woman a dog. In his eyes, the Gentiles were no better than dogs to the Israelites.

She does not even hesitate. She replies with, "Yes Lord, but even the dogs eat the scraps from the Master's table." She is engaged in an exchange of wits with Jesus. She is also begging for her daughter's life. She has nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Let us review a bit. Jesus has traveled to a Gentile region, the region of the Canaanites, a despised people. He hopes that there will be enough anonymity to allow some space to reflect. A woman approaches, identified as one of the despised Canaanites. She addresses Jesus by a royal title and a Messianic one, Son of David. Through the prophets, God had promised to continue the line of David on the throne of Israel for eternity. By addressing Jesus as Son of David, the woman has acknowledged Jesus as a royal descendent of David, the anointed one. She further acknowledges his status by kneeling in front of Jesus in reverence, as one would a holy person. She is doing everything right, IF she were a disciple of Jesus.

It is in this moment a miracle happens. Jesus had told his disciples long before now that he came only for the lost sheep of Israel, to reconcile them to their Divine purpose. He was clear to ONLY heal and teach in Jewish communities until this moment. In this moment Jesus sees faith displayed, a faith in who he really is. He sees it coming from someone who should not even know who he is. He sees a woman willing to cross boundaries of hate and prejudice to seek healing for her child. Jesus sees all of this, possibly for the first time in his life. He looks into the woman's eyes and says, "Great is your faith woman. Let it be as you wish." In that moment, her daughter was healed of her affliction. What a climactic moment and a radical instance of change!

I cling to this story because of that one fact, Jesus changed. Many scholars now agree that Jesus did not set up the scene of healing by traveling to Caesarea Philippi in order to teach the disciples a lesson, but to learn a lesson himself. The healing happened in spite of ethnic and cultural prejudices that Jesus held. They also agree on the possibility that Jesus had a change of heart in that moment, that his vision of ministry changed and broadened. From this time on in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is less inclined to only minister to his fellow Jews. By the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissions his disciples to go into "all the nations" and make disciples. It all began in this moment.

Now, to my point. If it is possible that Jesus had a change of heart, which now included ALL people to be worthy of the Divine love he shared, isn't it possible for me to do the same, for us to do the same? This changes everything. How might this change look to those around us? It would appear that we actually treat all people, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity, age, gender identify, economic status, marital status, theology, politics, profession, or religious traditions with love. Wow! Just think of it. Proclaiming that ALL people are loved in the eyes of the Divine, no matter our personal prejudices or preferences. If that were true, our perspective might change to advocate in all of those situations for everyone to value them as we do. There would no longer be Gentiles in our world. Imagine that!

## ***FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM***



### ***MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson***

During the July Leadership Team meeting, we discussed the past practice of not meeting during August, and agreed there would not be an August meeting, either physical or virtual. But plans get changed. Our planned meetings were to be on Monday's to continue discussion about The Poor People's Campaign, and if or how the congregation could participate.

After meeting several times to discuss the platform and proposed programs of the Poor People's Campaign (PPC), the Leadership Team voted to discontinue the Monday meetings, and ask the Social Justice and Ministry Team to continue the discussions and then propose, if, when, and how Congregational UCC might participate.

Other Leadership Team actions:

For some time, this summer, I had been contacting potential suppliers of Janitorial or Cleaning Services for the church building. After collecting the responses, and evaluating them, I concluded that the per month charges were much more than we currently budget for cleaning service, not including carpet cleaning which is always extra, and based on a per time basis. Since the previous supplier resigned, Guy Greenfield has been cleaning the church, on a 'gratis' basis. His efforts this summer have included and resulted in Guy's cleaning and painting of Faith Hall, and installation of chair rail along the walls. It really does look quite nice in Faith Hall. Guy has also dug, and moved, most of the shrubs that were affected by the ongoing construction in front of the Sanctuary. Plans are in place to strip and wax, and buff, the floors of Faith Hall and other locations, late in August. Watch for it. Please express your thanks to Guy for his work.

To discuss the Cleaning Service's issue, the Leadership Team agreed to a virtual meeting early in August. Because we had decided to not open the church to outside meetings during the pandemic, we do not receive contributions for the use of the building, as we did prior to the pandemic. During the meeting, we were not able to resolve the difference in quotes versus available funds. At the close of the meeting, we were told that Guy would continue to clean the building, until the resumption of meetings and worship. As an outgrowth, of Guy's offer to continue cleaning, the LT authorized a credit of a 'contribution-in-kind' for a stipulated hourly rate, for his labors.

This is all that I have for this newsletter. As always, the LT seeks your input on any issue or program that we participate in or discuss. Do not hesitate to contact any LT member, and I encourage you contact the Moderator.

Until we return to physical and corporate worship and meetings, STAY SAFE.



***ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair***

Your Endowment Team will soon begin to explore the establishment of a Scholarship Program aimed at providing assistance to graduating seniors from Charlotte High School and Port Charlotte High School. The resolution that launched the Endowment Fund in 1999 provides a category for financial assistance for grants or scholarships for the purpose of attending college, seminary, or other secondary schools. Even the college application process, including the payment of those fees, may be beyond a student's budget.

The Scholarship Program could be a function of the Endowment Team with the actual administration of the program separate from the funding. Our congregation is well populated with educators and administrators whose talents can be brought to this important outreach. This is very early in the process that will enable our church and its congregation to grow in Christian faith and service to God's people.



**TREASURER’S REPORT – Melissa Brown**

August 2020 Treasurer’s Report

| Financial Results                      | July 2020       | 2020 YTD  | Budget    |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Donations and Other Income             | \$9,781         | \$109,880 | \$101,850 |
| Expenses                               | 12,791          | 93,576    | 101,850   |
| Donations Above/ <b>Below</b> Expenses | <b>-\$3,011</b> | \$16,304  | \$0       |

| Financial Results                      | July 2019 | 2019 YTD | Budget          |
|--|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| Donations and Other Income             | \$13,092  | \$94,813 | \$88,375        |
| Expenses                               | 12,933    | 90,953   | 94,246          |
| Donations Above/ <b>Below</b> Expenses | \$159     | \$3,860  | <b>-\$5,871</b> |

| 2020 versus 2019 (Better/ <b>Worse</b> ) | July            | YTD           |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| Donations and Other Income               | <b>-\$3,311</b> | \$15,067      |
| Expenses                                 | 142             | <b>-2,623</b> |
| Donations Above/ <b>Below</b> Expenses   | <b>-\$3,171</b> | \$12,444      |

July expenses exceeded our donations by \$3,011, but we still have a YTD surplus of \$16,304 to get us through to the end of the year. We are ahead of last year’s July YTD net of donations over expenses by \$12,444. Donations YTD exceed 2019 YTD by \$15,067. **Thank you** for continuing to send in your operating account donations. Looks like we are in good shape going into the final stretch.



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:** September 6  
October 4  
November 1

**Education:** After seeing the murder of George Floyd on national TV, **the moment** happened for the rebirth of the Black Lives Matter movement. There have been numerous book studies to help people understand both racism, anti-racism, and White Privilege. If you would like to participate in such a Zoom group, please call Linda Greenfield (941-380-7411) or Linda Weaver (616-586-1896).

**Social Justice:** Over the summer we have seen 3 Social Justice Moments at the beginning of our worship services on Facebook or YouTube. In June, we saw a great video on Climate Change produced by the granddaughter of Lori and Jerry Larson. In July, we saw the trailer for a documentary coming out in the Fall, called Asylum Seeker about the cruel treatment and suffering of immigrant children and families. In August, we heard about the absolute importance of voting-an equal right for every U.S. citizen! In September, we are looking forward to another intergenerational presentation on the critical need to take action on Climate Change.



**MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James**

What's New Is Not Always Best

I love old hymns. I keep a stack of hymnals on my nightstand and have an ever-growing collection in my library. I cut my teeth on Charles Wesley and John Rippon.

While I certainly do not think that historic hymns are the only thing we should sing in corporate worship, I am concerned that omitting older hymns in our gatherings silences the rich voices of church history. Some churches seem uninterested in any song that is more

than two years old, much less two hundred years. Yes, the church will continue to write and sing new songs (Psalm 96:1), but it is also good and helpful for us to sing the old.

When I mention historic hymns, maybe you cringe as you recall a “worship war” in your local church. Maybe you are eager to only sing the old hymns. Or maybe you wonder why it is important at all. My aim is not to renew local church disputes or bolster mere sentimentality, but to commend something else altogether—to encourage younger churches to remember their history by joining with the countless men and women who have shared these songs over hundreds of years.

Our society is fixated on what is new and what’s next, but hymns remind us that what is next is not always what’s best. Singing the historic hymns of our faith reminds our congregations that we are not the first generation who have wrestled and prayed, asked, and believed. We are not the first to write hymns of praise to God. We walk gladly in the footsteps of our fathers who have written praises to Christ that have stood the test of time. When we sing a hymn, we state our theological faith and belief.

With a steady diet of merely new choruses, we can develop both modern idolatry and historical amnesia. Perhaps we should adopt this paraphrase of C.S. Lewis? Sing at least one old hymn to every three new ones.

### Hymns Teach Us

Hymns are portable sermons that articulate, exegete and pronounce biblical truths. They shape the way we view God, man, and Christ, and how we are to live in light of the gospel. The truths they communicate preach to us throughout the week following the style of Deuteronomy 6—at home and away, when lying down and waking. As R.W. Dale famously said, “Let me write the hymns of the church and I care not who writes the theology.”

Singing is a form of teaching that uses poetry to open to us the word of God. When Isaac Watts published Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, his intention was not to sing Scripture line by line, but to create poetic and emotive renditions of Scripture that enabled the church to sing the truths of Scripture.



**STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair**

### **STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH 2020**

Members and friends of Punta Gorda Congregational UCC, we are now initiating a second denominational mission donation project concerning 2020's STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH (STC). We completed the One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday on July 20; and our church's generosity is exciting: \$1395 for 2020's OGHS!!!

As you surely experience, our nation is amazingly diverse, representing many different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Yet most of us live in communities marked somewhat by sameness; among peoples who think, act, and generally look or at least behave similar to us. So, the vision behind 2020's STRENGTHEN program is to experience some unity amongst such a diverse crowd. Now you might then ask, "How?" ->>Through funds provided by the *Strengthen the Church* giving initiative.

One example of an STC benefit is seen within the Penn West UCC Conference. To support conference youth programming there in 2019, the Conference provided STC grants to two churches that provided funds to youth wanting to attend the National Youth Event (NYE). Penn West Conference Minister David Ackerman explained why this mattered, saying, "At National Youth Event, our youth get a sense of the width and breadth of the UCC. Most of the youth come from smaller rural churches. At NYE, they meet other youth with different backgrounds and come away sensing unity of purpose." (Unquote)

Every UCC conference benefits from our generous gifts to Strengthen the Church, certainly at the local community level as well. Just as in Penn West's example, STC grants also made a real difference in the lives of other youth attending the National Youth Event. Such financial support permitted, on a national stage, their attendance to experience God's vision about a truly united and uniting church, especially amidst different cultures and backgrounds.

We can see then, through STC funding in support of various other local, conference, or national projects, that our donations directly invested in God's vision for His Church. As the UCC facilitates both conferences' and churches' programs, the STC program does reach congregants in a variety of exciting ways.

Please give generously to our PG-CUCC's Strengthen the Church initiative from August 23 to September 21, 2020. Notice that STC reflects a shared commitment 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 congregations. Please make your check out to Congregational UCC with a note at the bottom that it is to go towards the Strengthen the Church Initiative. Thank you!

**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**



Book Talk Tea is on hiatus until January. I am working on a couple of options for the group to meet then. Reading for Renewal books will be in the library the week of November 1. There are a lot of good books in the library so please come in and browse. As always, donations are welcome.

Stay safe and healthy.

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

Voter Advocacy:

This month's social justice moment is devoted to voting, most specifically to voting rights. The United Church of Christ offers leadership and discernment in their work called "Our Faith Our Vote 2020." Before you say, wait, isn't the church supposed to stay out of politics, consider a quote from a recent UCC webinar. "The church doesn't have to be non-political, just non-partisan." In fact, many of the

issues taken up by the Social Justice Ministry Team have been political—not partisan—as they address what we believe Micah 6:8 to mean for us.

And so, it goes with voting rights. There has been a twenty-year endeavor to undercut access to fair voting, especially for a population already disenfranchised by color or economic situation. Then in 2013 the Supreme Court rolled back elements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That action has led to fewer polling places, reduced early voting calendars, purging of voter rolls, and a variety of restricted registration practices.

In a democracy with historically low turnouts, we should be making voting easier, not more difficult. And the need for fair and accessible elections has become even more acute during the COVID pandemic. You are likely aware of efforts to question the accuracy of mail in voting. We believe it is the only really fair way to conduct this election especially in Florida. For instance, you may request your absentee ballot with no excuse required. You can see what each state requires for absentee voting at [www.vote.org](http://www.vote.org), a 501(c)3 non-partisan site.

Since it seems apparent that the USPS, already under siege, will be overwhelmed by this process, we encourage you to learn your state's requirements, request your absentee ballot, and return your ballot as soon as you receive it.

For more information about the UCC's work on behalf of Our Faith Our Vote 2020, please go to [www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote](http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote).

Together we pray:

Dear God, may it be Your will, at this season of our election, to guide us towards peace. By voting, we commit to being full members of society, to accepting our individual responsibility for the good of the whole. Open our eyes to see the image of God in all candidates and elected officials, and may they see the image of God in all citizens of the earth. And grant us the courage to fulfill the commandment of loving our neighbors as ourselves, and place in our hearts the wisdom to understand those who do not share our views. Amen. Adapted from Lev Meierowitz Nelson

We remain devoted to our goal to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). You are invited to join us. Write or call any of CUCC's Social Justice Ministry team: co-facilitators Glenn Weaver or M.E. Steele-Pierce, Mary Cassidy-Anger, Jim DeGood, Jerry Larson, Lori Larson, 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.

### **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.

**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**

|          |                     |
|----------|---------------------|
| Sept. 1  | Kelly Ford          |
| Sept. 4  | Rene Ley            |
| Sept. 5  | Keith Weber         |
| Sept. 7  | Susan Blaisdell     |
| Sept. 10 | M. E. Steele-Pierce |
| Sept. 14 | Joseph Lawson       |
| Sept. 18 | Judy Marchert       |
| Sept. 24 | Pat Baran           |
| Sept. 27 | Valerie Maran       |
| Sept. 28 | Denny Reed          |
| Sept. 28 | Gloria McLaughlin   |

### **ANNIVERSARIES**

|          |                            |
|----------|----------------------------|
| Sept. 13 | Debra Grenzow & Barb Smith |
|----------|----------------------------|

Sept. 19 Chrystal Reichard & Ann Barker  
Sept. 30 Brook & Grace March  
Sept. 30 Lynn & Lou Stayner

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)