

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



SEPTEMBER 2021
FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Plain James

The letter of James is well known as a Pastoral Epistle. What does that mean? James wrote to the church to remind the church what their job was. It is often read at the installation of Ministers as the address to the congregation. Biblical scholars are not certain who the James was that this letter is attributed to. One possibility is that it was the brother of Jesus.

Martin Luther always held that James was his least favorite New Testament book. He would wonder why on earth it was even included in the bible, as it had little value in teaching who God is and who we are in Christ. As a matter of fact, Jesus Christ is mentioned only twice in the Epistle of James. Perhaps this points to the accuracy of the attribution of the letter to the brother of Jesus, sibling rivalry ;) At least Paul saw the life of faith only in relation to one's faith in Jesus as the Christ and how that changes one's inner and outer self. Paul's famous saying is, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!." (II Corinthians 5:17, NIV)

James seems to offer little of the affirmation of "being in Christ" that changes one's being. The writer of James seems to focus more on outcome than foundation. This is part of the reason that Martin Luther objected to its inclusion in the canon in the first place. Luther taught that by faith alone in Jesus one is justified and sanctified (I apologize for any scholars of Luther for my oversimplifications) or made holy in God's eyes. James offers another premise, if one has faith then good works will follow. In Luther's eyes this led to a theology of works righteousness. Boooo! Luther hated works righteousness!

One passage from James 1, in particular, led Luther to this conclusion, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." and further on "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep

oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:22, 27, NIV) And for Luther, blasphemy in James 2:14-17, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* (Italics added)

I see things a bit differently. For me, James offered an inseparable connection between faith and works, one results in the other, a “natural” transition. James writes that if one has faith the evidence is what a person does and how one lives their life in faith. I am kind of partial to James. The writer goes to great ends to speak of what the life of Christianity looks like, “be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,... rid (yourself) of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent,...keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” This seems like excellent advice for the church, wouldn’t you agree” I think it is very relevant for our day and age.

James speaks clearly into our times. If we are persons of faith we don’t just hear scripture read and go home. We listen, let it affect our lives and care for those who are set aside by culture and church in other settings. If you wonder why I like James’ advice so much, wonder no more, James was a Justice preacher! Let us be not only hearers of the Word, let us be doers as well! AMEN Blessings!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



MODERATOR’S REPORT – Melissa Brown

The Leadership Team did not meet in August, but via email we continued to discuss important topics, and once again, COVID was the lead topic. As you know by now, our Leadership Team has taken additional steps to control the spread of COVID among our congregation. We are continuing in-person worship, but **masks are required for all—whether you have been vaccinated or not**—and social distancing is also a must which means no physical contact between members. We are also suspending fellowship, again.

This is so disconcerting in so many ways. At a time when we need one another the most, we are limited in our interactions. However, there are ways that we can continue to support one another. Do you miss seeing someone from church? Are you wondering how someone is doing? Pick up the telephone and call them. Send them a card or write a personal note. Email them. Like a Facebook

post. Just let people know that you care. At the end of this month's Beacon, you will see—as you always do—a list of the anniversaries and birthdays in September. Let's inundate our September celebrants with a boatload of greetings from church friends. Need an address? Call or email the office, and we can share that information.

With Neoma focusing her attention on Bill, Darcy Hall has taken over the sending of cards to those on our prayer list. Thank you, Darcy, for donating your time to this ministry. Feel free to supplement Darcy's efforts by reaching out to those you know on the prayer list.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bil Tucker, Chair



Recommendations from the Endowment Team regarding distribution of Endowment Funds are considered and approved by the Leadership Team.

The following distribution of Endowment Funds was made in August: The Military Heritage Museum received a distribution from the Endowment Fund of \$1,500.

The Endowment Fund received \$500 in contributions during August.

“Thank You” to all who contribute to the Endowment Fund as part of your regular planned and ongoing support of the community ministries of the CUCC.

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.

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.

You can now make regular contributions to the Endowment Fund via designated contributions made in the Sunday offering. Just write your check to “Endowment Fund” and place it in the collection plate! May God Bless You.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Michael Robinson, Treasurer



Contributions income in August was good at \$ 13,447, not including \$ 600 for building use donations. The latter is a mineable source of future income, as we have a marvelous facility, adaptable and usable for many groups. What could be more Christian than opening it up to multiple uses by the community?

Our cash position is strong with a \$ 31,000 bank operating balance, \$ 51,100 in Capital Funds (earmarked for a handicapped-accessible bathroom renovation) and \$ 629,000 Endowment Funds, earmarked for missions and outreach .

Expenses remain within budget and we continue with efforts to rein in insurance premiums.

Thank you, Snowbirds, for continuing to support the church financially during your sojourn up North. The weather is starting to moderate here in the Sunshine state and we look forward to your return.

PASTORAL RELATIONS TEAM – Janis Tulk, Chair



Thank you for your timely responses to the survey about email vs. regular mail. At this time, I don't have all the results. We are planning on getting the evaluation survey out in September, so keep an eye out for it. Your input is very important.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY – Isaac James,



A big thanks to Chrystal and Ann for volunteering their time to the altar guild. We greatly appreciate your willingness to serve.

We are in dire need of greeters as well as communion preparers/servers for Sunday services. I am putting together a schedule for the rest of the year. There is a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary. You may also email me at isaac.james@icloud.com if you

would like to participate, I would greatly appreciate it.

If you have signed up, the books for Living the Question are in the church office.

Blessings on your month!



MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – Jessica and Dennis Danner



Fellowship has nothing to report unfortunately. There was no fellowship due to the COVID-19 restrictions, and unfortunately fellowship will not resume until further notice. Looking forward to the time when we can resume normal activities without fear of COVID. Praying that day comes sooner rather than later.



STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick



Hello from Eastern Ohio, Jefferson County, Rush Run Ohio – so far “back in the stix” that no internet/email/text is available. Perhaps residing in Bethlehem, or Nazareth, resembled living here. My God-assignment for a few weeks is caregiving of my younger sister. She has fallen causing separated shoulder, but more painful, apparent nerve damage causing her right DOMINANT hand to lose feeling, hence, functionality.

Caregiving is likely my weaker Stewardship suit, but God has the tendency to intercede and teach when least expected. (After all, it is summertime and fishing and playtime. Why God, why now?)

I’ve noticed also that sister Cynthia has difficulty coping with this extreme inconvenience requiring learning some left-handed functionality. So, it appears “God has it in for us”.

I think first about Job and his ‘tormentors’. Then about King Saul persecuting David. And so forth of OT characters tested by God. Then about the Christ and His persecution and foul-treatment by the Jewish leaders and community.

In so doing, I perceive everyone without exception throughout history has travails, sometimes unexpected, that foil our expectations about daily living, and perchance our appreciation of God.

‘On the other hand,’ (repeating Tevya of Fiddler On The Roof), God recognizes these travails and serves us ‘on a golden platter’ with encouragement, grace and peace to provide a way out – coping skills, faith, and love. “He has *chosen us*.” Eph 1:4

Q: What is to be our response to this infinite Trinity of love and care???

A: Think - ‘through faith, a life of loving Stewardship.’ In a few instances, even caregiving of dear persons in need! Amen.



MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James

It might seem unlikely that a blind writer of hymns living in a slum and a wealthy woman living in a mansion would have anything in common — but Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer, was a humble woman with several distinguished friends. Grover Cleveland, who later became President of the United States, met Fanny Crosby as a young man, and they became lifelong friends.

The friend in the mansion was Phoebe Knapp, the daughter of a Methodist evangelist. When she was just sixteen years old, Phoebe married Joseph Fairchild Knapp, a young man who founded the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The Knapps worshiped at the John Street Methodist Church in lower Manhattan, which is where Fanny Crosby also worshiped — and so a friendship was born. Phoebe, the wealthy matron, often invited Fanny, the blind hymn writer, to her palatial home.

Phoebe enjoyed music and had a music room furnished with a collection of musical instruments. During one of Fanny's visits, Phoebe invited her to the music room, where Phoebe sat down at the keyboard and played a tune that she had written. "What does that say," she asked? Fanny clapped her hands in delight and said, "That says, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!'" And so, a hymn was born.

During her lifetime, Fanny Crosby wrote eight thousand hymns, many of which became famous — but "Blessed Assurance" just might be the most famous of all.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger



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

CARING FRIENDS

Every month we send out birthday, anniversary, get well and thinking of you cards to our congregation. If anyone has any cards that they are not using and would like to see them go to good use, we would appreciate your donation. Right now, we are especially in need of anniversary cards. Please leave them with Mary in the church office. Thank you!

LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj



Just a reminder that the 2021-2022 Reading for Renewal list and books are now available in the church library. Please be sure to sign out the books before you take them!

I hope everyone is having a good summer and reading a lot of good books!



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.

Environmental Justice

On August 9, 2021, the UN released a new report on Climate Change. The picture is not getting brighter. But there are activities that can be done or not done to help slow things down. This is what Creation Justice churches are striving to do! For more information, please check our UCC.org website, article entitled, “UN report labels climate crisis a Code Red for humanity!”

For the month of September, Pastor Mike will be concentrating on a UCC program for Creation Justice services. Our whole service will be centered on the healing of creation and its inhabitants.

If you are interested in joining or have ideas for Creation Justice, please contact Lori and Jerry Larson.

Let us pray with the congregation of the Uniting Church of Australia:

Jesus Christ, teach us to empathize with Earth.
Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the land, the seas, and the skies.
Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit in
creation, groans of longing for a new creation.

Jesus Christ, make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin,
songs of celebration from the sea, the forest, and the air.
Christ, teach us to care. Amen

Racial Justice

Did you know? Dr. Martha Bireda's book, *A Time for Change*, is now available. Just call Mary and let her know if you need one. You can also sign up for the group discussions in early 2022!



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 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

Sept	1	Kelly Ford
	4	Rene Ley
	5	Keith Weber
	7	Susan Blaisdell
	10	Mary Ellen Steele-Pierce
	14	Joseph Lawson
	18	Judy Marchert
	27	Valerie Moran
	28	Gloria McLaughlin
	30	Dennis Danner

ANNIVERSARIES

Aug	13	Debra Grenzow & Barb Smith
	19	Ann Barker & Chrystal Reichard
	30	Grace and Brook March
	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