

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



JUNE 2020

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

SMALL THINGS

It seems that each time we settle into a routine that defines our times, another change comes our way. Truthfully, I was very content with the stay-at-home order issued by the Governor. I am a painful Introvert, so the order played right into my hands!

After what felt like a VERY short time, the order is being lifted and folks who have been cooped up for weeks are pouring into the streets, stores, and restaurants in Florida. I am not sure why, but most people have abandoned reason and ignore social distancing suggestions or health precautions. When the bars were opened, the order allowed 50% capacity, WITH social distancing AND protective masks to be worn by staff and patrons. We have watched news footage of people sitting shoulder to shoulder on bar stools and nearly every table occupied in restaurants. There was a story just today of a party in DeLand, Florida, that had over three thousand people attending. Police were forced to move in to order people to leave, and a small riot ensued. Guests claimed that their personal freedoms were being infringed upon and refused to disperse. Arrests and fights followed. Shameful!

If you are like me, this time in life is getting pretty old. I know of no one who likes sitting at home and binge watching sixteen seasons of Gray's Anatomy (except me). I know that all our routines have been shattered. I know that school children are falling behind in their learning curve. I know that domestic abuse and substance abuse have sharply risen. Our mental health is suffering. I know we are tired of it all. The news has little else to cover.

Every once in a while, I need to turn off my news feeds and venture outside. I get that opportunity each morning and have near sole possession of the Harbor Walk sidewalk. I will encounter a few people if I venture out just before daybreak; any later, and there has been quite a crowd out there. Until Monday, most would respect the social distancing order from the city and give space for safe passage. Since Monday, I would believe most people feel that there is no longer a need to observe that space. Hardly anyone wears their masks or shares the sidewalk. Many give me harsh looks when they see me avoiding them AND wearing my mask. I'm afraid: even that simple pleasure is being affected by the lack of respect others are willing to show for my safety.

Okay, rant over. My point of this article is that I have needed to look for the small signs of healing that are taking place. For the past month, the waters of Charlotte Harbor have been clear and FILLED with bait fish, large snook and hungry dolphins. I can actually see them even while the tide is in and the waters deeper! I have heard it is because of the lower power boat traffic not stirring up the muddy bottom of the Peace River. Amen! The birds are more active or perhaps I am only noticing them more since there isn't as much traffic. I was driving home after a trip to Manatee's Pizza on Sunday afternoon. For the first time since moving here, I didn't encounter a single car on 41 or any of the feeder roads! It was a ghost town. I took my time and looked at my surroundings, the new buildings and houses being constructed, folks out doing yard work, animals frolicking.

I had a special treat on Sunday morning. Most of you know that we planted a new tree at the start of our Capital Campaign. Over the winter it has required regular watering. One of those times is Sunday morning for me. I get to come to the church and have it to myself and water the tree.

This past Sunday, I had increased the volume of the water a bit because some of the leaves were starting to die. So, there was a good-sized puddle forming at the base of the tree before it soaked into the roots. I watched for a bit to make sure there was enough water. As I watched, a number of birds came to take a bath in the puddle and get a drink of cool water. They would splash and strut, fluffing their feathers to make sure they got them all covered with water. It was quite nice to see. The amazing part was that they actually lined up to take turns. I would see three or four lined up waiting patiently. I wished my own children would have been that patient waiting to get into our pool in the summer!

I learned an important lesson Sunday morning: to appreciate what we have and be thankful that we can enjoy small pleasures. It is such a welcome break from the stream of bad news and restricted life. Perhaps we can even learn from a few small birds frolicking in a puddle for a while. Life was simple for a few moments. It will be again. Blessings!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM AND OTHERS

MODERATOR'S REPORT - Bill Colson



I sure do miss the familiar faces I am used to seeing in worship. I'm sure you do, as well.

The Leadership Team addressed the issue of when, in our humble opinions, it will be appropriate (read: safe) to resume worship in the sanctuary on Sunday morning. We met virtually on May 4 to express our thoughts and come to consensus regarding corporate worship and meetings in the church building. An email update was sent to everyone on our mailing list during the first week of May. Did you receive it? If not, call the church office and ask for it to be sent to you. We may need your updated email address.

When we resume Sunday worship services, it will certainly be under different circumstances than we practiced in the past. In the meantime, we will continue to worship via the Sunday Facebook Live broadcasts and to conduct meeting via the Zoom app.

The Leadership Team met virtually on May 12 for our monthly meeting, to conduct business and receive reports from the committees. Among the actions taken, we agreed to circulate drafts of personnel policies, prepared by Ann Barker, Melissa Brown, and Kathy Reed. After several additions,

revisions and explanations, we voted via round-robin email to approve and adopt the policies as documentation of expectations of our employees. A copy of the policies will be given to each employee and a record placed in their personnel files.

Also, a long-term contract has been prepared for Isaac James and will be signed shortly, retroactive to January 1.

A long discussion was held among the Leadership Team members about the need for more frequent and more intensive cleaning/sanitizing of the church by our current cleaning service. With the coming resumption of Sunday worship and meetings of our tenants, we feel the need for more frequent attention to our restrooms and the surfaces that are frequently touched within the building. A subcommittee of the Leadership Team was appointed to meet with the cleaning company and express our needs and seek a new contract. Alternatively, we are seeking alternate sources for cleaning services.

In other news, Pastor Mike learned that the Florida Conference of the UCC was offering a matching grant for implementing remote worship capabilities of Florida congregations. After giving permission to apply, Pastor Mike sent in the application and expected to hear results in several days, if not weeks. "Surprise, surprise!", as Gomer Pyle used to say. The reply came back 20 minutes later. It was approved. The Leadership Team is grateful for his efforts and asked the Endowment Committee for a grant to the congregation for the matching funds needed. The total funds will be used for equipment to improve the production of the broadcast sent out each Sunday morning over Facebook live.

If you have comments, questions, or just want to express an opinion, the Leadership Team wants to hear from you. Please send us/me an email to bill.colson@gmail.com.

Until we meet again; stay safe, stay healthy. and may God bless us all.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Lead



The Endowment Team has recommended and the Leadership Team has approved two distributions:

The first is a distribution of \$800 as part of a matching grant program from our UCC Conference as a capital improvement to our audio/video system. The UCC Conference has made partial funding available for enhancements to our virtual Sunday Worship services.

The other distribution is to the North Fort Myers Academy for the Arts as an educational distribution of \$1,600 to provide audio services for the production of a video as a class project headed by Kathy Rivadeneira. Since the closing of schools has put a stop to their planned musical *Frozen*, Kathy needed to keep her students creative and productive. The results are a spectacular video of the "Frozen" cast doing a virtual rendition of the closing song. We will be given a copy of the video for viewing once regular worship services resume.

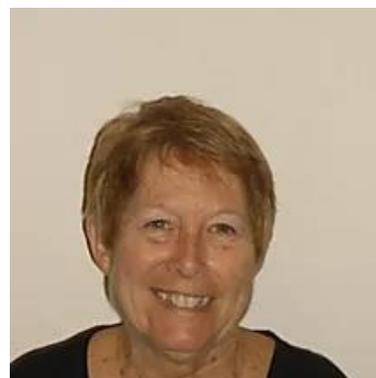
TREASURER'S REPORT – Melissa Brown

Financial Results	Apr-20	2020 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$14,302	\$76,712	\$58,200
Expenses	14,261	54,748	58,200
Net Income	\$41	\$21,964	\$0

We eked out a gain of \$41 for the month of April. Woo hoo! The life of the church goes on, despite not having had services since mid-March. The only expense that has seen a marked decrease is fellowship supplies (paper goods, coffee, etc.). One might think custodial supplies would decrease, but what we aren't spending on toilet paper and hand towels is being spent on hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies! We did see a drop of approximately \$100 in our electric bill when comparing March and April 2020 to the same time last year, but that decrease could also be attributed to lower temperatures. Who knows? We have been able to provide our virtual services with very little in additional costs. A matching grant from the Florida Conference will enable us to purchase some upgrades to improve the quality of our broadcasts, and we expect our virtual services to continue beyond the COVID-19 closure and well into the future. Thank you for continuing to send in your operating account contributions.

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, Co-Leads



Upcoming Communion Sundays: June 7, July 5, August.2

Bible Study: Did you know that you can attend Bible study every Thursday at 1 p.m. from the safety and comfort of your home??! Pastor Mike follows the Common Lectionary for our study passages and the following Sunday sermon. Our group has grown from 5 to 12 members across the Zoom gallery! You are welcome to come for fellowship, in-depth study and soul-lifting experiences!

Check our weekly announcements for the assigned scripture lesson, and call Mary at the office to get your name on the Zoom invitation list!

Facebook Ministry: For the safety of all our members and staff, Pastor Mike and his “tech team” (Isaac, Kevin, M.E., Susann) have worked hard to bring us worship and communion into the safety of our homes! In case you didn’t know, our Facebook page has several ongoing devotionals. On Mondays, Pastor Mike provides a short homily for a morning devotion. Tuesday, Isaac shares informative background on composers and hymns. On Wednesday, M.E. Steele-Pierce shares comforting poetry that correlates with the sermon scriptures. Rev. Ann Barker provides a Friday devotional highlighting Christian women who have impacted the faith. Saturday features guest clergy who provide a devotional that is timely to our lives today. This all helps to bring us closer to God and each other. Thanks to all who have shared their gifts and time!

Caring Circles: Another way to keep us “close together” during the pandemic are our groups of Caring Circle callers. We continue to communicate, commiserate and laugh via our germ-free phone calls. If you haven’t been called and want to get involved in this ministry, please call Neoma Remiger (941-575-6775) or Linda Weaver (616-516-1896).

A Note of Interest! Did you know that we, Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Leadership Team co-leads for Discipleship, have a lot in common?! We were both born in June 1948, lived in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, were elementary school teachers, have one brother and two sons, are married to great husbands, have a daughter-in-law named Krista, belong to Book Talk Tea, Ladies’ Lunch Out and Caring Circles, are concerned about social justice issues, are breast cancer survivors and we both are “Nanas” to two fantastic grandchildren!!

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick, Lead



During this season of Covid-19, we have heard the created phrase, “new normal,” repeated *ad infinitum*. It is as if any previous happening was unusual, novel, unordinary, or perhaps unwelcome. But in my view, preposterous better describes what we have experienced beginning on March and until now. So, maybe “post-preposterous” better describes what’s next.

My friend in Georgia, Lynn Reimann (a logistics specialist), wrote an encouraging short daily devotional recently, and which more effectively speaks to my mindset of what’s next. Please, may I share it with you?

Let Your Stewardship be the New Normal

As we go through this pandemic together, yet separate, I find one phrase that has entered our lexicon that annoys and angers me. That phrase is, “This is the new normal.”

I prayed on it and asked myself why this bothered me so much. It’s such a small thing in the face of this pandemic. Then I read an article in *The New York Times* by Chris Adrian, “How to Hope: Lessons from a Children’s Hospital,” and I instantly knew.

I was transported to my time of volunteering in children's hospice. There is nothing normal about a child having a rare form of cancer. There is nothing normal about that child going into palliative care. There is nothing normal about the parents washing their hands for two minutes before entering the child's room. Nor is it normal to don a face mask or disinfect every toy or gift. It becomes the norm as the family and child hold on to their last moments together on this Earth, but it is not normal. To call it so diminishes the pain and suffering, the ever-present grief and yet, shining throughout, the glimmer of hope.

We are a nation, a global people grieving our loss of normal; the most profound of which is the loss of human touch and gathering. While some of the hygiene and disinfecting practices may become routine, they are not normal. While we may grow accustomed to staying six feet away or wearing masks, it is not normal.

We do not have to wait for this to pass before we start healing. Healing starts when we recognize the grief and call out to God for help. As a Christian and woman of faith, hope is normal. That bears repeating: Hope. Is. Normal. Christians hold on to that Light Eternal no matter how dark the circumstances. As Richard Evans puts it, "Hope...it is often in the darkest skies we see the brightest stars."

And aren't we surrounded by stars? Shining examples of what it means to give and sacrifice.

Hope dictates that this pandemic and all it entails is not the new normal. That this too shall pass. That we'll see a tomorrow where we gather as a family of faith and join hands again. There will be lessons learned and changes as a result, but we will get back to hugging one another.

So, for this month's Stewardship moment:

Consider being a "post-preposterous" steward: share HOPE!

And let us thank Lynn Reiman's stars": healthcare workers.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM – No report this month

MUSIC DIRECTOR – Isaac James



Happy June, folks! It is unbelievable that we are nearly halfway through the year. I pray all of you are safe and well and that we will be able to see each other again soon. I miss you all greatly!

I had asked Mary to send an email to all you of you, offering anyone who would like to have a part in the service to please contact me. Preludes, postludes or special music during the service is where I will place your song. You are welcome to record yourself, or if you would like to come to the church, recording of the performance on my I-Pad is available as well. I would love to have you all participate as we are not able to see each other. It's a good way to show your face.

"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63b)

Composer Philip Paul Bliss was born in 1838 on a farm in Pennsylvania, and his chores were often neglected as his musical interests took priority. After attending a singing school in Rome, Pennsylvania, he never returned to the farm. He married and began a career as music teacher, song leader and composer.

Bliss believed that music could be an instrument used to carry the gospel message. The first composer to use the term "gospel hymn," he felt called to obey Jesus' command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). Bliss preached through his music. One of his hymns that has gone into all the world is "Wonderful Words of Life." He wrote both words and music in 1874. In the three verses of the hymn, the phrase "wonderful words" appears ten times. There is no doubt that the words of the Bible were wonderful to Bliss. The second stanza describes these words: "all so freely given, wooing us to heaven."

Bliss went to his heavenly home when he was only 38 years old. In 1876 he and his wife Lucy traveled by train to Chicago to join an evangelistic meeting at Moody Tabernacle, where he was to be the song leader. As the train crossed a ravine, the bridge collapsed, sending the passengers seventy feet below. Bliss survived the fall, but as he crawled back into the wreckage to rescue his beloved wife, it burst into flames. He died with her.

The music of Philip Bliss continues to go into all the world as millions of Christians have been inspired by his gospel songs for over a century. Each time I sing "Wonderful Words of Life," I am reminded of the importance of being a student of the Bible. To study it is to love its message. As we study Genesis through Revelation, we grow in our understanding of God's presence, purpose and plan.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Reminger

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



Check out the "New Arrivals" in the library. There is something for everyone!! The new Reading for Renewal list is also available in the library. The Punta Gorda library has a majority of the books. Have a good summer and happy reading!

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

Though we may find ourselves inconvenienced and perhaps uncomfortable during the “new normal” of the pandemic, many in our community find themselves in great jeopardy. Our vulnerable sisters and brothers need our help as much or more than ever.

Punta Gorda CUCC remains committed to our work on behalf of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). Two years ago, 42 of us traveled to Immokalee to learn about farmworker conditions. Social Justice Ministry team members have continued to demonstrate at a local Wendy’s restaurant to urge the fast food chain to join the Fair Food Alliance. And last year, you contributed over \$1400 to support the Student Farmworker Alliance.

Now, the work on behalf of our brothers and sisters intensifies as their health and well-being are in danger because of COVID-19. They have asked us for our help.

A few weeks ago, *The New York Times* published an op-ed detailing how farmworkers are being affected by COVID-19 in Immokalee and how they are extremely vulnerable to the disease, given their working and living conditions: crowded housing, crowded transportation to work, lack of access to healthcare, and lack of health resources in rural communities. With this in mind, the CIW launched a campaign urging Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to take immediate steps to protect farmworkers’ health and wellbeing. Unless the Governor acted quickly, Immokalee could become an epicenter of contagion with grave consequences not only for farmworkers but for all of us: no farmworkers, no food.

The state heard CIW’s pleas and agreed to do three-days of free testing in Immokalee earlier this month. The testing has now confirmed the worst. COVID-19 is in Immokalee with 344 confirmed cases as of the end of May. Given the inadequacy of our department of health, CIW partnered with Doctors Without Borders, and they have been able to provide testing. Unfortunately, farmworkers are still in need of more tests.

What can we do?

1. Please read the op-ed here: <https://bit.ly/IfFarmworkersGetSick>
2. Sign the petition here: <https://bit.ly/COVID19PetitionCIW> and share with friends and family.
3. CIW is asking allies to send or mail facemasks. CIW has passed out 15,000+ reusable masks. PPE is virtually impossible to find in the local stores, and Winn Dixie, the only traditional grocery store in Immokalee, has not had hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes since early March. If helping in this way is of interest to you, let Glenn (weaver.glenn1@gmail.com) or M.E. (steelepierce@gmail.com) know.
4. Finally, we can support CIW with our monetary donations so they can continue this critical work. You can donate here: <https://makeallfoodfairfood.funraise.org>.

We remain devoted to our goal to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). You’re invited to join us as we plan how to serve our marginalized brothers and sisters. Write or call any of CUCC’s Social Justice Ministry team: co-facilitators Glenn Weaver or M.E. Steele-Pierce, Jim DeGood, Lori Larson, Jerry Larson, Elizabeth Pitcher, Carol Schmuhl, Linda Weaver, and Elden Wick.

Social Justice Ministry Mission statement: Recognizing the interconnectedness of all Creation, we seek to act for God’s justice and encourage our congregation to participate in justice ministries.



CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: The office will be open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. We will be closed on Fridays. Our telephone number is (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 p.m.

Updating Your Information

We are always trying to keep our information on members and friends up to date. We need your help! If you have had a change of mailing address, email, home cell telephone number change, please let us know so we can keep our records current and enable us to maintain 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@puntaorda-ucc.com or you can drop them off in the church office.

Name Tags: Once corporate worship begins again, 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
June 2	Marilyn Belseth
June 3	Linda Greenfield
June 4	Susann Luckenbach
June 5	Kevin Rivadeneira
June 15	Lucia Rivadeneira
June 16	Suzanne Cleveland
June 17	Nadine Sommerfield
June 18	Glenn Garrett
June 20	Joanne Stoughton
June 20	Linda Weaver
June 25	Jean Ringelstein
June 27	Caden Klossner

ANNIVERSARIES

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

