



DECEMBER 2023

**Worship Service in our Sanctuary at 10:30am
or watch our worship service LIVE! at:
www.fpcpunta.org and click on the logo "YouTube"**

25250 Airport Road
Punta Gorda, FL 33950
941-639-1959
first@fpcpunta.org
www.fpcpunta.org



ADVENT SEASON

I'm looking forward to gathering with family and friends, great food, decorating the church, getting together with you for Worship, singing traditional Christmas hymns, and most of all celebrating the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How can the church help us focus on the birth of our Lord and Savior? December 3rd begins the Advent Season in the church calendar. Advent is a season of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas. On each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, the church focuses on some aspect of the Christmas story – usually through the Sanctuary colors, sermon, music, and the lighting of the candles on the Advent Wreath. The Advent season invites us to step away from what can be a frenzied time of parties and shopping to consider how we commemorate the birth of Jesus, one of the holiest times in the Christian faith. It is also a time to reflect on the triumphant return of Jesus at the second coming.

What is significant about the Sanctuary colors? Traditionally purple or blue was used for the color of Advent. It was often specified that it be an indigo to represent the darkness before the birth. Early art shows church leaders in ornately decorated blue robes. Shades of blue symbolize royalty, the coming of the King, hope, and the night sky before dawn. Some historians suggest that northern European dyes were made from berries that produced blue, while southern Europe was able to make purple dyes. So, depending on the tradition you grew up with, blue or purple may have been used in your church.

The most common tradition of the Advent season is the Advent Wreath. The wreath and candles are full of symbolism tied to the Christmas season. So, what does the Advent Wreath symbolize? The wreath itself, which is made of various evergreens, signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the everlasting life we find in Christ. Even the individual evergreens that make up the wreath have their own meanings that can be adapted to our faith. The laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering. The pine, holly, and yew signify immortality and the cedar signifies strength and healing. The pinecones that decorate the wreath symbolize life and resurrection.

The candles also have their own special significance. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent, and one candle is lit each Sunday. Three of the candles are purple because the color purple is a liturgical color that signifies royalty, the birth of the King of kings. The first candle, which is purple, symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle" in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah. The second candle, also purple, represents peace. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy. It is called the "Shepherd's Candle," and is pink because rose is a liturgical color for joy. On the fourth week of Advent, we light the final purple candle to mark the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our Savior. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle," symbolizes love. The white candle is lit on Christmas Eve. This candle is called the "Christ Candle" and represents the life of Christ. The color white is for purity—because Christ is our sinless, pure Savior.

As part of the preparation, we have several Advent Devotionals available in the church foyer, please take one for your family for daily reflections on the reason for the season.

So, please join us Sundays at 10:30 AM, in person or online, during the Advent season as we look at the true meaning of the Christmas story.

In Christ, Pastor Barksdale

(Adapted from various resources – Little Roses, St. Paul's Episcopal, and Advent Web pages)

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP



We will decorate the church with poinsettias for Christmas. If you would like to give one in memory of, or in honor of a loved one, or to the Glory of God, please use a poinsettia envelope on the table in the Sanctuary or Foyer. Suggested donation is \$7 per poinsettia. *Return your envelope by Monday, December 18th* in order to be listed in a special bulletin insert.



December 3



December 10



December 17



December 24

Sermon Series Advent



Symbols of Christmas

Sermon Series December 31st



CHRISTMAS Cantata

Christmas Cantata
Sunday, December 24th, at 10:30am Worship Service
 A Service of Lessons and Carols
 Chancel Choir, Congregation, and Pastor Barksdale



Christmas EVE

Christmas Eve Service
Sunday, December 24th, Christmas Eve
5:00pm Candlelight Communion Service



New Year's Eve WORSHIP SERVICE

New Year's Eve Morning Worship Service
Sunday, December 31st
Worship at 10:30am - Fellowship at 11:30am

WORSHIP MINISTRY



Worship
Schedule

Sunday Mornings - 10:30am Worship Service (Also Online)
Sunday Evenings - 6:00pm Prayer Meeting (On Facebook)



Fellowship Time

Join us for beverages, cookies and treats
after Sunday's Worship Service



Christmas Is Coming!

Every year the choir presents special music the Sunday before Christmas. This year we will be singing a presentation consisting of hymns and carols along with lessons read by Pastor Barksdale. We really need some of you to come forward and sing with us. Most of the music is familiar to all of you and all that is required is that you attend a few rehearsals on Thursdays at 3:30pm. We will present this work on **December 24th** at the 10:30 service (you would be there anyway) and we have extra robes. We have a lot of fun presenting our music and look forward to having you sing with us. For more information, give me a call at 941-661-1553. Joan Byron

DISCIPLESHIP 2023

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

We are studying the Bible book of "Esther"

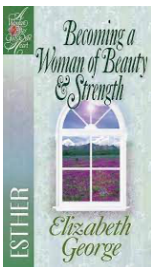
We meet the first and third Tuesdays each month at 10:00am in Fellowship Hall

Tuesday, December 5th - "Looking for a Queen" - Esther 2:1-4

"Discovering 'Diamonds in the Dust'" - Esther 2:5-7

Tuesday, December 19th - "Moving from the Mundane to the Mysterious" - Esther 2:8-11

Call Kathy Belville at 508-733-0546 for more information - All are welcome!



DONUTS & DOCTRINE Bible Study

Wednesday mornings at 10:00am

November 26 - December 6 - December 13 - December 20

Donuts &
Doctrine

Because of Bethlehem, by Max Lucado. Join us as we prepare for Advent. No one expected the Messiah to come the way he did. Yet the way he came was every bit as important as the coming itself. The manger *is* the message.

Because of Bethlehem, God knows what it's like to be human.

Because of Bethlehem, when we talk to him about tough times, he understands.

He's been there. He's been *here*.

Because of Bethlehem, we no longer have marks on our record...just grace.

DISCIPLESHIP WISDOM

A Flourishing Church is one that Expects Disciple Making

by the ECO Office (Dana)

In ECO, our mission is “The Building of Flourishing Churches that make Disciples of Jesus Christ”. We further define qualities of a flourishing church as one who:

- Knows its Unique Identity and Calling
- Normalizes Risk Taking
- Nurtures Missional Living
- Expects Disciple Making
- Generates Multiplying Leaders
- Prepares to Launch

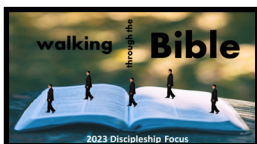
In previous years, congregations often identified their primary challenge and opportunity around the quality of *Knows its Unique Identity and Calling*.

Since the pandemic, the primary articulated area of need from congregations and leaders has shifted to one that *Expects Disciple Making*. The pandemic revealed the lack of discipleship in congregations that we had always just assumed was present. Disciple making is at the core calling of the church and the life of the individual Christian, and yet this fundamental task is fraught with challenges and distractions.

One of our desires and emphasis in ECO is to find appropriate ways to help in the area of discipleship for churches and leaders. Discipleship cannot be delegated to just one person. It is the mission of ECO as a whole. Here are some core beliefs about discipleship that we want to help churches integrate as they fulfill their calling.

- Discipleship is not a program that the church does. It is a culture the church creates. There are programs that can enhance discipleship, but we can't segregate discipleship to one department of the church or one season of the calendar year. It must be primary in all we do.
- Discipleship isn't simply knowing about God, it is about knowing God and following His leading into the world. Too often we have equated discipleship with knowledge and forgotten that discipleship is about loving God with our heart, mind, and strength and that love needs to overflow to others.
- Discipleship has core principles but flexible structures and interchangeable materials. One size does not fit all – and there is not one magic curriculum or program that will work for all congregations. I had dinner a couple of weeks ago with a guy who grew up in my home church and now is a VP for Young Life International. It was fascinating to talk to him about the consistency and diversity of how discipleship is done with the 1.9 million kids that are involved with Young Life throughout the world. We too are trying to suggest what are consistent principles and what are interchangeable methods among our ECO churches.
- In order for a discipleship culture to be developed, the whole operating system of the church needs to be evaluated and potentially modified.

As challenging as it can be to rethink and refocus our churches on discipleship, I am grateful that God has revealed this need to not only our ECO congregations but to the Church in the West. I am also grateful to do this journey together to learn, share and grow as we fulfill our calling together. Know that we are always here for you to help you flourish and help make Christ known in your communities and throughout the world!



The One Year Chronological Bible Reading Plan for December 2023

Pick up a copy of the Reading Plan in the church foyer

For December we will complete our reading of the New Testament

FPC'S ANNUAL CONCERT SERIES 2023 - 2024



Sunday, November 19, 2023, 3:00pm

Barefoot Trio

David Suarez-Rio, flute; Devin Burgess, viola; John McColley, harp
An enchanting fall performance of music presenting works by Claude Debussy, Carl Nielsen, Andre Jolivet and more



Sunday, December 17, 2023, 3:00pm

The Two Piano Group

The Two Piano Group of Charlotte County unites once again to perform their traditional mix of contemporary and traditional favorites, plus some new and innovative selections. These area musicians come from a professional pianistic musical background and are joined together by their love of playing the enhanced orchestral like sound created by the two-piano repertoire.



Sunday, January 21, 2024, 3:00pm

Cahal Dunne

Cahal Dunne, "Ireland's Piano Man", is a composer, pianist, comedian, story teller, and television personality. His style is rich and deep, reflecting the many strands in his distinguished career. Sit back and enjoy this entertainer extraordinaire.



Sunday, February 18, 2024, 3:00pm

The Goldtones

The Goldtones are one of Florida's premiere vocal harmony groups singing songs ranging from the traditional doo-wop tunes of the 50s and 60s to those melodies sung by later groups of the 70s and 80s. Audiences love them not only for their vocal talents, but for their humor and their audience interaction.



Sunday, April 7, 2024, 3:00pm

Stephanie Smith, Organist

Stephanie served as FPC's Organist from 2018 - 2020. In this concert she will share some of her favorite exciting hymn-based compositions. Stephanie now serves as Organist and Music Director at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palatka, Florida.

\$15.00 Suggested Donation for all concerts

**"Cahal Dunne" and "Goldtones" - Tickets are available now
Church office (9-12 Monday-Thursday) OR Call 941-625-4945**

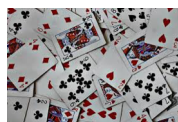
A free will offering will be taken at the other concerts

**All concerts presented at First Presbyterian Church of Punta Gorda
25250 Airport Road, Punta Gorda, FL 33950 Website -fpcpunta.org**

FPC ACTIVITIES AND OUTREACH



PRAYER SHAWL GATHERING
Monday, December 11th at 10:00am



GAME FELLOWSHIP
Thursday mornings at 10:00am in Fellowship Hall All are welcome!



LADIES LUNCH BUNCH

1st and 3rd Friday of each month

Sign up in the church foyer

*Friday, December 1st
12:00pm
Los Mariachi's
Punta Gorda*

*Friday, December 15th
12:00pm
LongHorn Steakhouse
Port Charlotte*



MISIÓN PENIEL (IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA)

*Join us on Friday, December 1st for an afternoon session
Meet at the church at 12:30pm and we will return between 8 and 9pm
Sign up in the church foyer*



CHRISTMAS POT LUCK DINNER

Wednesday, December 6th, 5:00

Turkey and Ham will be provided

Please sign up in the church foyer to share a side dish, salad, or dessert

We will also sing Christmas Carols



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS CRUISE of Punta Gorda

Friday, December 15th - 6:30pm

We will meet at the dock at Fishermen's Village

\$27.00 per person

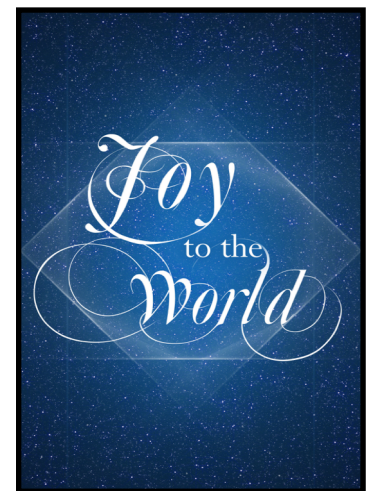
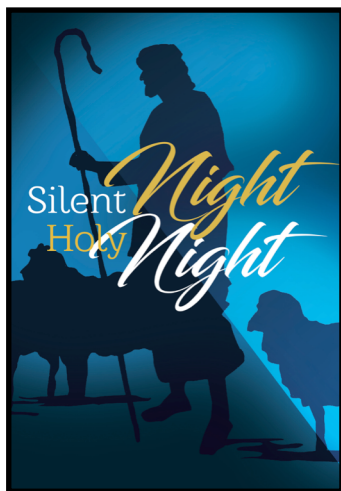
Sign up and pay by December 1st



Saturday, January 6th, 9am - Take Down Greens

FELLOWSHIP EVENTS

WELCOME BACK BREAKFAST



CHRISTMAS TIME



CHRISTMAS TIME, WINTER TIME
TIME TO SHARE WITH THOSE WE CARE
HUSTLE BUSTLE EVERYWHERE

CHRISTMAS TIME, BLESSING TIME
TIME TO PRAY AND TIME TO SAY
WE ARE THANKFUL EVERYDAY

CHRISTMAS TIME, JOYFUL TIME
TIME TO SING AND HUM ALL DAY
AND PASS THE MESSAGE ALONG THE WAY

JESUS IS WITH US EVERYDAY!

HOLY SPIRIT and Nancy Beasom

MISSIONS MINISTRY



First Presbyterian Church proudly supports
Missions from our church budget.
If you would personally like to make additional
donations, please make checks payable to FPC
and indicate the mission on the memo line.



FALL MISSION PROJECT Jesus Loves You Ministry

We sent 28+ pairs of pants
and 85+ towels
to Jesus Loves You Ministry

Thank you!

CHRISTMAS OFFERING Veterans Village

Use Christmas Gifting envelopes
for your donations
We will provide Gift Cards
to the Veterans

Thank you for your generosity

STAND IN THE GAP FUND

The purpose of this fund is to assist
supported missionaries and
ministries of our church when they
face unexpected financial burdens

To donate to this fund,
please mark your gift as SITG



Monthly Mission Support

CROSSROADS HOPE ACADEMY (PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA)

Crossroadspg.org



JESUS LOVES YOU MINISTRY (PORT CHARLOTTE, FLORIDA)

Jesuslovesyouministryinc.com

Shower & Lunch
Ministry



MISIÓN PENIEL (IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA)

Misionpeniel.com



ANTIOCH PARTNERS MISSIONARIES

Eric and Debbie Stone, Guatemala

Lisa Alfonsi, Lima, Peru

theantiochpartners.org



MISSIONARY VENTURES INTERNATIONAL

Chasen and Katie Brokaw

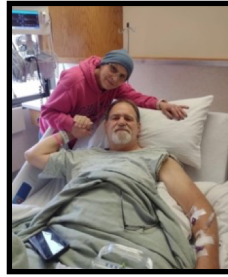
Nicaragua

mvi.org

breakingborders.org



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY



This is Rick and Margaret Speake, who live in Illinois. Rick is my (Gail Thornton) daughter's boss.

A little over a year ago, Rick's kidneys started to fail and he had to go on dialysis.

Shortly thereafter Margaret found out she had an aggressive form of cancer and had to have chemo and radiation.

My daughter asked for a couple of our prayer shawls for Rick and Margaret.

Rick has used his prayer shawl to bring comfort to him and he took it with him to every dialysis.

A week ago, after months of prayer and treatment, Margaret got to ring the bell that she is cancer free.

The next day Rick got a call that they had a kidney for him. He had the surgery that night and is doing well.

Rick said ***"I am leaving the hospital with my prayer blanket in tow. It has meant the world to me.***

Thank you all who are involved in the prayers that came with the blanket."

Our Prayer Shawl Gathering usually meets the second Monday of the month at the church at 10:00am

and they create beautiful soft prayer shawls for anyone who needs one.

So if you knit or crochet and want to spend some good fellowship time doing something you love, please join them.

Also, if you know of a neighbor, a friend or a relative who could find comfort and peace wrapped in a prayer shawl,

please let Suzie Lorenz know or contact the office.

Blessings, Gail Thornton

MILITARY PRAYER LIST

Prayer

O Prince of Peace, we humbly ask Your protection for all our men and women in military service. Give them unflinching courage to defend with honor, dignity and devotion the rights of all who are imperiled by injustice and evil. Guard our churches, our homes, our schools, our hospitals, our factories, our buildings, and all those within from harm and peril. Protect our land and its people from enemies within and without. Grant an early peace with victory founded upon justice. Instill in the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere a firm purpose to live forever in peace and good will towards all. Amen.

- * Major John McPherson, Air Force, great nephew of Marguerite O'Brien, stationed at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas
- * Major Ryan Swisher, Army Ranger, grandson of Rachel Pfaender, stationed in North Carolina
- * Major Eric Engstrom, Army Intel., son of Alan Engstrom, stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
- * Captain Zadick Self, Marines, grandson-in-law of Ron Beasom, stationed in Peoria, Illinois
- * Navy Seaman Tyler Beasom, Navy, grandson of Ron Beasom, stationed in San Diego, California
- * Lt. Col. David Sifferd, Jr., Army Reserve, son of David Sifferd, stationed in Ft. Knox, KY
- * Pvt. Michael Robert Wagner, U.S. Marine Corp., great-grandson of Robert and Jean Humphreys, stationed in Hawaii.

Do you have a family member serving in the military?

If so, we'd like to add them to the newsletter prayer list. Fill out the form that's on the sign-up table in the church foyer and place it in the HELMET or let the church office know.

MEMBER CARE



CONTACT information



Prayer Requests and Hospital / Rehab Information

Address, Phone, Email changes

Birthdays and Anniversaries

Email to first@fpcpunta.org



First Pres is on Facebook!

Go to:

[facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChurch-Punta Gorda](https://www.facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChurch-Punta Gorda)



To watch the current Service:

1) Follow the link: <https://www.youtube.com/@FPCPG>
(This link is also on our website in the top right corner, simply press the YouTube button.)

2) When you land on the FPC YouTube page you will see a small screen with the word LIVE, click it and it will fill up your screen. The Service will begin at approximately 10:30 AM. (If you don't see a small screen with the word LIVE, we have not started streaming.)



Giving to FPC - In person

Mail to the church office: 25250 Airport Rd; PG, FL 33950

Online Giving through our website: fpcpunta.org, click Donate



END OF YEAR GIVING

Thank you for your donations this year to FPC and its various ministries.

As you consider your end of year giving, please have your offerings/gifts to the church before December 31, 2023. Any donations received after that date will be applied to one's 2024 giving.

If you would like to donate gifts of stocks, please call the church for information.



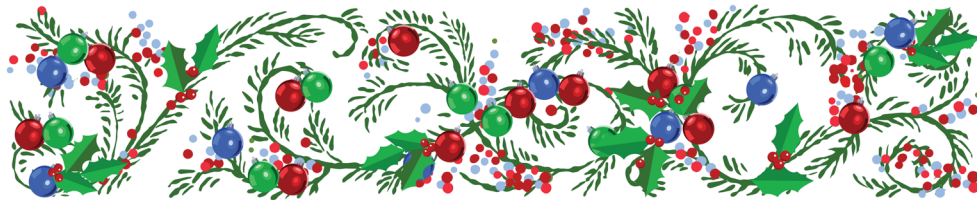
Please pray for the family of Diane Culver-Truby who went home to the Lord on October 25, 2023. A Memorial Service was held on November 4, 2023.

DECEMBER 2023

CHURCH PRAYER CALENDAR AND CELEBRATIONS

Prayer is the place where burdens change shoulders - We pray for....
*The elderly, the infirm, the hospitalized, those in nursing homes, the homebound and lonely,
 and all those who have requested our prayerful support.*

Each month we remember church members and friends on a rotating basis...



1 Steve MacDonald	11 Bruce Peters	21 Elaine Schultz
2 Carolyn Ann Maupin	12 Rachel Pfaender	22 Jene Shafer
3 Gene & Barbara McPherson	13 Linda Potthoff	23 Dave & Sharon Sifferd
4 Larry & Sue Mesler	14 Barksdale & Bo Pullen	24 Ron & Billie Sixt
5 Steve & Joanie Mock	15 Barbara Reynolds	25 Andy & Nancy Smith
6 Steve & Valerie Neeley	16 Tim Ronan	26 Margie Smith
7 Jim & Patti Nuznoff	17 Pete & Debbie Rostad	27 Bo & Karen Sostar
8 Marguerite O'Brien	18 Barbara Ryan	28 Gail Thornton
9 David Osweiler	19 Charles Sampsel	29 Larrie & Marjorie Tisdale
10 David & Jane Otoupal	20 Andy & Katie Schulte	30 Richard & Linda Wagar
		31 Don & Mary Anne Washabaugh



5—George Albright	20—Dave Osweiler
15—David Lang	21—Larrie Tisdale
16—Wanda Boyles	23—Steve Mock
17—Dave Sifferd	24—Bob Humphreys
19—Frances Frost	



19—John & Gail Evans	43 yrs.
19—David & Jane Otoupal	64 yrs.
21—Barksdale & Bo Pullen	39 yrs.



DECEMBER 2023



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Church Office Hours Monday - Thursday 9:00am to 1:00pm						
 3 Communion Sunday 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	4 1:00pm Worship Team	5 10:00am Women's Bible Study 1:00pm Fellowship Team	 6 10:00 Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry 5:00pm Christmas Dinner	7 10:00am Game Fellowship 3:30pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	8 12:00pm Ladies Lunch Bunch at Los Mariachi's Punta Gorda	9
 10 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	11 10:00am Prayer Shawl Gathering	12 10:00am Mission Team	13 10:00 Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	14 10:00am Game Fellowship 3:30pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	15 12:00pm Ladies Lunch Bunch at LongHorn Steakhouse Port Charlotte 6:30pm Christmas Lights Cruise	16
 17 Deacon's Fund 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 3:00 Concert Series 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	18 2:00pm Session	19 10:00am Women's Bible Study	20 10:00 Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	21 10:00am Game Fellowship 3:30pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	22	23
 24 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 5:00pm Christmas Eve Service	25  Christmas DAY	26 OFFICE CLOSED	27 OFFICE CLOSED	28 OFFICE CLOSED	29 OFFICE CLOSED	30
 31 New Year's Eve 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time	 Hello January					 January 2024 S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31