



ADVENT

DECEMBER 2024

**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



Dear Church Family,

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 1st 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 will be look at Isaiah 9:6 - "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." We have 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 10:30am, 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 16th* in order to be listed in a special bulletin insert.



December 1



December 8



December 15



December 22



December 24
Candlelight Communion
Service at 5:00pm



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



Sermon on the SAND
Every Sunday at 8:00am - 8:30am at Fishermen's Village
Pastor Barksdale will deliver the Message on December 1st

Holiday Ensemble



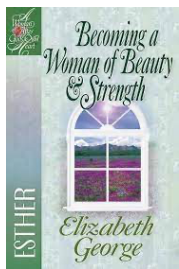
Please join this Ensemble to celebrate the holidays.

We will present music in worship on December 8th and 15th

with music from "A New and Glorious Morn", by Lloyd Larson.
Rehearsals are on Thursdays at 4:00pm for about one hour.

This will help prepare our congregation for Advent and Christmas
and will welcome people interested in singing with others and sharing together.

DISCIPLESHIP 2024



WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

December

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

December 3rd - Lesson 19 - Esther 8:9-17 "Sending Glad Tidings"

December 17th - Lesson 20 - Esther 9:1-10 "Fighting for Right"

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



DONUTS & DOCTRINE BIBLE STUDY

December 4, 11, 18

Wednesdays at 10:00am

"A Healthy Church" - Studies in 1 & II Timothy

All are welcome!



Church Membership CLASS

Next class will be January 26, 2025

Join us for a one-class introduction to FPC

DISCIPLESHIP WISDOM

Dear Discipleship-first Friends,

Continuing with our series detailing often overlooked advice on leading a church in Jesus-style disciple making – we've covered a lot of ground with the first four articles:

- [Don't Announce the Revolution](#)
- [Preach and Normalize King Jesus](#)
- [Normalize Being a Disciple of Jesus](#)
- [Normalize Conformity to the Image of Jesus as the Goal of Disciple Making](#)

You may be thinking, "Some of that is different or hard, but I think I can handle it. I thought it would be harder than that."

And, maybe you weren't wrong – here is the hard part that you've been anticipating. Instead of looking and feeling like a classroom, small groups should look and feel more like A.A. That's right... Alcoholics Anonymous. To truly make disciples of Jesus, people need to be loved and held accountable in a relational small group they can trust. Jesus reserved His best and deepest teachings for His small group:

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to [the crowd], as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything (Mark 4:33-34).

As Jim Putman often states, "We have separated the message of Jesus from the methods of Jesus. Jesus' methods are just as divine as His message." Jesus' method was to make disciples in relational small groups.

Did you know that A.A. began as the Christian discipleship program, The Oxford Group, in 1921? It was so successful at helping people change that a group of recovering alcoholics used the methodology to help other alcoholics get sober. They just dropped the Jesus part. Programs like [Re:generation](#) and [Celebrate Recovery](#) put Jesus back into the process.

Continued on Page 4

Likewise, Jim Putman modeled the small groups of [Real Life Ministries](#) after A.A.:

I learned a lot about myself when dealing with my drinking problem in the late 1980s. Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) had it right and many churches had it wrong. I felt weak and alone, though I had given my life to Christ. Most of the Christians I knew kept to themselves. Oh, there were potlucks where a lot of small talk occurred but not a lot of sharing about failings. Sometimes there was a lot of theological banter and some gossip about the pastor's kids, but nothing real. Maybe because they believed they had to appear holy. If anyone really knew them, the truth of who they are would come out. They're imperfect, just like everybody else. [...] We are to be with people who will tell us the truth, what we need to hear even if it isn't what we want to hear. God says to do this daily because He knows we can get messed up in the head in a moment's time. We need constant support. [...] Unfortunately, all I found in church at the time was a place to go once a week. I had many questions, but no one to answer them. The pastor was too busy and no one else had time. A.A. became essential in my life. The church wasn't there to help, so the secular world stepped in. Jesus modeled effective discipleship for us through building relationships. He could call His disciples on the carpet when they got it wrong. He encouraged them and provided a safe place where they could voice their shortcomings and ask for help. He had a small group of men He could really know and thus keep accountable. Once again, real discipleship happens in small groups.[i]

You can learn Real Life Ministries' small group disciple-making process from the [Relational Discipleship Network](#).

Putman wasn't the only one who realized that A.A. was a successful model of disciple making. Dallas Willard wrote:

Historically, the A.A. program was closely aligned with the church and Christian traditions, and now it has much to give back to a church that has largely lost its grip on spiritual formation as a standard path of Christian life. Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program. There can be no doubt that the A.A. program originated and gained its power from Christian sources, to meet needs that Christian institutions at the time should have been meeting but were not. It works in terms of essential structures of the human self, revealed by God through his people.[ii]

John Mark Comer reflected on Willard writing this and added:

It's highly likely that any working model of spiritual formation will bear all sorts of resemblance to A.A., with its three elements of (1) radical self-awareness, honesty, and confession, (2) total surrender to God's power, and (3) a loving, tight-knit community to both love you and hold you accountable to becoming your true self. Take away any one of these tripart elements, and the proverbial stool will fall.[iii]

Obviously, your standard small group with mixed genders should not be as confessional as A.A. However, out of your small groups, other accountability groups, such as same-gender accountability groups, micro-groups, and one-on-one groups such as [Small Circle](#) should be formed to fill this purpose. A quick Google search will reveal that there are many such groups out there. But whatever model you choose, it must hold people accountable for being [conformed to the image of Jesus](#).

I highly recommend beginning the process in your church by taking the staff or elders through a structured process such as Re:generation or Celebrate Recovery. Neither of these requires you to have an addiction to go through the process. What they will do is acclimate your team to what a relational disciple making group should feel like. Then, take that experience and introduce it into the rest of the small groups in your church.

I would also recommend reading Avery Willis' [Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World](#) to learn how to lead a group using the storying method. The majority of adults are functionally illiterate and will learn more orally than they will from studying a book. Storying also creates a conversational atmosphere in your small groups. Again, you can learn this method from the [Relational Discipleship Network](#).

As previously stated, don't start with the whole church. If you are the lead minister/pastor, start with the elders or staff. Start with a group of people who have taken hold of the previous steps and want to know more. Start with just one group. Then, let the people who get it spark a flame that spreads throughout the church.

[i] Putman, Jim. Church Is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together. Baker Publishing Group.

[ii] Willard, Dallas. Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ. The Navigators.

[iii] Comer, John Mark. Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus. Become like him. Do as he did. The Crown Publishing Group.

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.



CHRISTMAS OFFERING

Veterans Village
Ground Up Ministry

Use your Christmas or Special Gifting envelopes
Thank you for your generosity!
Collections through December 24th

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



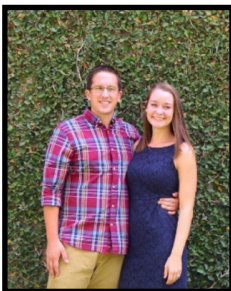
MISSIONARY VENTURES INTERNATIONAL

Chasen and Katie Brokaw

Nicaragua

mvi.org

breakingborders.org



FPC ACTIVITIES AND OUTREACH



PRAYER SHAWL GATHERING
Monday, December 9th 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 6th
12:00pm
Peter's Restaurant
Port Charlotte*

*Friday, December 20th
12:00pm
LongHorn Steakhouse
Port Charlotte*



*Tuesday, December 3rd - 12:00pm
Lunch 'n' Learn - "Wills & Trusts"
Sign up in the church foyer*



MISIÓN PENIEL (IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA)

*Join us on Friday, December 6th for the afternoon session
We will meet at the church at 12:15pm*

*Join us on Friday, January 31st for the afternoon session
We will meet at the church at 12:15pm*

We need 12 people to sign up in the church foyer



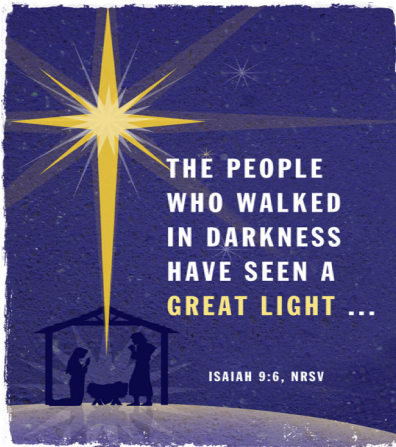
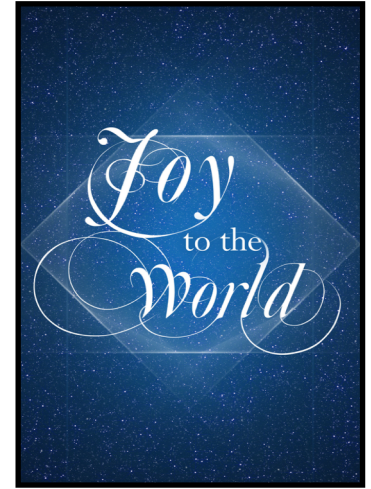
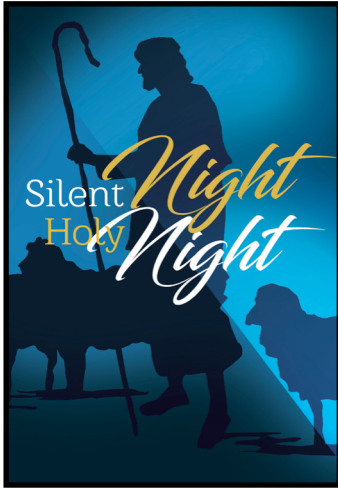
CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE at the Pullen's Home
*Sundays, December 8th and 15th from 1:30pm - 3:30pm
Sign up in the church foyer*



CHRISTMAS DINNER
*Wednesday, December 11th at 5:00pm
Turkey and Noodles Dinner
Sign up in the church foyer*



TAKE DOWN THE GREENS
Saturday, January 4th at 9:00am



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
- * 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
- * Second Lieutenant, JTAC, Alexander Kingsbury, Air Force, great-grandson of Tim Ronan, stationed in New York
- * Major Christina West, Army, granddaughter of William Dossé, stationed at Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg, NC) and her husband Major Matt Walter, Army, currently deployed in the Middle East

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



*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 10:30am (Pre-Service at 10:15am).
(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](https://www.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 by December 31, 2024.
Any donations received after that date will be applied to one's 2025 giving.
If you would like to donate gifts of stocks, please call the church for information.*



*Congratulations to Sonja and William (Bill) Dossé
on the birth of two great-grandsons
Conrad Mark Walter was born September 14, 2024
Sullivan James West was born October 26, 2024*



*Please pray for George Albright, whose wife Sharon
went home to the Lord on November 3, 2024
A Memorial Service was held on November 18th in our Sanctuary*

*Please pray for the family of Myles MacDonald
who went home to the Lord on November 3, 2024
Myles MacDonald was a retired Pastor who preached here from time to time*

DECEMBER 2024

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 Don & Mary Anne Washabaugh	11 Roy & Kathy Belville	21 Judith Cornell
2 Sharon Weed	12 Shirley Berg	22 Charlie & Doris Costa
3 Donald & Susan Willecke	13 Rick & Kay Berner	23 Robert Cuzner
4 Teri York	14 Duane & Wanda Boyles	24 Peter & Donna DeBree
5 Charles & Evelyn Zietsma	15 Bonnie Brown	25 Bill & Sonja Dossé
6 George Albright	16 Lili Bush	26 John & Ramona Douglas
7 Jay Aldridge	17 Ray & Joan Byron	27 Phyllis Ehrhardt
8 Rex Anderson	18 Kay Callahan	28 Merrillyn Ellison
9 Laurel Aumend	19 Bonnie Carey	29 Alan Engstrom
10 Denny & Minty Ausmen	20 Sam & Patti Cessna	30 John & Gail Evans
		31 George & Bev Fallenbeck



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	44 yrs.
19—David & Jane Otoupal	65 yrs.
21—Barksdale & Bo Pullen	40 yrs.



DECEMBER 2024



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																										
 Comunion Sunday 8:00am Sermon on the Sand 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	2 10:00am Prayer Shawl Gathering 1:00pm Worship Team	3 10:00am Women's Bible Study 12:00pm Lunch 'n' Learn "Wills & Trusts" 1:00pm Fellowship Team	4 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	5 10:00am Game Fellowship 4:00pm Holiday Ensemble	6 12:00pm Ladies Lunch Bunch at Peter's Restaurant in PC 12:15pm Mission Trip to Immokalee	7																																										
 8 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 1:30pm - 3:30pm Open House at Pullens 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	9 10:00am Prayer Shawl Gathering 1:00pm Worship Team	10 10:00am Mission Team	 11 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry 5:00pm Christmas Dinner	12 10:00am Game Fellowship 4:00pm Holiday Ensemble	13	14																																										
 15 Deacon's Fund 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 1:30pm - 3:30pm Open House at Pullens 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	16 2:00pm Session	17 10:00am Women's Bible Study 5:00pm Christmas Eve Service	18 10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry 5:00pm Christmas Dinner	19 10:00am Game Fellowship 4:00pm Holiday Ensemble	20 12:00pm Ladies Lunch Bunch at LongHorn Steakhouse in PC	21																																										
 22 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	23 OFFICE CLOSED	24  5:00pm Christmas Eve Service	25  10:00am Donuts & Doctrine 10:00am Jesus Loves You Shower Ministry	26 OFFICE CLOSED	27	28																																										
29 10:15am Hymn Sing 10:30am Worship Service 11:30am Fellowship Time 6:00pm Prayer Meeting-FB	30 OFFICE CLOSED	31  <i>New Year's Eve</i>			<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px;"> Church Office Hours Monday - Thursday 9:00am to 1:00pm </div>	<div style="text-align: right;"> January 2025 <table border="1"> <tr> <td>S</td><td>M</td><td>T</td><td>W</td><td>T</td><td>F</td><td>S</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td><td>31</td><td></td> </tr> </table> </div>	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	
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																																											