

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



August 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

A Deserted Place

I write this as I prepare to take a much-needed vacation. The care of our congregation is assured. Two VERY experienced retired clergy will be leading worship, preaching, and caring for the flock. Thank you, Dick Tulip and Herb Henry!

I wonder if there is a design for the timing of this week's Gospel reading, Mark 6:30-34. In this section of Mark's Gospel, the Apostles (the only time Mark calls the disciples this) have just returned from a very successful ministry experience. Jesus had given them authority over unclean spirits and healing powers. These twelve people returned from that experience filled with stories of their adventure, and they couldn't wait to tell Jesus. He sat and listened, I can imagine with a smile on his face. After they had run down, Jesus said this to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

Jesus didn't want them running short on spiritual energy and he urged them to get away from it all and rest. This is where I might see coincidence. It is exactly what I am about to do, get away from it all for a while.

In my mind, Jesus suggested this for the Apostles to be able to attend to their own needs and to recharge. They had been so busy that they hadn't even taken the time to eat! Jesus knew that if they didn't make that time, they wouldn't be as effective in ministry. I heed this advice from time to time.

We are very connected to Social Justice Ministries here. We are considering so many ministries, passions, that the plans are flying around like crazy. That is a wonderful experience but consuming in a way too.

I was reading a commentary by Cláudio Carvalhaes, a professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. In his commentary about Mark 6, he noted that we can become so busy doing ministry that we ignore our own spiritual needs. He cautioned against Social Justice Ministries BECOMING our spirituality. SJM are not intended to take the place of our soul care, they are meant to flow from a well-rested spiritual place. His comments impacted me. So, I have given myself a task while I am on vacation. I will do my best to remember to get away to a deserted place by myself for a bit to rest.

I know just the place. My parents gave us a piece of land in my hometown. It is a place with flowing streams, lush evergreen trees, and some open spaces from where one can see all the way to Mount Washington in New Hampshire, about one hundred miles from the spot where one stands. One can also see the Green Mountain range, all the way to Mount Mansfield, about sixty miles away. This piece of land is where I spent my childhood and where I have trekked with Kelly and my boys, looking for polliwogs and squirrels. It is where I hunted as a boy (believe me, the animals were really safe when I hunted! My heart wasn't into killing even then). It is certainly quiet and deserted, unless you count all the animals that call it home.

To get to this place, I will drive by familiar houses where I can name the families that lived there as I grew up. I will go there and, on the way, visit the grave of my mother. I will walk those cemetery grounds and see the names of families from my parent's past, some of whom I have buried there. My blood is in that place and on the land where I grew up. For just a little while, I will get away to that deserted place and rest.

Two significant things happen when one gets away. There is the chance to step away from things that have become routine, though never dull. One is able to try things that are new. I will have the opportunity to look around and really see deeply into myself at the same time. I think that one thing that happens is that a different breath enters you. It can be nostalgic or new, refreshing, renewing. The other thing, which I believe Jesus knew well, is that time away strengthens the desire to return to ministry. The Call never fades, but the energies sometimes do, a bit. Being away reawakens that passion and desire to serve God. It creates a hunger to return to what one has stepped away from. Kind of ironic, eh?

So, while I am away, please welcome into our pulpit a fresh perspective and consideration of the ministry that we do here. Have fun! This can be your time away to refresh and renew and you need not even leave this place! Take care my friends.

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Judy Minier, Moderator



Summer may seem like a “slow” time of the year for most of us with planned, restful vacations, family visits or reunions, or just hanging out in the back yard, but this year seems to be different here at your church in Punta Gorda! There has been a flurry of activity and several new endeavors we have embarked upon. You may read about some of these actions in the Endowment report or the Pastor's notes of this Beacon, but they are worth mentioning more than once, so please bear with me if some information is repeated! We have news on the roofing

project, a new Clerk to welcome to the Leadership Team (thank you, Susann Luckenbach for stepping forward!!), a special matching funds effort to support “Keep Families Together”, ongoing picketing of Wendy’s for their unfair labor practices, signs posted and letters sent to patrons about our gun policy, and more! Read on -

Special Leadership Team Roofing Meeting: On June 29, the Leadership Team met and reviewed bids submitted to us by 4 licensed roofers. Thanks go to Melissa Brown for organizing the helpful spreadsheet we reviewed to make it easier for us to compare the various options. One of the most intriguing recommendations that came to us was the offer (and strong suggestion) that all we really need to do is make repairs at this time because the overall roof (in this licensed roofer’s opinion) is in reasonable shape and should last another 3-4 years. After careful deliberation about this and the other offers, a vote was taken to pursue the “repair now, begin a capital campaign to fund a new roof, and then replace” it at a later time. The Leadership Team is continuing its conversation with Galloway Roofing staff to determine the exact course of action we will follow. The repairs are very affordable and would buy us time to raise the funds to do the complete job in a timely manner. Stay tuned to this important project – we want to protect and preserve the building in a safe, cost-effective way!

Gun-Free Building Letter: A letter has been mailed or hand delivered to our church’s vendors, workmen, and patrons who enter and use the building. The notice was also sent to city officials (including the police, fire department and Supervisor of Elections) to make them aware of our gun free policy. Thanks go to Cathy Ann and Bill Colson for having the no-gun signs made for our doors. So far, there haven’t been any questions or comments from folks about the policy. We trust that it will be respectfully followed and people will abide by our wishes.

Want Ad: We are in need of a Discipleship Chair and committee for our congregation! Please consider stepping forward! The job is not onerous or difficult. The Chair may be a member or associate member who can convene the Worship Committee at least quarterly, establish ushers on a monthly basis, and help arrange the annual picnic. Many of the duties can be done by phone or skype calls, so being a seasonal member would not be a problem! The added benefit is that you would learn a lot about the church, our practices, and the Leadership Team if you join us. Don’t be surprised if YOU get asked to consider taking on this position!

And finally, a note of gratitude to all who have participated in our services over the first half of the summer. Thank you for stepping up to help usher, set up communion elements, host coffee hour, greet newcomers, perform musically, read Bible passages, and keep our church community vibrant and relevant in today’s world. We could not operate with your support, assistance and service!

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 11 from 3:30-5:30 p.m. in the church library.

Remember, we (the Leadership Team and the Congregation) are here to support our Pastor, our church’s ministries/responsibilities, the church’s general operations, and one another. We welcome your input. I feel very fortunate to work with such a dedicated and knowledgeable group on our Team and within the congregation!

Have a great summer, safe travels, and stay cool!

TREASURER – Melissa Brown

July 2018 Treasurer’s Report



Financial Results	June-18	2018 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$9,024.00	\$81,216.00	\$85,500.00
Expenses	\$12,488.00	\$73,456.00	\$81,495.00
Net Income	-\$3,464.00	\$7,760.00	\$4,005.00

As expected, June financial results showed a loss, but it was actually less than the May loss: only \$3,464. Year-to-date, we have POSITIVE net income of \$7,760, which is BETTER THAN OUR FORECAST of \$4,005.

The chart below shows our electrical bills since the installation of the solar panels. From April through September is when we will see the most significant savings, and as you can see, the savings are adding up! Saving dollars and saving our planet at the same time.

Electrical Service	Charges		
	Current	Prior Year	(Higher)/ Lower
Nov-17	\$374.71	\$367.98	(\$6.73)
Dec-17	\$275.33	\$417.55	\$142.22
Jan-18	\$267.81	\$269.00	\$1.19
Feb-18	\$424.64	\$465.25	\$40.61
Mar-18	\$305.09	\$476.17	\$171.08
Apr-18	\$265.61	\$641.42	\$375.81
May-18	\$367.87	\$805.49	\$437.62
Jun-18	\$723.75	\$771.63	\$47.88
Total	\$3,004.81	\$4,214.49	\$1,209.68

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.

MINISTER OF MUSIC - Tim Sperber

I would like to thank the members of our summer choir for providing special music for our services during the month of July. They have faithfully come to rehearsal Sunday mornings at 9:15 A.M. in Faith Hall. Come join us on Sunday Mornings. We can always use more singers

Do you play a musical instrument? If you do, please let me know. We can use your talent during our worship services. It can be as simple as playing the melody of a hymn to special pieces that can be done during the musical offering. Contact me at the organ after service.

Musical Blessings
Tim Sperber



ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

. Your Endowment Team has had a busy year considering the number of applications and distributions during the first half of the year. The earnings from the Endowment investments have allowed a considerable increase in distributions this year, but with the current volatility of the market it is difficult to predict what might be available from 2018 earnings to be distributed in 2019. The Endowment portfolio with Vanguard is well positioned to smooth out the peaks and valleys of the current market. Time will tell how active we will be in 2019.



The Endowment Fund can be used for distributions to the following categories:

Education: Grants or scholarships for the purpose of attending schools of higher learning or training which enables members of our congregation to grow in Christian faith.

Community Service & Outreach: Funds programs through community action groups, service agencies and supports the social & economic needs of the community.

Wider Mission of the UCC: Provides for work of the UCC in such areas as new church development and world mission.

Capital Improvements: To provide for major capital improvements (not maintenance) of facilities and debt reduction that cannot be raised by annual giving and capital campaign efforts.

Distributions can be up to 1/2 of the income and/or up to 1/2 of the capital gains, excluding new gifts, in the current or following year. There will be no invasion of principal and gains cannot be carried over for future distribution.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

Summer is more than half over. We have been having around 30 people stay for Fellowship on Sunday. I would like to thank the following people for hosting: Brian Rowlands, Armando Mascarenaz, Jean and Bill Ringelstein, Kathy Frantish, Molly Hall, Betty Balmer, Sandy and Bob Armstrong



The last of the tall, white cupboards, in the corner of Faith Hall, is full of Ladies Fellowship supplies. Since we haven't had a Ladies Fellowship in several years, we will be cleaning it out in the middle of August. If there is anything in there that you would like to have or keep, please have it out by August 20. Thanks.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Ladies' Lunch Out will be on August 24 at 12:00 noon. We will be having lunch at Phil's 41. We'd love to have you join us.



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj

Nothing to report this month. Have a good month and happy reading!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY - M.E. Steele-Pierce

From the Social Justice Ministry Team: Healing the Earth

Each week we join hands and voices to end our worship with the peace song, including these words: "With every step I take, let this be my joyous vow: To love with kindness and work for justice that all may be set free." The Social Justice Ministry committee was formed to help CUCC congregants actively engage in the "work for justice" that we sing about. August's social justice focus is Environmental Justice.

How is the environment a part of social justice theology? How does it align with our UCC Synod's guidance?

UCC's 29th General Synod 2015 resolved that "the United Church of Christ raises its prophetic voice regarding the urgency of healing the climate of the earth, our home and God's gift for the future of all life, both human and all other life." To that end, one of the recommendations is that congregations aim to meet the architectural 2030 challenge of no fossil fuel emissions, that is, no carbon dioxide emitted by the production of energy used in the building.

Congregations around the US, including our own, are heeding the call. Why do this? During his summer stay "up north," team member Jerry Larson talked with church leaders from Wisconsin and Minnesota. Pastor Glenn Berg-Moberg of St. Anthony Park explains that using solar energy, for example, models leadership in stewardship of the earth, counters the fallacy of our earth having unlimited resources, and allows us to ponder what God would have us do with our time and resources.

Plus, there are practical payoffs for environmental stewardship. Jerry reports that since CUCC has added its solar panels, our electrical power purchased from Florida Power & Light (November 2017 until this July) has seen a remarkable decline:

Previous year, 28,260 KWH purchased

After solar panel installation, 14,640 KWH purchased

Short term, we see financial savings! Long term, our solar panels represent our statement of faith to our community and our congregation.

To learn more about this and other Environmental Justice issues, see <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries>.

Interested in joining one of our social justice ministry activities? Talk with any team member: Jim DeGood; Susan James; Lori and Jerry Larsen; Sandy James-Nogaj; Carol Schmuhl; M.E. Steele-Pierce; Linda and Glenn Weaver; Keith and Sandy Weber; or Elden Wick.



FROM Jerry and Lori Larson: How are our solar panels performing?

During the "before solar" interval of November 8, 2016 to July 12, 2017, the church purchased 28,260 KWH from Florida Power and Light (FPL). During the "after solar" interval from November 8, 2017 to July 11, 2018, the church purchased 14,640 KWH from FPL. This is a reduction of nearly 50% in the amount of electricity purchased from FPL after the solar array was installed. This is a significant step towards meeting the goal of the United Church of Christ's General Synod 29 (2013) recommendation on "Making UCC Church Buildings Carbon Neutral." We are almost half-way there! To reach the ultimate goal of carbon neutrality, there are things we can do. We can reduce consumption by replacing inefficient AC/Heat Pump units, lighting, and other energy consuming devices with units of greater energy efficiency, and tightening the building envelope. We could install additional solar

panels to increase carbon-free energy production. The caveat here is that our FPL bill has not been reduced by 50%. Why is that? It has everything to do with the way FPL calculates the bill.

During the interval of May 10, 2018 to June 11, 2018, our FPL bill was \$367.87. During a comparable period during 2017, the bill was \$805.49. That was a savings of \$437.62 for that month in 2018. During the interval of June 11, 2018 to July 11, 2018, our FPL bill was \$723.75. During a comparable period during 2017, the bill was \$771.63. While this was a much smaller savings than the last month, the solar production for both months was comparable. Without solar production, the \$723.75 bill could have been several hundred dollars greater. We are on a “demand” billing system with FPL. During the “before solar” period, there was an advantage to be on this billing system, but during a meeting last January with an FPL representative, he said that after the solar had been operating for a year, we should analyze whether the “demand” system was still advantageous for the church. So what happened during the last two billing periods was this: during the May-June, 2018 billing period, our on-peak demand maximum was 17KW. That resulted in a surcharge of \$184.11 to our bill. During the June-July, 2018 billing period, our on-peak demand maximum was 38KW, resulting in a surcharge of \$408.88. The difference in these surcharges was \$224.77. This billing system gives us very inexpensive electricity during off-peak times and reasonably priced electricity during peak times, if we can avoid the on-demand extreme maximum surcharges. The church has a commercial account that makes it different from a residential account.

FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk



The Three Stages of “Stuff”

According to my well-worn copy of Mr. Webster’s Dictionary, the word “stuff” can be defined as personal property, raw or fundamental material or unspecified, often worthless things.

Well, no matter how you define it, I’ve recently come to realize that the stuff I’ve accumulated over a lifetime is approaching critical mass

Last week, I called my friend and fellow writer, Nancy, about the problem. Nancy, who is a bit older but a great deal wiser than I, usually has some suggestions that put such mundane problems in perspective. And, this time, she didn’t fail me.

“Joyce,” she said, “You apparently don’t know about the three stages of stuff. Understanding them will help you to manage what you’re going through.” She went on to explain stuff’s natural progression.

The first stage begins in our late teens and continues through the early years of marriage and career. It’s the time we are bent on accumulating all the stuff the world tells us will bring enrichment or entertainment or happiness or whatever. These are the must-have items we are convinced will make life easier or, perhaps, give the appearance of success.

The items we amass during this first stage of stuff can range from that huge stainless-steel grill on the patio to the donut maker we only used once, to the whole-house sound system we’ve never mastered to our membership in the “Salad of the Month” club.

Stage two of stuff is a long interval when our efforts are focused on taking care of all our possessions. This involves the endless tasks of cleaning, preserving, repairing, protecting, upgrading and storing all the wonderful stuff we've gathered through the years.

But, inevitably, the weeks and months become decades and we realize we no longer own the stuff we've gathered. It now owns us. Once that realization sets in, we know the time has come to simplify our lives. We've entered the third stage of stuff; a time when discarding motivates us more than gathering.

But don't go into this stage thinking it will be easy.

How do you go through all the family greeting cards you've saved over the years and make yourself part with the ones that read in a wobbly print, "Happy Mother's Day to the bestest mom in the world."?

How do you discard your favorite deck of cards when you know you'll find the missing ace of hearts any day now?

How do you gather all that clothing you have "out grown" and give it away when in your heart of hearts, you know you'll be able to get back into those things once the holidays are over?

Well, I must admit that I recently reached the third stage of stuff. It's been an ongoing struggle to part with some of the treasures I've accumulated.

But, I've gathered some extra canned goods to give to the church's ongoing St. Vincent de Paul food drive. My clothing donations went to St. Vincent's as well as the Salvation Army. Goodwill received a few boxes, too.

Still, it seems I've hardly made a dent in my holdings. So, my next effort will be to join a community yard sale. My goal will be to entice lots of stage-one and stage-two stuff-gatherers to take home many of my past collectables.

I can only hope folks will buy into the old saying "One woman's trash is another woman's.....well, you know.



SUMMER HOURS FOR THE CHURCH OFFICE

Starting the week of April 30 – August 31, the church office will be open Monday – Thursday from 8:30 am -12:30 pm. The office will be closed on Fridays.



AUGUST CELEBRATORY DATES

BIRTHDAYS

August 1	Marty Buckingham
August 4	William Remiger
August 13	Donald Sourbeck
August 15	Lynn Decker
August 16	James Grunden
August 18	Michael Stonier
August 23	Stacy Scarrow
August 27	Dylan Klossner

ANNIVERSARIES

August 3	Ron & Louise Jankowski
August 9	Joanne & Lee Arvid
August 12	Duane & Marilyn Belseth
August 12	Edith & Donald Sourbeck
August 20	Gene & Polly Engebrecht
August 21	John & Stacy Scarrow
August 28	Sondra & Robert Gaylord
August 31	Neoma & William Remiger

Did we miss a birthday or anniversary? Please email the office, and we will try to make sure it doesn't happen again: office@puntagorda-ucc.com