

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



July 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

Seeking Meaning

I held off writing my article for the Beacon because I wanted to experience June 26th first. So, if you are wondering why our church news came out after the beginning of July, please blame me.

This past Tuesday we had the unique opportunity to have a group of students and community officials meet at our church to hold a Round Table and Town Hall discussion that seeks a new meaning and change. Some of the students were from Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida. On February 14th, they experienced the loss of innocence. Now they are on a statewide tour to promote voter registration and change in our culture.

Before they arrived at our church, they held a voter registration event at Laishley Park. Of course, the day turned out to be bright, sunny, and HOT. They stood in the blazing sun rallying people to register to vote, particularly those who showed up during the last election in staggeringly low numbers, the 18-25yr old demographic. Since I was at the church preparing the space for their arrival and for the Town Hall that would come later, I was not able to be at the park. I am told (those little birdies) that there was a large crowd and that the conversations were lively as well as action at the registration booth.

About fifteen minutes after 2pm a large bus pulled into the parking lot (after driving by the entrance and turning around, we must provide better visibility to our parking lot) and stopped near the front steps. People began pouring off the bus rushing into the air-conditioned building. Equipment was unloaded by support staff, security did a once through the building, and props were erected under the cross. I spent some time speaking to the tour director, Lawrence, and the head of security for the tour, Tony, laying out how the rest of the night would proceed. Meanwhile, the students from MSD and Charlotte schools gathered in Faith Hall for a quick lunch and some much-needed hydration. A flurry of activities were taking place behind the scenes for the event to happen.

After a brief time of relaxation, the principles for the Round Table began to gather. I met for the first time, our new Police Chief, our County Sherriff, the Superintendent of Schools in Charlotte County, the Mayor of Punta Gorda, and a Charlotte County school Board Member. This was certainly a power group to meet with. I was already impressed that the students got this response to their short notice invitation. It told me a lot about the character of our County and City :)

For around ninety minutes, these officials sat with the MSD students (16 of them, past and present) and the Charlotte County students (six of them) and talked about school safety and what changes they saw needed to be made to insure safe campuses. Our local students came from Charlotte High, Port Charlotte High, and FSW High. When the Round Table was ended the local officials came into the sanctuary and to the last person told me how impressed they were with these students and that they had genuinely good ideas to be listened to. What a great start to the evening!

At 5:30 (the appointed hour for the Town Hall to start) I made a few opening comments. I welcomed everyone here and said that we were pleased to be able to offer our sacred space for the meeting. Knowing some of the outcomes for the previous stops on the Change for Our Lives Tour the MSD students had experienced, I made everyone aware they were welcomed guests in a private space. As a private space we could determine when someone was no longer welcome to be in our space. That received a rousing round of applause. Apparently, others had heard of the ruckus at FGCU started by counter protestors. I insured the crowd that we believe hosting this event is an expression of our faith and commitment to Social Justice. Mercifully for all attending I ended my remarks. I say merciful because the air conditioning was not keeping up to the 300 or so people in the room. It was HOT, and we were just beginning.

To shorten this rendition a bit. The students began by asking one another questions such as why they were sitting on the panel. This is where I listened intently. One young woman said it the plainest for me. In essence, she said one of her best friends, and possibly the love of her life, was killed on Valentine's Day. She said that, for a while, she withdrew from life and mourned. Then she asked herself a very honest question, how was she to find meaning in her friend's death. She explained it this way, if she did nothing his death would be for nothing. If she spoke out about never letting this happen to anyone else's best friend, then he would have died with purpose. There it was, the one thing uniting all of these students and people across the country. The room fell silent before bursting into applause.

For the next hour we heard articulate reasons for bringing change. We heard about gun violence being a bipartisan issue. We heard a clear statement that they didn't want to take anyone's guns away. We heard anger being expressed about inactive politicians, afraid to rattle the cage of their base by hinting at changing the gun ownership laws. We heard that there is a rising tide of young people who are sick of the NRA shoving superpac money into Congress to sway the results. We heard a clear call for the "status quo" to step aside or be run over by the young people who will no longer tolerate inaction. We heard that the objective of this movement was to change the political landscape by voting out ALL who refused to act. We heard a warning that change is coming, and it will come from people who are fed up with the "old people" doing nothing to help them. It was a scene straight out of the 60s! I was pumped!!!

When all the student questions had been asked, it was time for questions to come from the audience. Here is where the tenor of the meeting changed. It seemed that most folks who came to the mic wanted to tell their own stories and seek their fifteen minutes of fame. They were reminded over and over that they were supposed to ask a question of the panel. What normally happens happened, most of the speakers ignored the young people who were moderating the meeting and did whatever they chose to do. It was a classic illustration of exactly why these students are traveling all over the country to recruit other young people to the cause, because the “adults” won’t listen.

Then the moment came for the counter protestors to have their chance at the mic. Each one who stood to speak began in the same, well coached, way, “First let me say, I am a Christian, I am a Conservative, and I am a member of the NRA.” From that point they would berate the kids for bullying the shooter at MSD and the police for murdering black people, and the government for killing Arabs. Each one repeated the same message, with slight variations. When one man (I won’t call him a gentleman) turned to the MSD students and told them they were to blame for the killings at MSD, I had had enough and asked the officers to remove him from the building. He left but not before turning to me and saying, “Read the Word Pastor.” This is code for read it the “right” way, their way. I wanted to ask him to show me in Holy Scripture where Jesus promoted gun ownership and violence.

It was an hour like that, people taking over to promote their own agenda. I don’t remember any questions being asked of the panel, though I am sure there were. Those questions were pushed out of my mind by the lack of dignity these folks brought to the scene. They wanted to talk, but they didn’t want to listen (this was not the first time I experienced this attitude in the past week).

Precisely at 7:30, the appointed hour of the end to the Town Hall, I shut down the sound system. Most of the crowd had left during the audience speaking time. It was hot, and they had had enough. The students though remained poised and looked a bit sad. They had hoped that people would listen beyond the questions they had been asked by their compatriots. I had to give them a lot of credit. They remained true to their convictions and did us all proud. I have the greatest hope I have had in a long time being inspired by the young folks. We will have a bright future IF we can start listening to them and not ourselves only.

To end, I came away from Tuesday, a very long and stressful day, with hope. I saw in a group of young people cause to hope. This country faces challenges it hasn’t for a hundred years. This country is seeking meaning and change in a way it hasn’t for decades. I get to witness and participate in a movement that just might save many lives in our country. I have vowed to listen very closely to these students. I pray we all shall. It will bring you hope if you do!

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Judy Minier, Moderator



Happy Summer Reading of the Beacon to all! Please let us know if you enjoy the monthly Beacon as published or if you would prefer a quarterly report instead or some other way to get information from your Leadership Team about its actions and activities. Thank you to those who responded to our Beacon Survey. For now, we will keep posting the Beacon monthly but are doing some tweaking of the format to make it easier to edit and send out by email.

Remember, we (the Leadership Team and the Congregation) are here to support our Pastor, our church's ministries/responsibilities, general operations, and one another. We welcome your input about what we are doing, how we are doing, and what we should be doing. Please inform any of us if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about how we can more effectively manage our resources or make our church more responsive for our members and the community we serve. I feel very fortunate to work with such a dedicated and knowledgeable group on our Leadership Team's responsibilities!

Special Congregational Meeting: My thanks go to Dick Tulip, Assistant Moderator, and Bill Ringelstein, head of Endowment Team, for convening and conducting the meeting held on June 17. I appreciate their efforts to keep our books in order as we abide by the bylaws that govern our church's financial operations. Thanks too, for those who were able to stay after the service (it was Father's Day, after all), to vote on this action.

Special Leadership Team Meeting: On June 29, your Leadership Team will meet for the specific purpose of considering four recently acquired bids to repair and/or replace our leaky eastern half of the roof. We have undertaken the task of identifying a licensed roofer to bid on the job and have four we will be reviewing. It has been a bit of an arduous journey to get to this point; hopefully the next phases, selecting the roofer and doing the fund-raising will be a bit more straight forward. Roofers are very busy people, we have learned in this process.

Gun-Free Building Policy: Pastor Mike and I joined the recent "die-in" at the local courthouse to remember and honor the victims of the Pulse night club shooting two years ago. It was a somber reminder that on average, 96 people in America die each day from guns. The die-in was organized by a small group of concerned and committed FSW students who are working hard to eradicate gun violence in America. The event was supported by several other local, civic minded groups. It was hard (not physically, but psychologically) to lay on the sidewalk in front of the courthouse steps for 16 minutes and recall the horror the people felt in the night club when they were gunned down. I'm so pleased that we have adopted a no-gun policy for our building and look forward to a time when we have sensible, enforceable gun laws in place in our state and country.

Reminders and Announcements: We are seeking individuals to take on leadership roles, specifically, a Discipleship Chair/Committee, Committee members to support Cathy Ann Colson with Stewardship responsibilities, a Clerk, and an Assistant Clerk. The Leadership Team needs these positions filled in order to keep worship operating and to keep our facilities in good shape. Associate Members are welcome to serve in the Discipleship role and with Stewardship – please let me or

another Leadership Team member know if you can step into one of these roles. Job descriptions are available if you'd like to learn more about what is expected.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 10 from 3:30-5:30 p.m. in the church library.

I leave you with this important thought: "Christian people have surely been in the vanguard of the movement for environmental responsibility, because of our doctrines of creation and stewardship. Did God make the world? Does he sustain it? Has he committed its resources to our care? His personal concern for his own creation should be sufficient to inspire us to be equally concerned."
John Stott, English Anglican Priest

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

TREASURER – Melissa Brown



June 2018 Treasurer's Report

Financial Results	May-18	2018 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$8,456.00	\$72,192.00	\$71,250.00
Expenses	\$12,628.00	\$60,968.00	\$67,913.00
Net Income	-\$4,172.00	\$11,224.00	\$3,337.00

How quickly things change. Last month, our net income was a gain of \$11,440. This month, we have a loss of \$4,172. This will probably be the norm for the next four months, so we will need to monitor our cash flow to be sure that we have enough money in the bank to pay our bills. As of the end of May, our operating fund bank balance was approximately \$31,000. This should be enough to get us through to October, barring any unforeseen expenditures or significant decrease in collections.

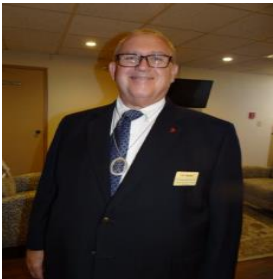
The chart below shows our electrical bills since the installation of the solar panels. From April through September is when we will see the most significant savings, and as you can see, the savings are adding up! Saving dollars and saving our planet at the same time.

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
Total	\$2,281.06	\$3,442.86	\$1,161.80

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 June. The summer choir rehearses Sunday mornings at 9:15 AM in Faith Hall. All are welcome to join us.

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

The most recent distribution was made on Sunday, June 24 to the Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens for \$2,850 so the facility can complete and stock their shade house. This is another example of being good stewards of God's creation and how wonderful a place can be made by those who care.



Remember, if you want to provide a legacy to someone, your Endowment Fund should be a consideration. The Fund is conservatively invested in socially responsible funds that will provide income so that distributions can be made.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

Even though our membership has thinned out for the summer, the coffee hour is still well attended. Remember, fewer people means hosting more often. As I write this, there is no one signed up for the month of July.

Thanks to our June hosts: Bill and Hazel Klossner, Susann Luckenbach, Kathy Rivadeneira, Judy Minier and Bil Tucker, Joanne and Lee Arvid, Melissa Brown, and Mary Tulip.



On June 16, the following ladies hosted a reception for the Celebration of Life for Betty Cooley: Susann Luckenbach, Neoma Remiger, Sandy Nogaj, Marguerite Van Dooren, Linda Greenfield, Mary Tulip and Molly Hall. Thank you so much, ladies. I was out of town, and they stepped up to the plate for me. I'm sure the family of Betty Cooley also appreciated it.

A reminder for when you are hosting coffee, only the cupboards marked "Church" are ours. The others belong to AA. Look for the little labels on the doors and drawers.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Ladies lunch for July will be at "Brooklyn Joe's", 1133 Bal Harbor Blvd., #1115, Punta Gorda, on Friday, July 27 at 12:00 noon. Please sign up at the Kiosk in the back of the sanctuary. We would love to have you join us. We have a great time of fun and fellowship.



CARING FRIENDS – Neoma Remiger

Every month we send out birthday, anniversary, get well and thinking of you cards to our congregation. If anyone has any cards that they are not using and would like to see them go to good use, we would appreciate your donation. Please give them to Neoma. Thank You!



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj

The 2018-2019 Reading for Renewal List is now available in the church library. I have purchased most of the books on the list and they are displayed in the library as well. Happy Summer Reading!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

The members of the Social Justice Ministry Team of the Congressional United Church of Christ of Punta Gorda, Florida and our congregation are concerned about the newly implemented policy of 'Zero Tolerance' that is separating families of illegal immigrants at U.S. Borders. The Social Justice Ministry Team members are a cross-section of the congregation—made up of ministers, teachers, retired ministers, retired university professors, and retired business people—we are committed to Social Justice for all and to the Constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the laws. Here are some specific examples of our concerns about the “Zero Tolerance” policy and treatment of children and families by our government.

The New York Times noted in April 2018 that 700 children, over 100 of them younger than four years old, have been taken from their parents at the border since October 2017. According to the May 25 MSNBS show “*All In with Chris Hayes*” “the United States government is now systematically taking children as young as 53 weeks old away from their parents at the border, thanks to new directives issued by the Trump administration”. *Senator Heidi Heitkamp* from North Dakota said, “This is not how we should treat children, regardless of what country they come from. We have a moral and humanitarian duty to protect and care for these children properly while they are under federal supervision and in this country – regardless of circumstances.” On June 3rd, *Senator Jeffery Merkley* from Oregon was barred from visiting a detention facility in Brownsville, Texas that holds children of jailed adults who had attempted to enter the U.S. illegally. *Senator Merkley* stated, “I think it is unacceptable that a member of Congress is not being admitted seeing what is happening to children whose families are applying for asylum.” In a follow up letter to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) on June 7th, *Senator Merkley* wrote that since the implementation of 'Zero Tolerance Policy' under U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions “children forcibly separated are labeled 'unaccompanied alien children' and are transferred to ORR custody...since the beginning of May, more than 600 children have been separated from their families...bringing the total under your care to a staggering 11,200.” The *U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights* has stated, “the practice of separating children from migrant families entering the U.S. violates their rights and international law.”

This policy is of grave concern to the Social Justice Ministry Team and our congregation. We are asking you to intervene and insure that Constitutional Rule of Law and favorable immigration policies are upheld in regards to the treatment of these families and their children. Thank you.

The Social Justice Ministry Team
Congregational United Church of Christ
1201 Aqui Esta Drive
Punta Gorda, FL 33950



Lessons Learned at Summer Camp



Here in the heart of camping season, youngsters have a dazzling array to choose from. There's a camp for everything from soccer to sailing, horseback to computers and on and on. But back in the late

1940s, when I had my first camping experience, the only camps for kids were operated either by churches or youth groups.

When I was thirteen, mom decided church camp would make for a wonderful summer experience for me. So, on a hot July morning I joined our pastor and a group of two dozen youngsters and adults at Camp SonRise in the middle of north Texas farm country. We were part of about 100 campers from Christian churches throughout the region.

Though much of the Lone Star state is ruggedly beautiful, Camp SonRise didn't fit that picture. Instead, the camp was a hot, dusty collection of ramshackle buildings scattered over a few scruffy acres of brush and stunted trees. But to me, the setting seemed to come straight out of my favorite western movies, filled with excitement and adventure.

Over the next ten days, I made dozens of friends, came to love camp food, discovered much about the Texas countryside and drew closer to God. When it was time to leave for home, I looked back on what the camp had taught me.

I sang camper favorites that still echo in my mind.

I learned how to make S'mores, the perfect camp snack.

And I learned there are few experiences as inspiring as a vesper service at twilight beside a blazing campfire.

A number of years after my church camp experience, I reentered the world of summer camping as a counselor at a Girl Scout Camp in central Texas. A far cry from Camp SonRise,



CampVal Verde was set on a hill overlooking a flowing stream. The campground boasted a swimming pool, riding stable, dining hall, craft tent and several cozy cabins.

Every week, a hundred eager Scouts would burst from busses, ready for fun and adventure. For the coming week, it was Game On as the staff worked to insure each camper made memories for a lifetime. My role as “Miss Joyce” was to teach crafts in my home base, the craft tent. One of my specialties was passing along the art of lanyard making, so that each girl could take home a hand braided strand for a whistle, keys, or whatever. In addition to my craft duties, I also served as a “house mother” for a cabin full of chatty, giggling girls.

The camp’s schedule kept both counselors and campers busy from rise-and-shine time at 6 am to lights-out at 9 pm. It was a dizzying pace filled with fun, good food and friendships.

Like my time at church camp, my two summers as a counselor taught me some lasting lessons.

I learned a counselor must be quick with the Band Aids as well as the right words to soothe an 8 year-old suffering her first bout of home sickness.

I learned to give resident Texas snakes a wide berth. I discovered the camp songs I picked up back at Camp SonRise were just what I needed to share with my Val Verde girls. I found my knowledge of S’mores was a popular asset with campers of all ages. And, I became an expert at lanyard making, a skill I’m sure I can apply somewhere.

But in all my camping experiences, I learned the most important lesson was that friendships made at camp are never forgotten. I may not see them again, but folks like Punky, Corky, Peanut and Scooter will stay with me forever.



JULY CELEBRATORY DATES

BIRTHDAYS

July 1	Dick Sommerfield
July 3	Betty Balmer
July 5	Bill Carroll
July 6	Gene Engebrecht
July 9	Sondra Gaylord
July 10	Barbara Fleshman
July 17	Fred Benson, Jr
July 22	Cameron Ford
July 24	Bethany Allen
July 24	Vicki Getz
July 30	Evelyn Swinamer
July 30	Glenn Weaver
July 31	Sandy Weber



ANNIVERSARIES

July 16	Dick & Nadine Sommerfield
July 16	William Tucker & Judy Minier

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



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.