

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



**JANUARY 2019**

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

**Rev. Mike Ford**

**The Reason for the Season**

Think back for just a moment or two. How many times have you sat in church on Christmas Eve? How many times have you heard the Birth Narrative of Jesus read to you, with the shepherds and angels gathered round? How many times have you heard "O Holy Night" sung to you on Christmas Eve? Have you ever asked yourself why you roust yourself out in the bleak mid-winter to hear the same story read to you? I do.

I will admit that it is a challenge to get too excited to get ready for Christmas Eve services yet again. Over the course of twenty-two years in ministry, I have conducted nearly forty-five Christmas Eve celebrations. The math might not add up for you until you recognize, that before I came to serve at CUCC, I served at least two churches and at one time three churches, all with separate Christmas Eve and Sunday services. In all this time, I have encountered the same story year after year and Christmas after Christmas. Yet, somehow, it feels brand new to me, because of the question "why". I still get excited for that night when we gather, often with many visitors, to hear the story read one more time and sing the familiar carols one more time. I look out over the sea of faces and I see a glimmer in people's eyes. Why?

I search each year for that cohesive reason that so many are drawn into a church, when for most of the rest of their lives they are not. Each year, a new and valid reason comes into my mind. This year, the reason was given me by an atheist, of all people.

I was grazing on some news stories when I came across a letter by a new father telling of his newborn son's baptism. In the letter, he expressed his conflict with this act. The story started out perfectly ordinary. He was raised an orthodox Jew, left home to go to college, encountered another way of life and had his beliefs shaken out of him. By the time he graduated, he had found he didn't believe in God any longer and was confused how anyone else could. He came to the place of seeing a messed-up world and concluded there must not be a God if all this conflict and strife existed.

The story gets a bit more complicated when he meets and falls in love with a woman while at college. There was no doubt for him that she was the ONE he wanted to spend the rest of his life with and to raise

children with. The complicating factor, she was a devout Roman Catholic. Why is that a problem, she believes and practices a faith that has at its center something he no longer could believe in. They had many conversations about faith, but he just couldn't connect with her on this topic. He believes what Karl Marx wrote as religion being the "opiate of the masses", a delusion created to keep people socially "sedated", so they wouldn't complain about how things really were.

They have had their first child, a son, and the time comes when his wife asks to have the baby baptized, in the Roman Catholic tradition. At first, he wondered how he wasn't being a hypocrite by agreeing to the baptism, but he loved his wife and son and wanted her to be happy. The day came, and he found himself standing next to his wife in front of the priest in the midst of the ceremony that joins his son to a system he CANNOT believe in. He watches the priest pour water over his son's forehead in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, absurd.

After the ceremony concluded, they rode home in silence, each with their own thoughts. His wife had thanked him for "putting up with" the baptism. He knew that she secretly wanted him to join her in faith and hoped that raising their son together would bring him there. In the meantime, she would take her son to church and eventually have him engage Catechism, be confirmed, and receive first Communion. She knew he would be by her side for those events, but that he wouldn't participate beyond attending.

I couldn't help relating this story to the possibility that some of the folks sitting in church on Christmas Eve this year might be in this young father's place. Perhaps they came out of tradition or were coerced into coming to make someone else happy (or at least stop complaining about his/her not wanting to go to church on Christmas Eve). Perhaps there were memories of being dragged to church by parents, wives/husbands, children, to hear the story and sing the songs yet again. Why?

There was a line in this young man's story that caught my eye as to the possible answer to why we do this every year when nothing of the story is new to us. This man wrote (and I'm paraphrasing), "Perhaps people come to believe because they are trying to find a vision for how the world SHOULD and COULD be." That phrase struck me silent. We come to find a vision for how the world might be?

We hear the story of the birth of a baby that will change people's concepts about what the world would look like if the marginalized were accepted and included. We come to hear the impossible Good News spoken to the lowly shepherds by angels. We come to hear about our salvation and restoration as human beings sharing the world with other human beings. We come to find a poor couple struggling with childbirth and wondering what on earth they will do with the Son of God as their son. We come to hear about Hope, of how the world could be. We come to find a vision for what God's intent for creation is. We possibly find, in the midst of this so familiar story, our own hope and vision.

For me, this young atheist father, with a faith filled wife, and a newly baptized son, have given me the language to speak about my faith this Christmas Eve. What could be so wrong with hearing the story again that gives reason for faith? What is so wrong with people finding a vision to live into? There isn't a reason, because it isn't wrong.

Just before this message on Christmas Eve, we heard "O Holy Night" sung beautifully by Kathy Rivadeneira. I looked up the history of the song and found the poem it is based upon. It was written by Placida Cappeau, wine maker and poet laureate of Roquemaure, France in 1847. He was asked by the local priest to pen a poem about the birth of Jesus. Cappeau, himself not a man of faith, was inspired by his friendship with the priest to write a poem for him. Within its phrases lies the vision, I believe, which brings us to hear the ancient story once more, much like the words written by an atheist father. Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!

Midnight, Christians, is the solemn hour,  
When God as man descended unto us  
To erase the stain of original sin  
And to end the wrath of His Father.  
The entire world thrills with hope  
On this night that gives it a Savior.  
People, kneel down, await your deliverance.

### ***FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM***

#### ***MODERATOR'S REPORT- Judy Minier***



This is my final offering as your Moderator, and I wish the new Leadership Team all good things as they take over the duties of their respective roles in February. The Nominating Committee has done a wonderful job in selecting additional members who will serve us well in the coming year. The Annual Report will present the new candidates in mid-January before the elections take place during our Annual Meeting to be held on January 27 after church. I want to thank all the LT members I've worked with over the past three years to express my gratitude for their patience, commitment, and hard work to keep our church moving in meaningful and productive ways. Well done, Team!

What a wonderful Christmas season we celebrated once again this year! The pace was brisk over the last days of December as usual, but I tried to take things one day at a time so that I could savor each moment of the holidays with friends, church family, and special people everywhere. Thank you to all who made the season memorable at church – the bell choir, soloists, our choir, Pastor Mike, pageant participants, and behind the scenes folks in our “Cave”. It was wonderful to see all the CEO's in church on Christmas Eve (Christmas and Easter Only) visitors along with our regular members. I'm still basking in the glow of all the happy events. We know that others may not have reason to feel such happiness, so I am grateful for our ministries who support people in need, especially this time of year. Special thanks to Emily Klossner and everyone who bought gift cards for students in our local

schools. We collected 139 cards for a total of \$2,790 which includes a special amount of \$500 which came from the Endowment Team.

**Stewardship:** The annual letter reminding us of our faith pledges has now been sent and the Leadership Team sincerely asks that each of you reading this thoughtfully consider your financial standing and your support of this church. You realize that all the work of our church and our ability to carry out our missions depends on YOU! I look forward to hearing pledge testimonials given by individuals on January 6, 13, and the 20<sup>th</sup> as we lead up to the day of presenting our pledge cards. Thanks to Dick Tulip and Pastor Mike for leading us in this meaningful direction.

**Music Ministry:** We welcome Isaac James as our new Music Director! By now you have experienced his marvelous talents and skills as the musician we have hired to lead our musical worship. It will be a pleasure to work with Isaac in the coming months as he guides us with our Sunday music programs, special worship services, and perhaps some community musical outreach efforts. We are most fortunate to know Isaac and to have him coordinating our music.

**The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting** is scheduled for Tuesday, February 12 from 3:00-4:30 p.m. in the church library. The new LT will officially begin duties for the coming year following their installation at the Annual Meeting.

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.

My closing thought for the day: "Poverty exists not because we can't feed the poor, but because we cannot satisfy the rich." Quote from AFL-CIO

Blessings always,

Judy Minier, Moderator

**TREASURER – Melissa Brown**

December 2018 Treasurer's Report



Financial Results	Nov 2018	2018 Y-T-D	Budget	2017 Y-T-D
Donations and Other Income	\$11,569.04	\$141,672.60	\$156,750.00	\$132,072.09
Expenses	\$11,375.25	\$141,292.55	\$149,407.00	\$150,579.95
Net Income	\$193.79	\$380.05	\$7,343.00	-\$18,507.86

What a difference a year makes! Last year at the end of November, we were facing a deficit of \$18,500. This year, we're breaking even. Our December 2018 collections were over \$17,000. Expenses are still unknown, but have been averaging \$13,000 a month, so we should end the year with a surplus of at least \$4,000. Thank you all for your continuing generosity.

Below are the FPL charges for 13 months of solar use. Note that the column, Before Solar, has the same charge on the lines November 2017 and November 2018. We aren't comparing November 2018 to November 2017 but to November 2016. The twelve months from November 2016 to October 2017 are the base year (the most recent twelve months before the solar panels were installed), and comparisons will no longer be made year-to-year but will be the current (Post Solar) charges compared to the Before Solar charges, i.e. November 2016 to October 2017. Clear as mud, right?

Electrical Service	Charges		
	Post Solar	Before Solar (Nov 16 - Oct 17)	(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
Jul-18	\$686.73	\$723.58	\$36.85
Aug-18	\$484.66	\$787.81	\$303.15
Sep-18	\$475.96	\$663.43	\$187.47
Oct-18	\$436.53	\$408.70	(\$27.83)
Nov-18	\$291.49	\$367.98	\$76.49
Total	\$5,380.18	\$7,165.99	\$1,785.81

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**

Welcome to Isaac James our new Minister of Music. We are so happy to have him join us! Stay tuned to hearing from Isaac in next month's Beacon.

**ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair**

**No report this month.**



**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs**

Happy New Year from the Discipleship Lindas!

What a wonderful Christmas celebration of Christ's birth and the advent of a New Kingdom on Earth! Now, in the new year, it is up to us with God's help and direction to show the world a different, radical way of life. Jesus' command to us: "Love God and Love one another". BUT, how we ask? Looking at the adult life of Jesus (the baby in the manger, who we revered in December)-that is our blueprint for a new way of living! Love your neighbor (any color or shape), help the widows, children, poor and sick. Turn from hatred and love and help one another. Seek justice and not just charity! May our loving God open our eyes, ears and hearts to live our lives as a witness to His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you to all the families who volunteered to light our Advent candles for 2018. Kudos to the entire cast of the Christmas pageant! Special thanks to Guy Greenfield and Pastor Mike for setting up the manger and animals.

Welcome to the new members: Bob & Joyce Baskovic, Bev Honkola & Joe Lawson, Susan Blaisdell, Carolyn Kvam-Hansman, Vicki McDonald and Susan Zakeer. It is so wonderful to have you join our CUCC of PG church family!

On January 18th we celebrate the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr...a champion for the Civil Rights movement in our country. We have been invited to the annual breakfast in his honor on Sat., Jan.19, sponsored by The Blanchard House. Stay tuned to our Social Justice Moments for more details

**MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk**

I would like to thank the December hosts:

December 2 – Sandy Weber, Bev Honkola, and Lori Larson

December 9 – Diane and Elden Wick, Mary Farnquist, and the

Leadership Team



December 16 – Ann Barker, Chrystal Reichard, and Sandra

McLauchlan

December 23 – John & Carol Schmuhl

December 30 – Leadership Team

Also, a big thank you to Ian and Sandra McLauchlan for supplying the creamer cups all year.

This is a busy time of year and hosting is much appreciated. Hope you had a merry Christmas and a bright New Year!

### ***GREAT DECISIONS – 2019***

You see the headlines for global news, but do you know the back story for the event – how it developed to this point, its history, what the U.S. response might be? In the Great Decisions discussion group, we examine eight current foreign policy issues to better understand each situation. This year we will look at the following issues:

Refugees and Global Migration

The Middle East: Regional Disorder

Nuclear negotiations: Back to the Future?

The Rise of Populism in Europe

Decoding U.S. China Trade

Cyber Conflicts and Geopolitics

The United States and Mexico: Partnership Tested

State of the State Department and Diplomacy

Our group meets on Tuesdays from 1:30pm – 3:00 pm in the church library from February 5 through March 26. Each participant/couple will need to purchase a resource book and will share in the cost of a DVD. The total cost will depend on the number of participants but is usually around \$30-\$35. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary. We will need to know if you are going to attend by January 20 so that we can order books. For more information, please contact Lori and Jerry Larson (715-781-0657). We would love to have you join us

### ***LIVING THE QUESTION***

Living the Question will be meeting from 1-3:30PM on Mondays, during the months of Feb. and March. Those who wish to gather for a brown bag lunch will meet at noon ahead of the class. We will be following a UCC curriculum dealing with issues of White Privilege. Over the final weeks of the class, we will be reading and discussing, *The Third Reconstruction* by Rev. William Barber. If you would like to join the group, please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary. If you have any questions, please call Jim DeGood (616-502-7257)

## **LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger**

We had a wonderful time in December when 20 ladies joined for a High Tea at Zoetz Sweets. Our next luncheon will be at 12:00 noon on Friday, January 25<sup>th</sup> at “Brooklyn Joe’s”, a place we’ve been to in the past and really enjoyed. We would love to have you join us. A sign-up sheet is available at the kiosk at the back of the church.



## **LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj**

January Book Talk Tea is on Fri January 11 at 1pm in the church library. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

## **FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk**



### **Memories of the old Clothesline**

Last week, I received an e-mail that opened a flood-gate of sweet memories. The message, from my sister-in-law, Vera, focused on that family staple of yesterday, the clothesline.

Looking at the pictures included in the e-mail took me back to those long-ago washdays in the Texas of my childhood. Like every other house on Carleton Street, our place boasted a well-used line for drying the family wash. Our clothesline was stretched from the “T” shaped post next to the back porch, across the old swing set to the “T” post beside the garage, then back again.

Our family of six.... Mom and Dad, two sons and two daughters.... required plenty of hanging room for the Monday morning wash. Since wash day was a tradition with most of the families on the block, there was always plenty of neighborly conversation as mothers and daughters dealt with the clean contents of the wash baskets.

The process of hanging the wash, taking it down and folding it into the basket took most of the day. The next day, Tuesday, was reserved for ironing.... but that was another story.



As the youngest member of the family, I was sometimes able to prevail on mom to hang the clean sheets across the two parallel lines, giving me something of a play tent area as the items dried. I'd often take my lunch out into the yard and eat under the breezy shade of the drying linens.

There was nothing to equal the smell of those air-dried sheets as we took them off the line and folded them. When the beds were remade with the fresh linens, it was like bringing the outdoors inside.

In those clothesline days, family life was readily displayed for anyone willing to decipher the signs. Week after week, the clothesline contents would change as life inside the home went through transitions. Maternity clothes gave way to tiny baby garments and lines full of freshly-washed diapers. Rompers and dresses progressed from small to ever larger sizes. Eventually, these were replaced by blue jeans and tee shirts. Finally, the lines held only the clothing and other items used by the mother and father, now empty nesters.

When I left the clothesline of my childhood and established one for my own family, I devised a game my children all enjoyed. On washdays, my little ones would join me in the back yard. As I got ready to hang various clothing items, I'd give each of them "clothes pin math" to calculate.

"Becky, I need two pins for Dad's sox and two more for your blouse."

With that, little Becky would proudly bring me four pins.

Sherri and Tim happily joined the game, filling their "pin" assignments and learning their addition at the same time.

For those living in rural areas of our state, family clotheslines are often still parts of the landscape. But generally, in most suburbs clotheslines are as rare as the milk man, the neighborhood butcher and doctors who make house calls

I don't think any of us want to give up our trusty clothes dryers and go back to the old labor-intensive washdays. But you can't deny the feel-good nostalgia that comes from sleeping in beds fresh-made with sun-dried sheets.



**CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:** The office will be open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm. We will be closed on Fridays. Phone # 941-637-8443.

## Updating Your Information

We are always trying to keep our information on members and visitors up-to-date. We need your help! If you have had a change of address, new email address, home phone or cell phone change, please let us know so we can keep our records current which will help us to keep good communication with all of you. If you are not receiving emails or the Beacon newsletter, please let us also know that. Thank you so much. Your help is very much appreciated.

SEND CHANGES TO: [office@puntagorda-ucc.com](mailto:office@puntagorda-ucc.com) OR you can drop them off in the church office.

**Name Tags:** Just a reminder, if you would like a magnet on the back of your name tag instead of the pin, just leave your name tag in the blue bin on the name tag rack and it will be changed and ready for the next week.



## BIRTHDAYS

January 9	Wyona Crosley
January 11	Clifford Trudeau
January 12	Polly Engebrecht
January 17	Judy Minier
January 23	Tim Schenk
January 24	Archie Coll
January 25	Duane Belseth
January 27	Lucille Begin
January 28	Mary Barnt
January 29	Lynn Stayner
January 31	Sandy Armstrong

## ANNIVERSARIES

January 3	Herb Henry and Joanne Stoughton
January 10	Bill & Cathy Ann Colson
January 19	Charles & Carol Salisbury
January 20	Bob & Sandy Armstrong
January 22	Dick & Mary Tulip
January 24	Bill and Jean Ringelstein

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](mailto:office@puntagorda-ucc.com)