

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



DECEMBER 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

We are in an odd time in the church calendar. We have come to the end of the church year and are preparing for a new year which begins with Advent. For the past twenty-six weeks we have lived in the Gospel of Mark, reviewing the life and ministry teachings of Jesus. After all that time, we look forward to the story of Jesus' birth. Odd.

I am compelled to write of the Gospel from November 18th, Mark 13:1-8. It is an account of Jesus leaving the Temple just prior to his being betrayed and tried for treason against the Roman Empire. As Jesus was leaving the temple with his disciples, they remark about how beautiful and large the Temple is. Jesus responds by telling them that what they see will all be torn down, not one stone will remain left upon another. This prediction is distressing, to say the least, for the disciples. They think that the Temple is the one constant in the turbulent times they live in.

The destruction of the Temple can be seen as a disaster or a blessing, depending on your perspective. Jesus has been teaching the disciples about God and their relationship to God. He pointed out the treatment of the marginalized in the Jewish community and how the community wasn't living up to what God intended for ALL people. Jesus had had some very public disputes with the ruling class of the Temple and the Jewish community in general. It was a large part of his teaching to his disciples. He advocated for the change which would realign the values of the community to those of God's intent.

One thing we might acknowledge is that change is inevitable. We also might acknowledge that we don't like change all that much. It is the classic double bind situation. We know that change happens, and we can't hold it off most times. Change happens TO us. It can also happen because of us. The TO kind is much harder to take because we don't have a choice. This is the kind of change Jesus refers to in this passage from Mark 13. The stable environment the disciples expect is about to radically change for them.

I feel that these are the times we currently live in. I have been reflecting on a passage from Roland Rolheiser's book, "Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity". He wrote these words in 2014. In a section entitled, "Be Wide in Your Embrace", Rohlheiser writes, "We are constantly being overwhelmed by otherness. Nothing is safe for long. More than any previous generation, we are being stretched beyond what is familiar. Often that is painful and disorienting. It is not easy to have our boundaries, values, and ideas under constant redefinition, especially when we believe that God has revealed certain reliable truths to us."

Boy does that ring true for me these days! I suspect that we can identify closely with how the disciples felt when Jesus told them that everything they trust is going to change. But sometimes change can be good, especially when what we have needs to be reoriented toward a better purpose. The news that the Temple would fall, I feel, was good news for those who weren't being served well. I feel it was good news for the disciples to learn that God's ways are better than our ways. I feel it is good news that the change will bring into focus the right path to follow. I'm certain it didn't feel that way when the disciples heard it, but change was needed, so that has to be good.

Phyllis Tickle in her book, "The Great Emergence" observes that the church holds a "Yard Sale" about every five hundred years. It is a time where the church sets on the curb the practices and principles that no longer serve well. It is a time when the church reorients to a new norm and follows a different path. Good news, we are right in the middle of that five-hundred-year cycle! Change is coming.

I now look forward to having that reorientation take place. I am expecting that GREAT things are happening in the Church even now! Do you feel that way too?

The news that the Temple is falling apart can be a disaster or a blessing. I'm choosing the "blessing" perspective. I feel we are living in times that challenge us, where "we are being stretched beyond what is familiar" in Rohleiser's words. I kind of like this feeling. I am looking forward to the beginning of a new church year. I pray you are as well. Change is coming!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT- Judy Minier



Life in the fast lane! Do you feel like time is speeding up and you have less and less opportunity to get all the things done that need to be done? That is how I've been feeling since writing the November Beacon report! I know this time of year is hectic for all, but it seems particularly

like I'm caught in a tsunami, or as the old saying goes, trying to take a drink from a fire hose. Anyway, my family's visits are slowing down, I'm catching up on belated grandkids birthdays, getting some decorations up around the house, and may even get a Christmas letter prepared to email to friends and family far and near. Add to this mix the myriad of church and holiday events and it may be small wonder that it is easy to get stressed out. But, we can all stop, take a deep breath, remember to be kind to one another, and recall that this is really a miraculous season for which we are most grateful. I wish you and your loved ones a blessed Christmas! See you in church for our wonderful services with all the special music we love to hear and to sing throughout the month! Amen.

Stewardship: The annual letter reminding us of our faith pledges is coming your way soon!

Music Ministry: The search team has spoken with a candidate for the Music Minister position. The Leadership Team has approved the search team moving forward with this candidate.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 15 from 3:00-4:30 p.m. in the church library. **The Annual Meeting** is slated to be held after church on January 13. This will be the time we review our Annual Report and vote on a budget for 2019.

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 am most fortunate to be able to associate with such a dedicated and knowledgeable Teams and individuals in the congregation!

My closing thought for the day:

"Man is the most insane species. He worships an invisible God and destroys a visible Nature. Unaware that the Nature he is destroying is this God he is worshipping." -- Hubert Reeves

Judy Minier, Moderator

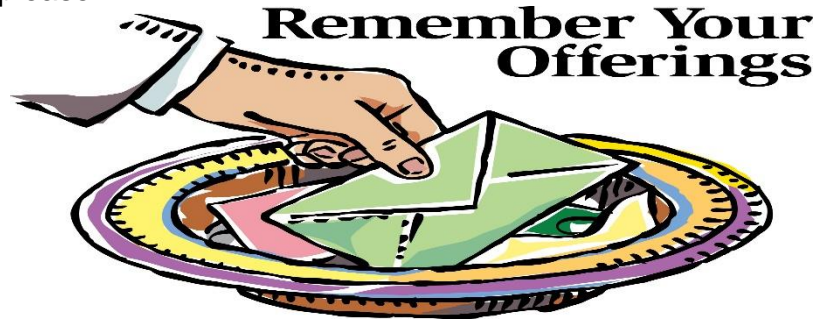
TREASURER – Melissa Brown

November 2018 Treasurer's Report



Financial Results	Oct 2018	2018 Y-T-D	Budget	2017 Y-T-D
Donations and Other Income	\$10,394.99	\$127,103.56	\$142,500.00	\$122,165.94
Expenses	\$11,096.54	\$126,917.30	\$135,824.44	\$137,741.25
Net Income	-\$701.55	\$186.26	\$6,675.56	-\$15,575.31

Two months to go, and we are still below budget. November 2018 donations were \$11,600 which is \$1,600 more than November 2017 so we have made some headway in reducing our deficit. In this season of giving, please



The chart below shows our electrical bills since the installation of the solar panels, and we now have one year of data. We can now look at the different billing options that FPL offers to see if we are on the billing plan that provides us the greatest savings. In any case, we are still contributing to a greener planet.

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
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)
Total	\$5,088.69	\$6,798.01	\$1,709.32

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.

MUSIC MINISTRY

Keep an eye on this space for upcoming news!

STEWARDSHIP TEAM

The envelopes for the "The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross" will be distributed in the programs on Christmas Eve. Envelopes will be included in the programs for the 7:00pm service. Envelopes are also available at the church office if you would like to pick them up prior to the Christmas Eve services.

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world for over 115 years. The Christmas Fund — formerly known as "Veterans of the Cross" provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in kindheartedness to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing worrisome financial needs. The Fund has helped provide supplemental monies for pension and health insurance premiums to low-income retirees. At Christmas, the offering provides gift checks to hundreds of annuitants, but it also provides emergency assistance to clergy and lay employees and their families throughout the year.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

This past April, your Endowment Fund presented a distribution of \$3,500 to the Baker Center in Punta Gorda. This Early Childhood Education facility serves over 350 low-income poverty level families and special needs children. The parents of those children comprise a volunteer group that aids the staff of Baker Center with the program; that volunteerism earns the parents "Baker Bucks" which can be redeemed for needed items at the Baker Store.



Recently, I was given a tour of the Baker Store and heard of the great success of this project which you helped start. The Store is stocked with all manner of items that include clothing, food, household items and personal items. This results in positive parent engagement in their child's education. Niki James is the coordinator of the program and is so very appreciative of our involvement in the lives of so many. This outreach has proven that through our involvement, we have brought a quality of life to those who might not otherwise experience a better life.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Greetings from the Discipleship Lindas!

Lots of thanks in this month's newsletter. Judy Marchert shared her baking skills preparing breads for new visitors, then moved on to be the correspondent mailing out the cards we all enjoy receiving. As she steps down from this role, Molly Hall has stepped forward to take on the responsibility.

Lou Stayner has faithfully baked breads, as well, over the last several years. Recently

four others have volunteered to share in the baking responsibilities.

It takes many “hands” to have our church run smoothly. What a blessing it is to have our congregation sharing their talents!



Thanks so much to ALL who volunteered to participate in our annual Christmas pageant on Sunday, Dec.16 at the 10am service. A special thanks to Kathy and Kevin Rivadeneira who once again will be the great directors! Mark your calendars now and get there early for good seats!

We will have a regular service on Sunday, Dec. 23 and our beautiful candlelight Christmas Eve service on Monday, Dec.24 at 6:00pm. Please come with your family and friends to celebrate Christ’s birth.

During this time of busyness, take time to ponder life’s true blessings and praise the Lord! Share His Love with others!

Psalm 126:3 “Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!”

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

Thanks to our November Fellowship Hosts:

November 4 Ann Barker and Chrystal Reichard
November 11 Diane and Elden Wick
November 18 Kathy Frantish, Jean and Bill Ringelstein
November 25 Ann Barker and Chrystal Reichard



In keeping with reducing our carbon footprint, I have purchased some compostable ecofriendly environmental paper plates for Sunday Fellowship. According to the ad on Amazon, these plates are made with bagasse, a natural by-product that would have just gone to waste. This product recycles the pre-consumer by-products left during the production of sugar from sugarcane. The natural fiber is stronger yet durable and leaves no carbon footprint on our environment as it otherwise would be discarded and wasted. Unlike paper plates, plastic or even a bamboo plate, these disposable dinner plates are made with 100% natural non-toxic byproduct materials, completely tree and plastic free. Let me know what you think of them. We are trying to do our best to help our planet.



LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Our next luncheon will be a Christmas Tea on December 14 at Zoetz at 12:00 noon. A sign-up sheet is available at the kiosk at the back of the church. Due to space considerations at the restaurant, only 20 will be able to attend so sign up early. The cost will be \$15. In memory of Betty Cooley, we have decided to use china cups and saucers. If you have a favorite, please bring it with you, however, if you don't have one, don't worry, we will have plenty of extras. Looking forward to seeing everyone!



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj

Thanks to Neoma Remiger for hosting Book Talk Tea in November. We discussed books that we have read plus books that are on the Reading for Renewal list. An enjoyable afternoon was had by all! There will be no tea in December. The January Book Talk Tea will be on January 11 at 1pm in the church library. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

Please visit the library and check out the "New Arrivals". There are biographies, memoirs, mysteries and everything in between! Thanks to everyone that donated the books.

FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Unlike old Ebenezer Scrooge, I welcome my seasonal visit from the Ghost of Christmas Past. He brings priceless memories of family gatherings through the years.

And the Ghost of Christmas Present lets me glimpse the joy of this year's celebration of Christ's birth.

But the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come may be a sorrowful visitor. Future Christmas scenes may be far different from those of my childhood or even that of my own children.

The Spirit of what-lies-ahead may one day see small children who know Christmas only as a time of Santa Claus, lists of wanted gifts, stores filled with shoppers, fancy packages and seasonal stress. The day will come when somewhere, amid the tinsel and trappings of another yuletide, a little



boy will notice an antique ornament of an angel. If he asks his parents the story of the little haloed figure, will his mom and dad remember?

And across the land, in government buildings and public places, halls will be decked with holly and mistletoe, bells and ribbons. Yet in no park, no village square, no town hall, no Washington chamber will there be a softly lit scene of a young mother tenderly holding her newborn son as a proud Joseph stands quietly by and lowly shepherds kneel in worship.

In schools everywhere, the songs of the season will focus on snow and jingle bells, sleigh rides and Santa Claus. Children who are never taken to church will not learn to sing the sweet traditional stories of "Away in a Manger," "Silent Night" or "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

If on some far-off December evening, a little girl asks her mommy to teach her some of the old songs, will the mother remember them?

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come fears a future of even more Christmas-time stress as people lose the season's joy and peace in their rush to out-spend, out-give and out-do each other.

The Ghost fears that in Christmas seasons of the future, the miracle of Jesus birth may only be told in the churches. Here, those who have heard the story over and over will gather to hear it once again, to share the message of the coming of the Messiah.

But what of the weary world so in need of the story of hope and joy, peace and love? What of those who don't visit the churches? Where will the children and their busier-than-ever parents hear those words that radiate like the light of the star, the light that has shone through all these generations? Where will they learn of the Christ of Christmas?

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come looks ahead, and sometimes, he cries.





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. The office will be closed on Christmas Day!

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 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.



D CELEBRATORY DATES

BIRTHDAYS

December 10 Elaine Erickson

December 12 Emily Klossner

December 15	Mary Tulip
December 17	Armondo Mascarenaz
December 18	Lee Swift
December 22	Sally Benson
December 27	Robert Gaylord
December 29	Susan James
December 31	Elden Wick

ANNIVERSARIES

December 14	Zoli and Jackie Szeifert
December 18	Bob and Joyce Baskovic

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