

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



**FEBRUARY 2019**

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

**Rev. Mike Ford**

**Good News Is Bad News Is Good News**

I read this in a commentary on Luke 4:14-21 by David Schnasa Jacobsen at Boston University School of Theology. In this passage Jesus comes home to Nazareth after successfully launching his ministry in the Galilean region.

In the Gospel of Luke there are some rather large events in the first three chapters. You might remember some from our Advent season and Christmas pageant. Zechariah receives a visit from the angel Gabriel telling of the impending birth of a son to he and Elizabeth. Zechariah laughs at Gabe and is forced to be mute until his son John is born. Mary receives a visit from Gabe too. She is told that she will birth a son who will be the salvation of the world. She is wiser than Zechariah and submits to God's plan. Then in chapter two the famous birth narrative with angels and shepherds and no room at the Inn. A short time later, Jesus gets left behind at the Temple and is found teaching the teachers. Then fast forward to the adult Jesus being baptized in the Jordan by his cousin John. A voice comes for the heavens proclaiming Jesus as a beloved son and the Holy Spirit alights on him. At that point, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness for forty days to face temptations which offer him ultimate power if he will submit to the authority of Satan. Whew! That was busy. I'm out of breath just writing that!

Then, in Luke 4, we read that Jesus comes back from his time of being tempted. We are told that Jesus returns from that place filled with the Holy Spirit. He begins to teach in the synagogues in the region and the reports about him are very good. People are impressed, in fact "everyone praised him."

In verse 14, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom. Jesus, we are told, was a person of faith, the Jewish faith. I have to admit that there have been times when I mention that Jesus was never a Christian, how some faithful people have been upset with me. I even remember hearing that a mother took her daughter out of

Sunday School because the teacher said that Jesus was Jewish. Anyway, that's a story for yet another day.

Jesus' fame had spread throughout the region. I get the impression that the folks were excited to have the, "hometown boy", Jesus, there with them in worship. I can imagine that they were smiling and expectant when he stood to read from the scroll of Isaiah. He paused and read these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he sat down, as was the custom of the teachers during Sabbath worship. He looked around the room and proclaimed, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Imagine if something you had waited for your entire life for, in fact the entire history of your people had been fulfilled in an instant. Let that soak in for a second. Sometimes the waiting is filled with preparation and busyness. Sometimes those preparations become ritual or tradition. Every year you get ready for the big event. Once it happens, everything will change.

The family and friends Jesus was speaking to that day had been waiting for the decades of oppression to end. They had waited for God to vindicate them and end the series of invasions and occupations that they had become used to as common place. They had been waiting for the Messiah or the Christ to come to end their suffering under foreign, non-Jewish, armies and rulers. They were waiting for the "land flowing with milk and honey" to return to their lives. They were waiting to be on the top of the ladder again. Jesus reads from Isaiah and announces that an end to their problems has arrived. He claims the authority that Isaiah has written about belongs to him.

You might think that the people would begin cheering and planning a party the likes of which has never happened before. You might think there was relieved weeping and hugging loved ones. You might think that there would be stunned silence for some. You might think someone would say, "Praise God!" You would be wrong. They received the Good News as Bad News as Good News for others. Jesus had a different idea for the meaning of Isaiah's Messiah.

What they did instead was to throw Jesus out of the synagogue and threaten to throw him over a nearby cliff! They were angry instead of joyful. After all, hadn't they been waiting for God to show up to take over and throw their enemies out of Jerusalem and the entire Israelite region? Hadn't they waited through years of oppression for this to be Good News? But instead Jesus said he came for the poor, the blind, the imprisoned. He hadn't come only for THEM! They weren't poor or blind or in prison. They were oppressed by people who didn't share their faith, who stole their land and money, who made slaves of them. That's what they needed relief from, the Romans. To top things off, he wanted give everything back to people who didn't deserve it. Hadn't they proven their righteousness by being wealthy and powerful? They couldn't give it all away. They were so angry they wanted to kill Jesus, the hometown boy, the Messiah.

This passage left me wondering how these proclamations would be received today. Do we expect that we "own" what we possess and that there is a fair amount of security in that wealth and prestige? What if we were told that it would be taken away and given to those who have nothing? Wouldn't we rebel and shout "unfair!" Jesus proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor and it was

frightening. Out of fear, they wanted to throw him off the cliff just because he suggested it MIGHT happen. It wasn't about defeating the enemies of Judaism to Jesus. It was about freedom and wholeness and peace for ALL people.

Today when we hear that message as "Christians" do we resent that the "Others" might get an advantage over us, that we might end up the oppressed people of our day? A very real possibility exists that, once things are equal, those formerly oppressed peoples will become the new oppressors. History bears that out. But perhaps not, if equality and equity come to all people. So, what do we do?

I have a novel idea, why don't we take the words attributed to Jesus at face value. Why don't WE become the people who set the captive peoples in our country free, heal the sight of our nation, free others from oppression, and proclaim a year of God's favor over the land. What if we GAVE away to others the freedoms and advantages we enjoy simply because it is the right thing to do, the faithful thing to do? Imagine that Good News!

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

#### ***MODERATOR'S REPORT- Bill Colson***

Greetings from your new Moderator. Please bear with me as I "learn the ropes".

I'm writing this from Fernandina Beach (Amelia Island), Florida, while my daughter attends a Dental Continuing Education conference. Because of publishing and time constraints, it is being written before the 2019 Annual Meeting.

#### **Carryover from prior reports.**

In preparation for this, my first report of 2019, I reviewed all the Moderator's Reports for the past year. As the new Leadership Team begins their first year, there are several items that will continue to be discussed and reported on during our meetings:

- Repairs to stucco on wall above the roof. The covering on the firewall has deteriorated and needs to be repaired before causing more leaks.
- Our website needs updates. The method of updating needs to be upgraded to make updates easy and transparent. The website needs pictures of current activities. You the congregants can help by taking pictures of activities. Does anyone have pictures of the December Christmas Pageant?
- The Congregation needs an updated directory with pictures of everyone. What better way for new members to put a name with a face.
- Contract for and installation of Hearing Assist T-coil loops for the Sanctuary and Pulpit/Choir areas. Thanks to Jim DeGood, for your January report on the Hearing Assist system. As all of us age, we will put the system to good use. By the way, my own hearing aids are on order.

**From the Moderators' Annual Meeting Report**, here are some items that the Leadership Team will consider in the coming months:

- Building Security for staff and occupants during meeting times and work hours. Should the existing system be up graded? Should there be cameras installed to monitor who is in the building? How would our tenants interface with an Alarm System?
- Based upon recommendations from FPL and our study of savings from installation of the Solar Panels, the Leadership Team should prepare for modifications or replacement of our aging Air Conditioning system. It will be prudent to establish a reserve fund to pay for new equipment.
- Similarly, the Leadership Team must make preparations for replacement of the building's roof at the end of its useful life.
- Establish a "Garden" on the church grounds. The garden could have a "Memorial" theme to honor our members and friends after their passing. We need to update the plantings throughout the grounds.
- How will the Congregation strengthen and concentrate our Social Justice efforts through our social justice team? How will this interact with our outreach efforts?

### **The Beacon.**

The emblem from the masthead of our publication shows a 'Light' to draw attention to the publication name, The Beacon. From Wikipedia, I take this explanation: A Beacon is an intentionally conspicuous device designed to attract attention to a specific location. Our monthly report is featured prominently on our website as a means to let those interested in Congregational UCC know what has transpired in the past, what is happening in the future, and who will be involved. **How can we improve The Beacon?** Let your Leadership Team know your thoughts.

### **Closing.**

The next scheduled Leadership Team meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 12, from 3:00-4:30 p.m. in the church library. The LT agenda will be sent midweek of the prior week, so get your reports ready for circulation via email.

From many of Judy Minier's previous Reports, I borrow this admonition. 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.

### **ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair**

Vanguard has recently released the year-end statements for the Endowment Fund. The next step is to review the positions we hold for any possible changes; none are anticipated. Then we will determine the 2018 capital gains and dividends that can be used for distribution in 2019. We can distribute up to 50% of those 2018 earnings when approved by the Leadership Team. You can expect additional information when it becomes available



**TREASURER – Melissa Brown**



Operating Income/Expense			
	Jan - Dec 17	Jan - Dec 18	Variance
Total Income	\$162,569	\$157,888	(\$4,682)
Total Expense	<u>166,358</u>	<u>153,736</u>	<u>12,622</u>
Net Operating Income	<u>(\$3,788)</u>	<u>\$4,152</u>	<u>\$7,940</u>

The chart above details the church's unaudited financial results for this past year and compares those results to 2017. Despite a decrease of \$4.6K in contributions and other sources of revenue, we managed to generate a profit of \$4.2K, resulting in a year-over-year net income improvement of \$7.9K. We were able to do this primarily because:

- 1) Changes in the tax laws announced in late 2017 generated \$5.5K in contributions in 2017 toward our 2018 revenues. Had those pledges been received in 2018 rather than 2017, our income year-over-year would have shown a slight increase in 2018 over 2017.
- 2) Pledge collections in 2018 were down when compared to 2017 but several generous memorial contributions totaling \$10.5K offset the drop in pledged collections.
- 3) In 2018, our cost for our pastor's medical benefits decreased significantly because of a generous decision by Pastor Mike to switch his healthcare from the UCC's plan to a plan available to him as a result of his military service. This decision on his part resulted in significant savings for our church.

We were also able to reimburse the loans totaling \$17.5K that had been advanced from the capital fund to the operating fund in FY2015 and FY2016. The repayment was not made from operating funds. Rather, \$6.7K in unused search fund monies and \$10.8 in distributions from the Endowment Fund for debt repayment and hurricane relief were used to restore the capital fund.

At our annual meeting, the congregation will be asked to approve the attached budget, which currently shows a deficit of approximately \$10K. So how do we go from a gain of \$4.2K to a potential loss of \$10K—a \$14.2K swing—in one year?

- 1) \$6.4K of the variance is revenue related. We do expect that our operating fund contributions will increase in 2019 when those who gave in 2017 for 2018 begin to contribute again in 2019. However, the budget does not include any projections of memorial contributions.
- 2) \$7.8K of the variance is expense related. We are budgeting \$5K for OCWM, which is a \$2K increase over the prior years. We have included cost of living increases and merit raises of approximately \$4K. The remaining \$1.8K in increases over FY2018 actual charges may not materialize but is budgeted as a hedge against inflation and other unknown outlays.

I want to give thanks to my team who make my job so much easier: Mary Tulip, who has been the church's financial assistant for a little over a year now, our weekly counters (Elaine Erickson, Susann Luckenbach, Jean Ringelstein and Cindy Trudeau), and the great staff at G.F. Business Services. We implemented some needed improvements in our processes that have helped in our reconciliations and the timeliness of our reporting. I would like to thank Bill Colson for his help as assistant treasurer, and I look forward to continuing to work with him in his new role as moderator of the Leadership Team. I also look forward to working with Dick Michael as assistant treasurer in the coming year.



### **MINISTER OF MUSIC - Isaac James**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the selection committee/Leadership Team for choosing me as your new music director. It is hard to believe that just over two months ago, I had no idea I would be where I am at today, in a beautiful Florida community with dear friends and in this position at the Punta Gorda CUCC, bringing you my gift of musical abilities. God is truly an awesome God.

I was told by Mary Tulip that I should tell you a little about myself, so here goes. I am the oldest of 9 children, born into a large religious family with an ordained minister as a father. Growing up, we had an old upright piano that I played on by ear for several years and never started taking formal piano lessons until I was 12. By the time I was 16, I entered my first international piano competition where I placed in the top 4 categories out of 9 pianists from around the world. This was the first time I had jumped into the classical music circuit and mind you...with both feet. After this, it was a nonstop roller coaster of performing in many concert halls and other venues as both a solo recitalist and accompanist. I would venture to say that the height or pinnacle of excitement in my career was my Carnegie Hall debut in November of 2012. No experience could ever come close as being on the same stage that Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky had been on over a century earlier. As I looked out over a thousand people in the audience, I could still hear the reverberations of his first Piano Concerto in B flat that he conducted on 5 October 1891, for the opening of Carnegie Hall, and every golden age performing artist after him.

About 10 years ago or so, I began to work as a full-time church musician. I worked as an organist mainly at first, which then of course turned into a choir director etc. I am a very easy-going person (I'd like to think) so I always made sure that choir practice wasn't a grueling, throat-destroying, dry, bland time to be had by all. To me, it is a time for musical appreciators to get together and enjoy some quality music. In the future I would very much love to be able to incorporate some larger works into our services, but for now, to get acquainted with all of you in the choir and those to be so in the future. Hint. Hint. I will always welcome new members into the choir. If ever you are interested in joining stop by the organ area after service and see me. Choir rehearsal times have changed from Wednesday evenings to Thursday evenings at 6:30, and last from an hour to an hour and a half at most. Music for our services is chosen two months in advance, so any of you that would like to offer your musical abilities as a solo or with the choir, let me know and I will certainly give all ideas consideration.

You may have noticed the change in the beginning of service. I have been accustomed at every church I've been to, to have gathering music as you walk in. This is a time for silent prayer, worship, meditation and reflection on our past week. A time for us as individuals and God. Music is such a great tool for this. I always have thought music to be therapeutic and inspiring. It reaches our most inner selves and for sure, our soul. It opens every emotion in us as fertile soil, so that we can be filled with the Spirit. Music is a very easy thing to be selfish with, mainly since it reaches to our souls so deeply in a personal way, it makes us feel good, we enjoy it, and so as humans we can at times make it about ourselves. However, as the scriptures say, all good things come from God, including music. So, it is for us to give back to Him. That is what has been my goal...to give my abilities in His name and for His glory. As we give to Him, He will bless us. That my friends is what I hope for all of you. That you will feel full of the spirit and God's love each week by my music and the spoken word from Pastor Mike, and that somehow you might go home each Sunday feeling blessed, inspired, loved and full of peace.

God's blessings on all of you,

Isaac James  
Music Director

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

As you may have noticed, there has been a slight change in the liturgy. Isaac James, our new Music and Choir Director, plays beautiful Gathering Music (A Time for Reflection) before the Prelude. This is a time for meditation and centering our thoughts on God. "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10.

Remember to share Valentine's Day with someone you love or someone who needs loving!

***LIVING THE QUESTIONS***-The class will meet on Mondays, beginning February 4-March 25, from 1-2:30pm in the library. You are welcome to come at 12:15pm with a bag lunch to socialize before the class! The theme this year is, Exploring White Privilege, using UCC materials and culminating with the book, *The Third Reconstruction: How A Moral Movement Is Overcoming The Politics of Division and Fear* by The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the church.

## **MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk**

Thanks to our January Fellowship Hosts:

- January 6 Dave Cramer, Jerry Oscarson, Val Martin, Barb Smith, Deb Grenzow
- January 13 Lee and Joanne Arvid, Linda and Glenn Weaver
- January 20 Ann Baker and Chrystal Reichard
- January 27 Emily Klossner



Watch for these upcoming events:

- February 10 Volunteer Sunday – Coffee Hour to be hosted by the Leadership Team in honor of our volunteers.
- March 24 Church Picnic at Lashley Park – Dust off your favorite recipes or check out your local deli for ideas.

## **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. For more information, please contact Lori and Jerry Larson (715-781-0657). We would love to have you join us



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

Our next luncheon will be at 12:00 noon on Friday, February 22 at Phil's 41 restaurant on US 41. We would love to have you join us. A sign-up sheet is available at the kiosk in the back of the church.



### **LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj**

The January Book Talk Tea was a huge success. We welcomed two new members to the group: Sue Blaisdell and Mary Ellen Nielsen. Thanks to everyone who participated.

The February Book Talk Tea is on Friday February 8 at 1pm in the church library. It is being hosted by Fern Sparks, Myra Nagle and Gretchen Smith. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

Thank you to Joyce Schenk for the book donations. They are a welcome addition to the library. They are on display on the top bookshelf.

PLEASE NOTE: I am missing approximately 15 books from the Reading for Renewal reading list. If you have any of these books please return them to the library as soon as possible. These books are for the Book Talk Tea group to read and review. Thank you!!!

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



### **Party Line Memories of Long-ago**

Apple's newest addition to the innovative iPhone family is, like earlier models, a powerhouse communicator. But, with all the "non-phone" features built into the compact new unit, it seems the company should consider another name for their latest offering rather than the familiar title of "phone." This version goes far beyond a means for carrying spoken conversation. That, after all, was the original goal of Alexander Bell's invention.

Comparing Apple's newest version with the telephones of my childhood is like comparing a Model A Ford with Marty McFly's flying car.

Back in those long-ago days of telephone history, our heavy phone had a permanent home in the downstairs hallway. It didn't go with us as today's little phones do. Whenever the phone rang, we had to race to answer it.

A major difference with our phone service in those days was that we were on a party line. We shared our line with the Halls next door to the north and Mr. and Mrs. English to the south. When the strident ringing of the phone sounded twice, the call was for us. The Halls had one ring and the English family had three. Naturally, a favorite pastime for us kids was to quietly listen in on the conversations of the neighbors. Our parents, of course, were mortified and constantly struggled to keep us from such blatant spying. Thus, the phone was the center of an endless generational battle.

Fortunately, the telephone technology finally advanced and the old party lines were phased out, giving each family a private line. The change was much more efficient but not nearly as entertaining for the youngest members of the family. Eventually, we were able to install additional phones throughout the house. No more running from the front upstairs bedroom, through the second floor, down the stairs to the hallway just in time to have the caller hang up. With additional phones, frustration levels and missed calls dropped dramatically.

The telephones of today have very little in common with that old, heavy black unit of my childhood. Instead, today's cell phones easily fit into a pocket. They have the power to connect the caller to anyone, anywhere in the world and do it in the blink of an eye. In addition, most cell phone conversations are free of the interferences and distortions of the past. Besides making voice communication so much faster and more efficient, the phones of today perform dozens of other functions.

Daughter Becky, whose cell phone is never farther away than the end of her arm, tells me she can manage her entire world through the use of her bright pink iPhone. The unit contains a seemingly-endless list of applications condensed by modern technology into one tiny package. Among Becky's favorites are: a calendar, calculator, camera, flashlight, bar code scanner, memo-keeper, keyboard for texting, voice mail, an E-book reader for those unexpected waiting times, her music collection for ongoing entertainment, a GPS with mapping potential for the world, even a directory of what was formerly known as the "Yellow Pages."

Apple's iPhone developers are continuing their work on new apps for their smart phones. Who knows what they'll come up with next. Just between us, the kid in me would like to see them add a Party Line app.



**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

February 1	Mary Franquist
February 1	Robert Zitti
February 4	Gerry Blandford
February 23	Ron Jankowski
February 24	Judy Wood
February 26	Joanne Arvid

## ANNIVERSARIES

February 2	Mike & Kelly Ford
February 11	Linda & Glenn Weaver
February 24	Denny & Kathy Reed

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)