

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



June 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

Prophets and Angels

I learned a long time ago in Seminary that whenever an angel or a prophet shows up, it could be both good and bad news at the same time.

On May 27th, we had as part of our scriptures Isaiah 6:1-8. This reading is famous for it being the call of the prophet Isaiah into God's service among the Chosen. Isaiah is sitting in church, probably, when, all of a sudden, he has a vision of God's throne, the hem of God's robe filling the temple, seraphs flying around shouting Glory, and the temple filled with smoke. All these pieces acknowledge the presence of God. One might expect this to happen in church, but Isaiah seems to be taken off guard by the vision. He understands that something big is happening and that he is in the presence of God. He proclaims, "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips!" It is almost as if he knows what is about to happen.

One of the seraphs (a flying serpent) flies over to the sacrificial altar, removes a live coal, flies over to Isaiah and presses the coal against Isaiah's lips. The seraph proclaims that Isaiah has been cleansed and his sin removed. Isaiah has been prepared. He then hears a voice asking, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

This is where the plot thickens. If we were watching a horror flick we might shout, "No Isaiah, don't open that door!" There is that feeling of unknown and a bit of dread when one encounters God and hears the seemingly undirected question about being sent. Without hesitation, Isaiah exclaims, "Here I am Lord. Send me." And this is the point in the horror flick when the hero opens the cellar door and confronts the evil waiting at the bottom of the stairs. That is exactly what Isaiah is about to do.

Now our reading stopped at verse 8 when Isaiah answers the call. He has no idea what he will be asked to do. He only knows God has called and he has accepted the call. Remember I wrote at the beginning that it could be both bad and good news brought by prophets and angels?

This is what God orders Isaiah to proclaim to Israel: “And he said, “Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.”

What an uplifting message, NOT! You see prophets usually are activated when something is going VERY wrong in covenant keeping. What was happening in Israel? The grandson of King Uzziah, Ahaz, became King of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and wanted to expand his power into the Northern Kingdom of Israel, ruled by David. Ahaz wanted Jerusalem as a jewel in his crown. The houses of Israel’s families were plotting to destroy one another. Isaiah was called into their midst to tell of the ruin it would bring, and that Israel would be scattered across the known world, to Egypt and Assyria. Isaiah was called into the midst of the people to tell them that they were violating the covenant they had accepted with God and that bad things would happen if they pursued the course of action they were embarking on. Isaiah was sent to turn them back to right relationship with God. He was sent to tell them that disaster could be avoided if they turned back to God. Remember I also said that prophets could bring good news too.

Well, of course they didn’t heed Isaiah’s warning and it ended up that they were conquered by the Assyrians and sent into exile in Assyria and Egypt. The brightest and best were sent away, the artisans and leaders. The remnant were left in Israel to take care of the new property of Assyria. For centuries, they languished as slaves in all the lands they were dispersed to. For all intent and purpose, Israel no longer existed. Some of the twelve tribes never were found again. They became assimilated into the places they were sent, married foreigners, and became foreigners themselves. Eventually, other powerful nations conquered the Assyrians and sent the Israelites home who wanted to go back. Israel was a mere shell of its former self, all because they were power hungry and disregarded their covenant with God and one another.

On this Sunday, I suggested that the church had received its message on the day of Pentecost. It was given the ever-present God in the form of the Holy Spirit. The church was given a voice to proclaim freedom for the captives. It was empowered to live as God intended in Creation no matter the circumstance of who was in power. The church was called back into relationship with God in a way that could never be broken again. All of this in the midst of the occupation by the most powerful force on Earth, the Roman Empire. The church was encouraged to live beyond that circumstance and follow the call once more to be a people of Justice, Mercy, and Love.

I look at this passage and wonder whether things have changed all that much in our world. People are oppressed, families separated and disbursed into foreign lands. The poor are becoming poorer. People are ill without help. Our schools are becoming a place of daily violence. It is a depressing situation. I can’t help but cry out for a prophet to rise up and speak to the need to repent and come back to our senses.

I think once again God has asked, "Whom shall I send. Who will go for us?" I believe that call is exactly what the church is hearing today. We certainly live among a people of unclean lips. We are being sent into this place to speak words of warning and encouragement.



There is good news to share with the world today. We can again become a people who seek good for all. We can again become a people of peace and love. It won't happen, though, until we raise our voices to proclaim what is wrong and demand a return to civil behavior. Let us call out loudly and clearly for reconciliation with one another and the world around us. Let us answer God's call with, "Here WE are Lord! Send US!"

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Judy Minier, Moderator



It has been another productive month in the life of your church! When I have an opportunity to tell people about our church and the myriad of activities we are involved in, they are surprised by what it takes to keep things running smoothly in our building and in the activities, we support. Just ask anyone on the Leadership Team what their duties have been recently in their realm – Endowment, Stewardship, Fellowship, serving as Clerk, Treasurer, Social Justice, etc. and you'll hear about some very deep and important work being done behind the scenes. I realize the following is a trite and overused analogy but being on the Leadership Team reminds me of the duck paddling on the pond – all looks calm from above, but the duck is paddling like mad beneath the surface to keep moving!

While summer is usually a time for relaxing (especially for us retirees!) your Team continues to work on projects around the church. The big effort this year is getting our leaking roof repaired or replaced. We have several written quotes (finally!!) coming in as I write this, so we'll use our June LT meeting to begin to make the decision about where we go from here. The discussion is timely since rainy season is upon us already! You may think it is easy to get quotes from licensed roofers – not so! All seem to be very tied up with repairs related to last year's hurricanes or are working on new construction which seems to be everywhere. Stay tuned for further details....

Repairs are also ongoing to mend the railing on the front steps. Thanks to Bil Tucker and Guy Greenfield for putting their heads together to find a solution to reinstall the railing for us! We'll be patient as you guys figure out a way to secure the structure. Luckily, the other half of the steps and the railing are very solid.

Gun-Free Building Policy: A letter is being sent or given to each of the groups that meet in our building which explains our gun free policy. The letter indicates that we are willing to discuss the policy if there are questions, as we strive to maintain positive relationships with these groups. The statement reads:

“It is the policy of this church that firearms, of any sort, are not allowed in the building, even if the individual has a valid permit to carry. This policy does not apply to law enforcement personnel.”

The LT will revisit this policy in 90 days and again annually to see if it meets our expectations and hopes. The spate of shootings in America continues unabated, so we feel it is as important as ever to indicate our stand on this matter.

Reminders and Announcements:

- 1. Survey regarding the Beacon:** We conducted an email survey in May requesting people to let us know about their Beacon reading habits. The newsletter is quite time consuming to write, compile, edit and send out in batches to all the emails of folks who read it. We received about a dozen responses and for the most part respondents said they liked the monthly schedule for publishing but could live with quarterly since it takes a bit of effort to compile it each month. Do YOU read the Beacon? What do you find useful? Would a quarterly “report” suffice for your reading pleasure? Let someone on the LT know your thoughts!
- 2. Seeking individuals to take on leadership roles: *HELP!!*** These posts need to be filled:
 - a Discipleship Chair/Committee.
 - Committee members to support Cathy Ann Colson with Stewardship responsibilities.
 - Assistant Clerk

We need 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 LT 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.

Next Leadership Team Meeting: The upcoming Leadership Team meeting takes place on Tuesday, June 12th from 3:30-5:30 p.m. Remember, we are here to support our Pastor, our church ministries/responsibilities and operations, and one another in the congregation. We welcome your input about what we are doing, how we are doing, and what we should be doing. Please see 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.

TREASURER – Melissa Brown

April 2018 Treasurer’s Report

Financial Results	Apr-18	2018 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$23,063.00	\$63,736.00	\$57,000.00
Expenses	\$11,623.00	\$48,340.00	\$54,331.00
Net Income	\$11,440.00	\$15,396.00	\$2,669.00

Don't faint! Yes, net income for the month of April was \$11,440.00! Our contributions were plentiful, and we also received a generous gift from the family of Frank Bowker. We are continuing to monitor and reduce our expenses. We did receive a reduction in our property insurance for the remainder of the year of \$1,793. The savings of approximately \$200 per month started in April. Our YTD electric bill was \$1,272. Through April 2017, our electric bill was \$1,628, so we are beginning to see some evidence of savings from the solar panels. Health insurance costs to date this year are \$1,200 compared to \$8,400 last year.



In addition to all the above, as of the end of May, our members have contributed \$550 in checks and cash to St. Vincent de Paul as well as numerous gifts of food, linens and personal hygiene products.

Thank you all!

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 all of you for your thoughts and prayers during my time of illness. I would like to thank Carol Schmuhl, Kathy, Kevin, Lucia and Ana Rivadeneira for providing special music for the month of May. I would like to give special thanks to Melissa Brown and Mike Robinson for covering the Sundays I missed due to illness. We are so blessed to have so many talented people in our music program.

Did you sing in a choir in high school or college? Do you miss the fun and camaraderie of making music together? Would you like to relive some of those memories? Then join the Summer Choir which begins Sunday, June 3rd. It is not too late to join us. Dress is casual (no robes). We rehearse Sundays before the Worship service at 9:15 A.M. in Faith Hall and sing once or twice a month. You won't have to audition or sing a solo! All are welcome!

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

Our Church has demonstrated that we are truly socially responsible; for that and for the leadership who got us there, we should be very proud. In that light, the investments held by your Endowment Fund were examined to insure there were no conflicting positions.

There are over 200 corporations that have guns/ammunition business in the U.S. Of these, about 2/3 are gun and gun accessory manufacturers and 1/3 are ammunition providers. Only about 5% of those 200+ corporations are publicly traded; the rest are privately held or obscure foreign providers.

Your Endowment Fund investment positions do not include any of those corporations that are publicly traded. Your Vanguard investments are totally correct as being socially responsible. All meet our high criteria as safe, conservative producers of both growth and income. These have funded our distributions and changed the lives of those we touched.

Your Endowment Team is fully aware of our stewardship responsibilities; to that end, we will embrace the policies of being socially responsible.



STEWARDSHIP – No report available at this time.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

. On May 20th, the Fellowship Team provided a light luncheon following the Memorial Service for Warren Sparks. Thanks to the following ladies who made this all happen: Neoma Remiger, Nadine Sommerfield, Sandy Nogaj, Fern Sparks, Molly Hall, Susann Luckenbach, CathyAnn Colson, Lucille Begin, Mary Tulip, and Joanne Stoughton. You all did a wonderful job. Our sympathies to Fern and her family.



This month Coffee Hour was hosted by Judy Minier, Bil Tucker, Brian Rolands, Armondo Mascarenaz, Glenn and Linda Weaver, Lou and Lynn Stayner, Jean and Bill Ringelstein, and Kathy Frantish. Thank you so much for making this fellowship happen after our services on Sunday.

We only have one person signed up for the last Sunday in June. Please consider signing up so we can keep this going. It is enjoyed by many.

Hosting Hint: If you are doing coffee, and you bring juice or tea, please take any leftover home with you. We share the refrigerators with our AA groups, and no one is sure what belongs to whom, so it sits. Both refrigerators were full this last Sunday. All we can do is discard those out of date. If you must leave some, there is a marker in the drawer by the fire extinguisher. Mark it "church" and put

the date on it. Please don't save anything less than half of the container. Also, please do not leave any cookies unless they are in an unopened package. They go stale quickly



Coffee Fellowship

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Ladies Lunch Out this month will be at the P.G.I. Café on Aqui Esta and Bal Harbor Corner. It will be on Friday, June 22 at Noon. There is a sign-up sheet on the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary. Please join us, we have lots of fun!



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj



Thanks to Jan Tulk for hosting the final Book Talk Tea of the season. We had a good time and Jan made a wonderful lunch which we thoroughly enjoyed.

On a sad note, we lost one of the original members of the Book Talk Tea group this past week - Betty Cooley. Betty was an avid reader (she always read the most books!), had a great sense of humor and a friend to all. She will be sorely missed.

The 2018-2019 Reading for Renewal list is in the library. I have ordered the books and they should arrive soon. Thanks to all the members of Book Talk Tea for donating the funds to purchase the books.

Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. We are rooted in a moral analysis based on our deepest religious and constitutional values that demand justice for all. Moral revival is necessary to save the heart and soul of our democracy.

2. We are committed to lifting up and deepening the leadership of those most affected by systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation and to building unity across lines of division.

3. We believe in the dismantling of unjust criminalization systems that exploit poor communities and communities of color and the transformation of the “War Economy” into a “Peace Economy” that values all humanity.

4. We believe that equal protection under the law is non-negotiable.

5. We believe that people should not live in or die from poverty in the richest nation ever to exist. Blaming the poor and claiming that the United States does not have an abundance of resources to overcome poverty are false narratives used to perpetuate economic exploitation, exclusion, and deep inequality.

6. We recognize the centrality of systemic racism in maintaining economic oppression must be named, detailed and exposed empirically, morally and spiritually. Poverty and economic inequality cannot be understood apart from a society built on white supremacy.



Learn more or join here:

<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org>

7. We aim to shift the distorted moral narrative often promoted by religious extremists in the nation from issues like prayer in school, abortion, and gun rights to one that is concerned with how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, LGBTQIA folks, workers, immigrants, the disabled and the sick; equality and representation under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.

8. We will build up the power of people and state-based movements to serve as a vehicle for a powerful moral movement in the country and to transform the political, economic and moral structures of our society.

9. We recognize the need to organize at the state and local level—many of the most regressive policies are being passed at the state level, and these policies will have long and lasting effect, past even executive orders. The movement is not from above but below.

10. We will do our work in a non-partisan way—no elected officials or candidates get the stage or serve on the State Organizing Committee of the Campaign. This is not about left and right, Democrat or Republican but about right and wrong.

11. We uphold the need to do a season of sustained moral direct action as a way to break through the tweets and shift the moral narrative. We are demonstrating the power of people coming together across issues and geography and putting our bodies on the line to the issues that are affecting us all.

12. The Campaign and all its Participants and Endorsers embrace nonviolence. Violent tactics or actions will not be tolerated.

FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk

Digging to China

It was a sweltering June day in Texas. In those long-ago years, there were no video games, no TV shows, and no malls to provide distraction. Our group of neighborhood kids was suffering from a depressing combination of ailments. We had boundless energy coupled with ripe imaginations. But we were overcome by boredom.

On this day, we migrated to Jimmy Murphy's back yard to hangout beneath the shady canopy of a massive pecan tree. As our little group of 9 and 10-year-olds sprawled on the grass, we tried to come up with a plan for the day. Finally, we decided. We would work together and dig our way to China!



According to the world globe we studied at school, we were sure that China must be directly on the other side of the world from Jimmy's back yard. Fortunately, the shade of the pecan tree extended past the back of the garage, so that area would make the ideal site for our excavation. It was out of sight of the house, yet near enough to the garden hose for frequent drinks.

Once the ideal site was chosen, our gang broke up and headed home to round up the excavation equipment. Soon we were back with a strange collection of digging and planting tools gathered from sheds and garages throughout the neighborhood. We each selected a spot in the dry and dusty yard and began working on our section of the magnificent tunnel we envisioned.

Unfortunately, just as we started making some visible dents in the dirt, Jimmy's sister, Maxine, came out to investigate. Maxine was one of those obnoxious girls who seemed to know everything. At 11, she was a year older than any of the rest of the kids in our gang. And she never let us forget that the age difference made her superior to us little children.

Maxine had something to say on every subject. And, whether her pronouncements were correct or not, she said them with such firm conviction that we all believed her.

On this day, she listened to Jimmy's excited description of our China Project without a word. When he was finished, she simply smiled, turned on her heel and walked back into the house. With no more delay, we renewed our efforts with our shovels and trowels. We reasoned that with all of us digging, we would reach China by suppertime.

We couldn't wait to see the looks on our parents' and neighbors' faces when we brought them out to our massive opening in the earth. How surprised they would be to see the little yellow-skinned kids in coolie hats looking up at us!

After an hour of digging, we were a sweaty, grimy group. And the hole was only a ragged dent in the dirt, less than a foot deep. This was going to be a bit harder than we had

thought. As we stopped to catch our breath, Maxine reappeared from the house. She carried a large shaker of some kind. When she got to the work area, we parted so she could see our progress. But, instead of commenting, she simply walked slowly around the hole, sprinkling the contents of the shaker on the dirt. Then she stood up and gave us her nastiest smile. “There ,” she said. “That ought to slow you down. As everyone knows, when the earth is salty, it is harder to dig.” With that, she hurried back into the house, chuckling to herself on the way.



We all sat back on our heels and looked at each other. No one spoke. We knew Maxine had put an end to our China plan. Slowly, we each picked up our tools and headed home, leaving behind the remains of our unrealized project.

The long-ago incident taught me two valuable lessons. First, never shake salt on another person’s dreams. And second, it takes far more than a shovel and a summer afternoon to get to China.



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.

JUNE CELEBRATORY DATES

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

June 1	Hazel Klossner
June 2	Marilyn Belseth
June 3	Linda Greenfield
June 4	Susann Luckenbach
June 5	Kevin Rivadeneira
June 8	Jacob Klossner
June 12	Susan Cheney
June 15	Lucia Rivadeneira
June 16	Suzanne Cleveland
June 17	Nadine Sommerfield
June 18	Glenn Garrett
June 19	Clifford Birdsall
June 20	Joanne Stoughton
June 20	Linda Weaver
June 24	Tim Sperber
June 25	Jean Ringelstein
June 27	Caden Klossner



JUNE ANNIVERSARIES

June 5	Jacob & Jenna Klossner
June 11	Carroll & Wyona Crosley
June 14	Gerald & Lori Larson
June 14	Clifford & Cindy Trudeau
June 16	Melissa & Steve Brown
June 22	Dick & Paula Michael
June 25	Bob & Judy Wood
June 29	Elden & Dianne Wick

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

