

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



MARCH 2019

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

A New Perspective

This one is going to be a VERY short vignette. Several Sundays ago, we encountered a very familiar passage, one that resonates with Christian and non-Christian alike. It is from the Gospel of Luke 5.

The setting is Jesus strolling down next to the Sea of Gennesaret. He is set upon by a crowd that wants to hear him preach and to be healed. They press in so close that they threaten to push him into the water. He sees two boats beached while the fishermen clean their nets. He climbs into one and asks the owner, Simon (Peter), to push off a way from shore. Simon agrees and Jesus preaches from the boat in safety.

When he had finished speaking to the crowd, he told Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets. Simon informs Jesus that they had just come back from fishing all night and had caught nothing. Basically, Jesus says, "trust me."

Simon agrees and they catch so many fish that their nets wanted to burst. They called over another boat, James and John, the Sons of Zebedee (I love that term!) and the two of them were in danger of sinking, the catch was so great! Simon realizes that something divine has happened. He falls on his knees and begs Jesus to leave because Simon is a sinful man.

Jesus tells Simon to not be afraid. Now we get to the familiar part. Jesus tells Simon that from now on he will be a fisher of people. Weird, eh? It seems that Jesus is telling Simon that he will be catching people as his livelihood.

I wonder if that is where the church began thinking of people as a commodity. For years I have heard of the necessity of getting more people to come to church, that our measure of success were full seats on Sunday. Is that true?

I realized that Jesus may have been inferring another meaning. As I studied this passage, I

looked for the word “catch” in my Greek lexicon. One of the POSSIBLE translations is to “capture” something as though to trap it. BUT I found another that I believe is closer to what Jesus intended. Another POSSIBLE translation is to “rescue”, as in keep from falling or harming themselves. This possibility resonates more deeply with me.

I think rather than setting a mission for the disciples to capture folks for the Kingdom, Jesus intends us to rescue people from harm or to catch them as they are falling to help them to their feet. I like that image much better!

So, if we are looking for mission, why not view this pivotal piece of ancient text as a call to catch people as they fall and offer assistance. Remember the Parable of the Samaritan? Doesn't Jesus go to great lengths to illustrate how we are to serve one another? We are to release boundaries and judgements and “catch” those who need help standing upright again, to offer a voice for the powerless, to advocate for changes that usher in Equity and Equality in our world. I like that a whole lot more than capturing people to indoctrinate them into our way of doing things. What if each person we “catch” changes us more into the image of Christ?

It's in the Air

This will tell you that I am in full vacation mode as I sit to write. As I went on my morning walk today, the breeze came from the northeast. As I walked along, I tried to place the smell in the air. I wasn't near anyone, so it couldn't be perfume. It came through in every puff of breeze. Then it finally hit me. I was smelling orange blossoms. What a sweet and pleasant surprise!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT- Bill Colson

The “New’ Leadership Team held their first meeting this month, so look for new reports beginning this month. The Team’s meeting lasted a little longer than usual as we covered a large number of items under Old and Current Business. Progress is being made, even though I have to measure it in micro inches.

Old Business

- Stucco Repairs: a single quote to repair cracks which are causing delamination of the stucco on the firewall and the exterior walls. We will discuss at the next Leadership Team meeting.
- Hearing Loop in the Sanctuary: The contract to supply and install a Hearing Loop and associated electronics, was signed and returned, with initial payment, to Complete Hearing Solutions, Sarasota, Florida. During the last week of February, it was agreed to install the Loop and other equipment on Thursday March 28th. The system should be operational on Sunday March 31st. My personal Thanks to everyone who supported the fund drive toward purchase of this hearing assist device.
- A verbal estimate for repairs to the fascia was received by Guy Greenfield, in the amount of \$31,000. A written quote will be sought.

New Business

- A presentation was made at the beginning of the Leadership Team meeting by Keith Webber regarding an update to the church ground's plantings and ornamental palms. Keith presented a plan from a local landscape company for possible relocation, feeding, pruning, and removal of diseased specimens. A drip irrigation system was proposed, fed from two onsite water storage tanks. Discussion was held about sustainability and the need for volunteers needed for care. We will continue to discuss in coming months.
- The Team heard a report from Pastor Mike regarding Buckley's Pass and its impact on this church. The City of Punta Gorda's proposed special assessment of waterfront property owners to fund the project may impact Congregational UCC about \$25500. To learn more about the project and its timeline visit the City's Buckley Pass webpage at <https://www.ci.punta-gorda.fl.us/government/capital-projects/buckley-s-pass-additional-harbor-access> . More to come in April Beacon.
- An Acceptable Use Policy is needed for anyone using the Church facility. The tenants/users will be expected to accept and abide by the policy during the times they occupy our building.
- A working group from the Leadership Team, and others, will meet with the owner of the Janitorial Services company, in late March, to discuss their scope of service and prepare a Service Contract.

Some thoughts about recent events at Congregational UCC.....

Did you get your sweet tooth satisfied at the Bake Sale on Sunday the 24th? I was very impressed by the response from our members at the fellowship hour. Thank you everyone! The Bake Sale donations support Anamaria Rivadeneira's efforts to bring a Repertoire Company's performance to her school.

Thank you letters were received this month by those who have made financial pledges to support the expenses of the church. If you have not made a pledge this year, it is not too late. Contact the Church Office, or Eldon Wick, to make a pledge.

The Endowment Team is already at work—A distribution was made Sunday February 24th. See their Team Report, here in the Beacon.

Visit the Church's website for a listing of upcoming March events, including a Concert (March 17) and the Church Picnic (March 24).

Daylight Saving Time starts March 10th.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting will be held Tuesday March 12th, in the Church Library, from 3:00-4:30 PM.

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.

Blessings and Peace,
Bill Colson, Moderator

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

Financial Results	Jan-19 Actual	Jan-19 Budget	Variance
Donations and Other Income	\$11,818	\$12,625	(\$807)
Expenses	<u>12,629</u>	<u>13,464</u>	<u>835</u>
Actual Net Income	<u>(\$811)</u>	<u>(\$839)</u>	<u>\$28</u>

These are the financial results for January 2019. There are several ways to spin the results:

1. The income budget was too optimistic.

Very possible. Our 2019 pledge currently is slightly below \$90,000. Last year's pledge was around \$95,000. Consider also that, based on historical trends, we usually EXCEED the income budget in January, February and March.

2. The expense forecast was overstated, and there is a lot of "fluff" in the budget.

Fluff in the budget? There could be some areas that are overstated, but based on the first two months of the year, building expenses could be the biggest budget issue in 2019. The roof, the air conditioners, the building fascia and the increased custodial needs of an aging building could easily wipe out any "fluff" in the expense budget.

3. With a positive variance of \$28 through January, our treasurer is very good at budgeting/forecasting.

The jury is still out.



As a congregation, we approved a budgeted loss of \$10,065 for 2019, and this is not sustainable. Fortunately, when we identify a need, people step up. Funding of the hearing loop system, contributions for the CIW bus trip and proceeds from the bake sale to support the performance of **Refugee** were all met with enthusiasm and strong financial support. Let's hope the same will happen as we address the serious capital expenditures that we need to address in 2019.

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.

STEWARDSHIP – Elden Wick, Chair

Hello Beacon readers and greetings to a new budgeted year of worship, missions and service within the family of God as centered, for us, at Congregational UCC Punta Gorda.

HALLELUJAH! For this opportunity to provide witness for what we do and how we go about it as disciples in Christ. Our plate is full, and we are excited by the roadmap drawn up for this year by our previous Leadership Team.

Yes, hallelujah for responses by you to The Prodigal God pledge Drive, as you have committed yourselves to financial support for God's Glory. Yes, in this congregation, in this place! We are delighted by your pledge, and you will soon receive mailed grateful confirmation.

As a newly installed CUCC Stewardship leader, let me explain myself. I observe Stewardship as a three-leg STOOL tool constructed by the Body of Christ to support our precious God's Kingdom on Earth. Obviously, they are: (1) financial/ monetary resources (reference pledges, offerings and money gifts to the church's work); (2) time - our 'time', God given and freely so in abundance of our lifetime, but yet so short; and (3) talents - the skill sets that we seek out, possess and perfect as we go about finding satisfaction and fulfillment in what we do to God's glory. So, having stated all that, what then?

I am reminded of our recent Sunday worship theme, Pastor Mike's sermon, and the "quire's" song offering – God's CALL. "HERE I AM LORD, SEND ME." What is your situation in life? First, what talents can you offer in mission and service, as a volunteer? Second, will you/ can you offer your time wisely in God's service? Plan the time, please. And third I suggest bringing your pence (or 'gold bullion'), small or larger, to His table to complete your pledges and find extra, God-given, to close the apparent shortfall of pledges-total to budgeted costs for the C-UCC works in 2019. Perhaps or surely, we collectively will be blessed by God for these tasks in this year's roadmap. God! Let it be so!



MINISTER OF MUSIC - Isaac James

I wanted to take an opportunity to publicly thank the choir members for all the work they have put into their music. It truly is a joy to work with them. In March and April, we will be bringing you some special music. On March 31st, the handbell choir will be playing a few pieces. Easter Sunday, there will be a few selections from Handel's Messiah sung. Also, some fine brass players from Charlotte High School will be accompanying the congregation and organ, as well as have a solo. Quite a bit to be excited about!

On March 17th, at 3:00 PM, my good friend and colleague Skip Potter, will be performing a wonderful benefit concert. Admission is \$20 at the door or you may buy advance tickets through the church office. 100% of the proceeds will be benefitting the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition. Skip is a marvelous tenor, whom I have had the pleasure of performing with many times over the last several years. He will be singing everything from Opera to Broadway, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Stephen Sondheim, Giacomo Puccini, Gabriel Faure, Leonard Bernstein and many more. I thought it would be good to give you a small peek for you to hear his voice by having him sing during that Sunday morning service. Skip will sing the traditional Lord's Prayer in place of us saying it. I know you all will enjoy his wonderful tone and clear high notes as he brings you his gift, for a good cause. Please do come, I promise you, you're in for a treat. Advance tickets are available in the church office or you may pay at the door.

You may have noticed that we have been singing new hymns during our worship service. I have played music in so many churches that only sing a select number of hymns because they are familiar with them and were dismayed by the idea that the hymns should correlate with the lectionary readings for that week. I personally very much like to go home on a Sunday after service with a theme going through my mind. So much so, that is nearly impossible to forget. We will still sing many that are familiar but with a new hymn or two, to add to our collection of known hymns.

I'd like to leave you with a thought to ponder on. I have been thinking about this for the last month or so. I thought I would share it with you. I have found, and think we all would agree, that music and song continue to play a vital role in the life of God's people today. Contemporary culture and modern technology bring new possibilities and new challenges to the music ministry of the church at large. In my opinion, people's lives are surrounded with music, television and radio, the background music of video games, the music of shopping malls, CD's, and synthesizers. Yet much of the time, music functions as background, rather than as an opportunity for serious listening, and not so much participation. Outside the church there are few occasions or opportunities in North American culture for people to sing together. A lot of the popular music (including popular Christian music) composed

today is for performance rather than for participation. The church also has better access and has shown greater openness to a large variety of music, from traditional hymns to Christian rock, from European cantatas to South African choruses. This diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated, it shows the diversity of God's creation. But greater variety and options in music call for greater discernment and care in planning and implementing the music ministry of the church. The people of God sing, what they sing and how they sing are important issues. I pray this Lenten season that the music assists the cleansing process of our hearts and souls, so we will be ready to fully receive our resurrected Savior on Easter.

Blessings on all of you in the next month. I look forward to seeing you all each Sunday.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Mark your calendars now for a super musical treat! Sunday, March 17 at 3pm, return to church to hear our own Isaac James and friend at the Skip Potter Tenor Performance. Cost will be \$20 per person and the money will be donated to the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition.

Both Living the Questions (White Privilege) and the Great Decisions (global issues) classes have been informative and thought provoking. Both are centered around video presentations and group discussions. These classes will continue through the month of March. Everyone is welcome.

Congratulations to Jerry Larson who had his letter to the editor published in the Charlotte Sun on February 9. The content dealt with progress toward reducing carbon emissions in the atmosphere. Genesis 1-stewardship of our earth.

Some of our church family are facing difficult medical challenges and would appreciate a card or visit. Talk with Neoma Remiger for more information.

Thanks to our Social Justice Ministries Committee for presenting Social Justice Moments to help inform us of current social needs and opportunities to work for social justice. They continue to expand our knowledge about environmental, economic, immigration, racial and gun violence social justice issues.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

Thanks to our February Fellowship Hosts:

February 3 Mary Farnquist, Jim DeGood, George and Marty Buckingham

February 10 Volunteer Sunday sponsored by the Leadership Team

February 17, Carol and John Schmuhl, Melissa Brown, and Diane Wick

February 24 We had a bake sale to raise money for Anna Rivadeneira's school. This was to help pay for a repertory company to come to the school and present the play, "The Refugee". Her goal was \$500. The turnout



was great! I'm sure she met and exceeded that goal, which will help with the total costs. Coffee was hosted by Jan Tulk.

Watch for this upcoming event:



March 24 Church Picnic at Laishley Park – Dust off your favorite Recipes, or check out your local deli for ideas. Signup sheets are on the table by the kiosk. Please note that you are to bring your own beverages and table service. As we did last year, there will be a meat category, so we don't have to have men grilling during the service.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Our next ladies luncheon will be at 12:00 noon on Friday, March 22 at Callaloo Caribbean Restaurant.

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

Thanks to Gretchen, Myra and Fern for hosting the February Book Talk Tea. We discussed some very interesting books. Here are a few recommendations for your reading pleasure: "Becoming" by Michelle Obama, "The Great Alone" by Kristin Hannah, "We Fed and Island" by Chef Jose Andres, "Educated" by Tara Westover and "Where the Crawdads Sing" by Delia Owens.

The March Book Talk Tea is Friday March 8 at 1pm in the Church Library. Please sign up at the kiosk in the back of the sanctuary.

I have displayed some new books that have been donated to the library. Enjoy!



SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY REPORT

March Focus: Economic Justice

Last spring, 40 of us from CUCC traveled to Immokalee to visit the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and learn about their Fair Food Program. It was a powerful time of raising our awareness of working conditions on Florida's tomato farms: low pay, long hours, few benefits, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and even slavery. At the same time, we learned about the Coalition's 20-year fight as a worker-led human rights organization and their success in combating these ills.

Today, 14 major food retailers participate in their Fair Food Program. These retailers agree to purchase only from growers who meet a worker-designed Code of Conduct and a zero-tolerance policy for slavery, violence and child labor. Retailers also pay a "penny-per-pound" premium passed directly to farm workers. All major fast food companies participate in the Fair Food Program except for one—Wendy's.

The Coalition continues its work to bring Wendy's on board. As part of that effort, this March the CIW and allies will travel from Immokalee to public universities to call on these campuses to end their relationship with Wendy's until the fast-food giant joins the Fair Food Program.

One of their stops will be the University of Florida in Gainesville. Because of our interest in and support of the CIW last year, they reached out to us to ask for our support.

Here are things we can do in solidarity:

- Join us on the bus to Gainesville on March 14 to march and stand in solidarity with the farmworkers, or
- Help pay for the farmworkers' and students' bus fare. Donation checks can be made to CUCC with "Alliance for Fair Food" in the memo line, or
- Make the commitment not to buy at Wendy's, and
- Pray for farmworkers and all workers who face low wages, harsh conditions and abuse on the job and pray for those in power to do the right thing

Each Sunday after worship we sing in our Peace song: "To love with kindness and work for justice that all may be set free." Standing with CIW is part of our commitment to love with kindness and work for justice. For more information, see ucc.org/boycott_Wendys. For more information about the UCC's economic justice movement, see ucc.org/ejm. To learn more about CUCC's social justice ministry team, talk with any of our members: Elden Wick, Jerry and Lori Larson, Glenn and Linda Weaver, Carol Schmuhl, Keith and Sandy Weber, Jim DeGood, or M.E. Steele-Pierce.



Customer Rewards, Then and Now

I still remember Mom pouring the oatmeal out of the big, round box into a large pan, so she could retrieve the cereal bowl hidden inside. It was a little gift the oatmeal folks included in each container as a thank you to their loyal customers. Over the years, our collection of these small dishes served the family well. Nothing fancy, but very useful.

And in those days, as well as during my children's early years, almost every box of cereal contained a toy or key chain or some other prize. The inexpensive items were buried treasures that made the cereal even more appealing, especially to the youngsters.

Then, there were the decorative glasses, a basic bonus of every jelly purchase. After the grape or strawberry jam was all gone, the pretty glass joined its fellow drink holders in the cabinet. In our family, each member had a personal favorite. And, thanks to the jelly folks, all were free dividends.

It wasn't just the food producers who gave their customers such freebies. The local banks showed they treasured those opening new accounts by awarding mementos like toasters or small radios. I recall all the years we received the same kind of extra attention when we purchased our gasoline at Bradley's Gas Station in Findley Lake. Katie Bradley always gave out extras including toilet paper, glasses or other useful household items. At one time, we had an entire set of Bradley Gas Station glasses on hand in our kitchen.

Such rewards were standard fare in those long-ago days when businesses worked hard to insure customer loyalty by demonstrating their appreciation. The "rewards" have changed significantly over the years. Yesterday's mail brought two good examples. First, there was a "check" from a local car dealer. This was no little token amount. Instead, the check was for \$7000! There was, however, a small detail noted in the mailing. The money could only be applied to a new car.

Another more modest "gift" came from a mail-order firm I often do business with. This, too, was in the form of a check. The amount was \$20. The interesting item looked like a standard, take-to-the-bank check. But, when I examined the draft more closely, I found that endorsing it would be a commitment to open an ongoing charge account with a base value of \$149. That total would be charged and payable immediately. The company's clever idea was to have me buy items from their catalog against this "prepaid" amount until it was used up. Then, I could "fill up" the charge account again. A worthless \$7000 check and a pay-up-front charge account are a far cry from free jelly glasses and cereal package toys. All in all, today's enterprises, eager to make me a customer, could learn a lot about rewards from those long-ago folks who put free bowls in Mom's oatmeal boxes



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 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

March 1	Paula Michael
March 5	Vicki McDonald
March 6	Janis Tulk
March 10	Carol Schmuhl
March 11	Bill Klossner
March 14	Anamaria Rivadeneira
March 15	Charles Salisbury
March 19	Sandra James-Nogaj
March 22	David Ley
March 23	William Tucker
March 26	Mike Ford

ANNIVERSARIES

March 25

Keith & Sandy Weber

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