

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



October 2018

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

**Rev. Mike Ford**

**The Cost of Discipleship**

We are traveling once again through the book of Mark. Mark's gospel moves at a furious pace. It seems that Jesus and his disciples barely have time to eat and sleep as they move from scene to scene. Probably this was not the case as Mark was gathering his gospel together, but the style in which he wrote it. Mark has a "Dragnet" approach to telling the story of Jesus' life and ministry, "Just the facts ma'am!"

In the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus moves into his journey toward Jerusalem. He knows he is headed there to confront power in its raw forms, the church, politics, and the military might of Rome. Because he knows the intent of his confronting these power centers, he wants his disciples and us to know the consequences of speaking truth to power.

In chapter eight, Jesus with his disciples, is headed toward the Roman city of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way, Jesus begins to open up for his disciples what awaits him in Jerusalem. In verse twenty-seven, Jesus asks the disciples to tell him who the crowds think he is. They respond with, what amounts to be, a prophet in the style and power of John the Baptist, Elijah, or another of the greats. Then Jesus doubles down by asking the disciples who THEY think he is. Peter, in typical Peter fashion, speaks for them and declares Jesus to be the Messiah.

Immediately (Mark's favorite descriptive term), Jesus tells his disciples that he is to go to Jerusalem, be handed over to the authorities (church and military), be tortured, die, and rise again from the grave after three days. Peter takes exception to that plan and pulls Jesus aside to tell him that isn't the plan he had in mind. Peter expects, like most observant Jews (and to us as well), that Jesus will conquer their enemies and set up Israel as the ruling power in the region again. Well, Jesus pulls Peter aside and tells him that his plan comes from God and that it wasn't designed to meet our expectations. In fact, he calls Peter's thoughts evil. Jesus goes on to teach the crowd that

following him means putting our self-interests aside to travel the path he is on.

Again, in Chapter nine, Jesus tells his disciples that the plan includes his being tortured, beaten, killed, and rising to new life three days later. This time we are told that they really didn't understand what he meant by this, but at least they kept their mouths shut. They didn't want another rebuke from Jesus. They were afraid to ask him. Instead they argued amongst themselves as they continued their journey into Galilee.

When they arrived at the house they were to stay in, Jesus asked them what they were arguing about. Again, they were afraid to answer because they had been arguing about who was the greatest disciple. Jesus sat them down and taught them. He taught that true power was not ruling over others, but instead serving their needs before considering their own. To emphasize his point, Jesus takes a little child, an example of powerlessness, and says that if welcome one such as this little child they welcome him and the One who sent him.

For a third time, now in chapter ten, Jesus takes the disciples aside to reveal the "plan" for when they enter Jerusalem (by now they could see the city). This time he makes it even clearer. He tells them that THEY are going to Jerusalem where he will be tortured, killed and the third day rise again. This time James and John ask Jesus if he will give them whatever they want. Jesus asks what they want. One wants to sit on his left and the other on his right in his glory. In essence, they were asking to rule beside him in the new kingdom he was establishing.

Jesus responds by telling them that they don't know what they are asking for. He asks them if they are prepared to drink from the cup he is about to drink from. Of course, they say yes. He goes on to tell them that they indeed will share in his fate, but the seats on his right and left in the new kingdom have already been assigned to others.

Well, the other disciples go ballistic when they hear this! James and John have asked to be put in power over them and they would have to serve them in the new kingdom! Jesus again teaches. He says that the world seeks to use power to control others, that is what power looks like in their world. However, in his world the rulers serve the subjects. If they want greatness, they must become servants of all, that whoever wants to be first must become slave to all. He tells them that even he didn't come to exercise worldly power over others, but instead came to give his life for all as a ransom, to pay the debt of sin, and redeem them in their relationship with God.

These three scenes ask for a response from me. In each scene, the disciples still want things to be as they are used to. They want to stick it to their enemies and oppressors and get a little payback for all the suffering they have endured. Jesus, however, remains steadfast in his description of what a life of faith and discipleship look like. Being a disciple means a life built around service to those who have been pushed aside by the power the world wields. Discipleship means putting the concerns of others before our own. It's about serving rather than being served. It is no wonder they didn't understand. What Jesus was asking of them is directly counter to how the world operates.

It is no wonder we don't understand either. When we practice true discipleship, it doesn't matter how big or fancy our church is. It doesn't matter how much prestige we have. What matters is that the needs of others come before our own. That's a hard path to walk on. We still have our own needs to fulfill. We must make sure of that. Jesus offers another perspective. He teaches that

discipleship, when practiced correctly, meets our greatest need, grace and mercy. When others become more valuable to us than our own security and safety, we have become true disciples.

I once got in a lot of trouble when I said from the pulpit one Sunday, "I'd rather serve a church with ten disciples in the pews than a hundred bystanders. We could change the world." Well, that statement was for another time and place.

I truly believe that we are seeking to live as disciples in our daily lives. To me, it shows in how we look at the world and the problems others encounter and desire to do something about it! It takes speaking truth to power when children are abducted from parents, when walls are built to keep out oppressed peoples, when women are treated as objects to be abused, when children go to bed hungry, when climate changes bring death and destruction to the poorest but leaves the wealthy safe and sound. I see that what Jesus teaches is being put into action among us.

Are we perfect in that practice? Absolutely not! But at least we are willing to try to follow Jesus toward our own Jerusalem and not shy away from what discipleship really means. I am so blest to be among you!

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

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



Welcome to the October edition of our church's newsletter! We hope that reading our monthly set of reports, articles, and updates help you remain connected to our church community. For those of you who are in places other than Punta Gorda, we hope you enjoy receiving this and that this information allows you to step back into our church life once you are back in our midst. If you enjoy reading the Beacon, please let Mary Tulip know as she very ably compiles our "reports" and missives into the attractive format you now see! Thanks, Mary, for all you do for us!

I hope you enjoyed an extended summer and are grateful that we have escaped any hurricanes (so far) this season. Our solar panels got a workout over the summer, though the multitude of thunderstorms every day seemed more extended than usual this year. (I say that because they interfered with my afternoon sessions in the pool.) Summer also provided us the opportunity to have roof repairs completed which has helped buy us time to plan our roof replacement strategy. Guy Greenfield was very instrumental in ensuring our roof remains solid and will protect us another several years! Thanks, Guy and LT for your work on our summer projects.

**Leadership Team:** Welcome, Kathy Frantish, to LT as our new Assistant Clerk! We are very pleased that you'll join us to fulfill the term and then stand for election for the new LT that will be voted in at the January Annual Meeting. We have an opening remaining at the helm of Stewardship, an important position as we head into our annual pledge process. The LT will take on many of the tasks, but we also welcome support or assistance if a member of the congregation is able to join the effort.

Even though our LT is nearly fully staffed, I'd like to remind YOU to consider ***being a committee member*** of any of the LT Teams such as Discipleship, Stewardship, or Fellowship. Each group can always use extra hands or ideas to support their ministries.

Additionally, please consider joining the Social Justice Team for any of their meetings or actions to call attention to inequities among people in our society. There is much work to be done to provide equality to so many and to help eradicate poverty, bigotry, and poor work conditions for so many in our region of the state. It is heartening to see what actions the SJT is taking on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves such as the migrant workers, families separated by ICE actions, or other injustices in our community and beyond. Thank you for your wonderful work to make our world a better place.

**Music Ministry:** We have established a search committee to start the process to hire a new Minister of Music. Please let anyone on LT know if you have a recommendation or suggestions for this position. We plan to advertise the position in several church/hiring websites, review the resumes, and then interview the top candidates before making our selection and extending an offer to the successful person. In the interim, we are most grateful for our regular substitutes who help out with providing music for our weekly services, as well as accompaniment for choir and choir directing. We are set through the holidays and hope to have a new person on board to begin the new year. Of course, our choir is ALWAYS seeking new members, so come join us and sing!

**The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting** is scheduled for Tuesday, October 9 from 3:00-4:30 p.m. in the church library.

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 work with such a dedicated and knowledgeable group on our Team and within the congregation!

I'll end with a little saying that I actually cross stitched and posted on my refrigerator for many years in the many places I've lived: **Bloom where you are planted**. Let this be the time that you will help our church thrive and bloom, too!

Amen!

### ***MINISTER OF MUSIC***

A special thank you to Mike Robinson and Melissa Brown for covering our music on Sunday mornings while we search for a new Minister of Music.

**TREASURER – Melissa Brown**



September 2018 Treasurer's Report

Financial Results	31-Aug	2018 Y-T-D	Budget	2017 Y-T-D
Donations and Other Income	\$9,583.00	\$104,922.00	\$114,000.00	\$97,661.00
Expenses	\$19,157.00	\$105,435.00	\$108,660.00	\$111,013.00
Net Income	(\$9,574.00)	(\$513.00)	\$5,340.00	(\$13,352.00)

Despite the August loss of \$9,574, we are in very good shape as we head into the remainder of the fiscal year. Last year's YTD income as of August 2017 was a loss of \$13,352; this year, we are breaking even! Income for 2018 exceeds last year by \$7,261, which is fantastic. Expenses are \$5,578 less than last year, which is also good news. Thank you all for your generous giving.

The chart below shows our electrical bills since the installation of the solar panels. From April through September is when we will see the most significant savings, and as you can see, our bills continue to be less than the prior period last year.

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
Total	\$4,176.20	\$5,725.88	\$1,549.68

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.

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

The Leadership Team and Endowment Team have placed a soft hold on future distributions for 2018 so that our existing balance can be properly be used for debt reduction and Our Church Wider Mission. We have some catching up to do and this year, the funds are there to accomplish both debt reduction and fund OCWM. However, all future applications will be reviewed and acted on during the remainder of the year.



The conservative and diverse nature of the Endowment Fund investment positions have served us well during a somewhat turbulent market. We are confident the future will be bright so, this outreach can continue to be robust.

For the Team: Dick Michael , Pat Baran, Dick Sommerfield, Kathy Rivadeneira, Don Nagel.  
Bill Ringelstein, Chair

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

Greetings from the Lindas!

We would like you to be aware of some upcoming events/activities in worship.

**Oct.7-World Communion Sunday** -Set up: Linda & Guy Greenfield

**Communion Sunday Calendar** - we are trying to set up a yearly calendar for those who can help set up and serve communion. We are asking people to do it one time per year. It entails providing bread, gluten-free bread, grape juice and wine and then arranging them on trays.

### **Laity Sunday-October 21**

Laity (the congregation) have the pleasure of serving the Lord in leading the congregation in worship! The retired pastors and Pastor Mike will be the greeters/media center workers and host the fellowship hour and the rest of us can help carry out the liturgy. Psalm 103:1 "Praise the Lord, I tell myself; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name."

### **Looking Ahead-Calendar Notes**

Before we know it, Advent will be here, and it will be time to decorate the house of the Lord! Many hands make light work and lots of fun!!

Nov.18-Materials for decorating brought down

Nov.25-Christmas decorating (no Fellowship Hour)

Dec.2-Hanging of the Greens; Preparations for Advent

**MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk**

I would like to thank the September hosts:

Sept. 2 - Ann Barker and Chrystal Reichard

September 9 - Jan Tulk

September 16 - Emily Klossner, Bill and Hazel Klossner

September 23 - Lee and Joanne Arvid

September 30 - Ann Barker and Chrystal Reichard



At this time, only the second of October has been filled for food. We could use someone to do the coffee and juice. Please consider signing up for that or one of the other open Sundays.

**LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger**

October's Ladies' Lunch will be at 12:00 noon on Friday, October 26 at Monty's on Tamiami Trail. We would love to have you join us.



**LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj**

There are 2 new books in the Social Justice section of the library: Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America by Michael Eric Dyson and The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein.

The first Book Talk Tea of the 2018-2019 season is on Friday October 12 at 1pm at Molly Hall's home. Her address is 1354 Rock Dove Ct., Apt A-102, Punta Gorda. Please sign up at the kiosk. Look forward to having the group together again.

**SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL**

Thank you all for the many wonderful donations of food and money for Saint Vincent de Paul. They have written us a thank you which is posted on the bulletin board just outside of Faith Hall. We thought you would like to know that to-date this year, we have contributed a total of \$1,106.10. Keep up the good work!

## ***SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY - M. E. Steele-Pierce***

“In the United Church of Christ, we do justice,” says Velda Love, one of UCC’s Ministers for Justice. “We started in the 60s with the Civil Rights movement. We’ve been advocating for gay rights since the 70s. We took on environmental racism in the 80s. And in 2005, we were the first church in America to endorse marriage equality. We’re doing justice. Join us.”

CUCC has an active and passionate Social Justice Ministry team. Current initiatives include Racial Justice, Economic Justice, and Environmental Justice but we continue to expand our circles of interest and influence.

Carol Schmul’s Wisconsin church, Plymouth UCC, participates in MICAH, Milwaukee Inner City Churches. One of their activities is a weekly “Jericho Walk” around the Milwaukee ICE office in support of immigrant families. A Jericho walk is a way of praying modeled after Joshua 6, in which God instructs the Israelites to circle the walls of Jericho seven times. MICAH will begin an all-city kickoff to a book study of *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein.

Glenn and Linda Weaver continue their work in Michigan supporting Rios de Agua Viva UCC to serve as an immigrant-welcoming church and a sanctuary church. Rios de Agua Viva means “Joy like a river.” It hopes to be a place of safety for immigrants and their children who are seeking refuge. The congregation worships in a building that had been used by a previous UCC that disbanded. The church asks for our support and prayers as they face many challenges and dangers ahead.

M.E. Steele-Pierce represents her Cincinnati OH church, Faith UCC, at Anderson Churches for Racial Unity, a coalition of faith communities that offer programs and events to promote racial unity. Activities included a memorial service for the Emmanuel Nine and a book study of *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon for White America* by Michael Eric Dyson.

Our support of the Fair Food Program and Coalition of Immokalee Workers continues here in Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte. We continue to demonstrate to Wendy’s on behalf of Florida farmworkers to ensure humane wages and working conditions on fruit and vegetable farms.

CUCC is doing justice. Join us! Want to learn more? Talk with any member: Jim DeGood; Susan James; Lori and Jerry Larson; Sandy James-Nogaj; Carol Schmuhl; M.E. Steele-Pierce; Linda and Glenn Weaver; Keith and Sandy Weber; or Elden Wick.

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

### **A Neighborhood of Halloween Traditions**

In the long-ago days of my Texas childhood, my friendly neighborhood was settled with families that had been there for years. We knew everyone on the block as well as the names of all the local family cats and dogs.

The neighborhood loved its traditions and went all out for each one.





The favorite celebration for us kids was Halloween. Although we recited the traditional “Trick or treat” at every stop, we never even considered the trick portion of the statement. We knew we would simply load up on the abundant treats our neighbors had waiting.

One of the advantages of a Carleton Street Halloween was the layout of the neighborhood.

The houses were set back from the street, leaving deep, shadowy yards. A single streetlight was located at each end of the block along with one set mid-way. Together, the three created a nebulous scene of shifting dark pockets, a spooky circuit for our pack of ghosts and goblins to travel as we trick-or-treated.

On Carleton Street, predictability was an integral part of the Halloween observance.

For instance, Mrs. Young, who lived in the big brick home in the middle of the block, considered the holiday an opportunity to try her dramatic skills.

Our group would timidly approach her impressive entrance. Just as one of us got up the nerve to ring the bell, Mrs. Young would throw open the door with a rousing “Boooo”. That was followed with a shouted demand, “Who ARE you little ruffians?”

Then, one by one, she would carefully put on a show in struggling to identify each costumed visitor. The entire act always took quite a while, but she gave us so much individual attention, we were thrilled to be a part of her annual Halloween performance. And, of course, her traditional treats of sticky/crunchy popcorn balls were a reward worth waiting for.

At Mr. Vindage’s we could count on a totally different response. Instead of sweet treats, Mr. V., a widower who never seemed to remember Halloween, was always caught unprepared. So, when a group of us would ring the bell, we could depend on the old man to give our costumed crowd a puzzled look. Then, in response to our timid “trick or treat,” he would dig into his pockets and begin passing out change. We learned early on to be among the first to ring Mr. V’s bell. When his pockets were empty, he’d simply turn off the porch light and go to bed.

There were others up and down the block who had dependable responses to our trick-or-treat requests, too.

Mrs. Windmiller always had fresh-baked cookies for us. The Riches, who had no children, took the easy way, simply passing out candy bars. E.W. Smith’s mother, a health enthusiast, gave a shiny red apple to each kid who came along.

But the best stop on the street was the last place we visited. Mr. And Mrs. Owen, an elderly couple, seemed to enjoy Halloween as much as the kids.

At the end of our circuit of Carleton Street, it was an expected part of the evening’s activities that we’d be invited into the Owens’s cozy living room. There, the couple would take turns trying to guess who was hiding in those disguises.

Though they knew each of us very well, they made a great show of confusion and surprise while carefully examining each child.

I think the Gypsy dancer must be Martha Connolly.”

“Why, I’d never have guessed that ghost was Robert Allen!”

“The little princess with the crown has to be Joyce Hertell.”

After the long, laughter-filled guessing game, the Owens would reward us with their traditional cider and warm ginger cookies before sending us on our way home.

It’s been more than seven decades since those long-ago Halloween nights. Still, I clearly remember being part of the costumed gang as we shared the scary thrill of walking down that shadowy neighborhood street in search of treats.



**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.



## ***OCTOBER CELEBRATORY DATES***

### **BIRTHDAYS**

October 5	Kathleen Reed
October 10	Kathy Rivadeneira
October 11	Cathy Ann Colson
October 11	Jerry Larson
October 13	Pat Blandford
October 19	James DeGood
October 19	John Schmuhl
October 21	Dick Michael
October 25	Kathryn Frantish

### **ANNIVERSARIES**

October 7	Gerry and Pat Blandford
October 14	Fred and Sally Benson, Jr.

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)