

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



**MAY 2018**

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

**Rev. Mike Ford**

**The Newest Environmental Crisis**

#Blacklivesmatter, #MeToo, #Neveragain, do you recognize any of these “hashtags?” They are all new in our culture. They are symbols of the wave of a new human rights movement happening in our country. It seems there is a need to have a new hashtag every week these days.

#Blacklivesmatter came into being after the Ferguson, Mo. murder of an unarmed black man. For far too long it seemed there were no repercussions for anyone who took the life of another black person. What made matters seem worse is that often these killings were coming from within the community that is charged with protecting the safety of citizens. Just a few weeks ago there was another shooting. This man was shot over 20 times, nine of which were in his back. Often, there are no penalties for these shootings. Investigations result in the act having been justified.

To be fair to law enforcement, there has been an escalated sense of anxiety in most encounters with people of color. For almost every person shot by law enforcement, there has been an officer murdered in cold blood while on duty. It almost seems like there is an expectation of trouble before a situation presents itself. It is nearly “open season” on blacks and law enforcement. Unacceptable.

#MeToo arose when victims of sexual abuse began to stand up to their abusers. It has come with the “normal” amount of denial and slandering that accompanies movements that have women speaking truth to power in our country. The need seems to be even greater these days for these confrontations. Do you feel that too? Women have been oppressed by the “good old boys” network for all my life. Now, it is refreshing to see the facade of money and power being torn down to expose some sick men in our nation, and around the world, and that the abusers are being brought to task for their behavior. Perhaps it will lead to real change?

Finally, #Neveragain is the most recent on the scene of the human rights movement. It was begun after the mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. The students themselves are standing and asking for state and national legislators do SOMETHING to change our culture of guns. It is a fact that people purchase guns illegally in our country every day. It is also true that people purchase guns legally every day that should not be allowed to. It seems like a simple task to adjust guns purchasing laws to protect the public.

Where the pushback seems to be coming from is an NRA led campaign which uses fear to enforce the idea that the objective of changed gun law is to “take our guns away. The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution does NOT give private citizens the RIGHT to buy a gun simply because they want to. The Amendment clearly states that gun ownership is for the sole purpose of populating a WELL-REGULATED MILITIA to defend states’ rights. Please tell me where it says that assault rifles equate to a muzzle loaded black powder musket or that private citizens are allowed to own them for fun?

I know of no person or politician which has promoted the idea of confiscating anyone’s guns. What has been asked for, by the students demonstrating, is that a REASONABLE waiting period be instituted (I have read one suggestion be that it be as hard to buy a gun as get a license to drive a car, YEA), that there is a REGISTRY for persons under the care of a mental health provider, that there be TRAINING in the proper use and safety of firearms. As of yet, there is no national action to make those changes. A dog dies in an overhead bin on an airplane, which is a tragedy too, and a law is passed the next day. Seventeen children and teachers die in a mass shooting and legislators have NO response other than to raise the legal age of purchase of an assault type weapon to twenty-one!

Last Friday I attended the Student Walkout day. It was a nationwide effort to show the politicians that the students aren’t going away. One sad aspect to me was hearing that the students were THREATENED with suspension if they left campus. A number of VERY brave and committed students gathered at the FSW campus in Punta Gorda and at the old City Hall downtown. The students at FSW walked from campus to City Hall. Some in CHS and PCH met them there. The intent was to illustrate to Rep. Rooney that he needs to take action on their behalf. Guess who was missing on Friday?

The students took the opportunity to speak to why this demonstration means so much to them. What I heard described took me back to my days in graded school. Remember the days of “duck and cover” drill we participated in? If an air-raid siren sounded, we were to dive under our desks and cover our heads. Mind you, this was a drill in case of a NUCLEAR attack. Like those desks were going to offer us any protection!

On Friday, I felt the same wave of panic I used to feel when we did those drills. I felt helpless and small. I heard these college and high school students express those same feelings when they described how they feel going to school these days. They have a genuine dread of being there. They feel they are just there to wait until the next gunman comes around to slaughter them. They worry that siblings will not come home from school someday or that their siblings may need to face their not coming home. They feel helpless and small. The worst part, for them, is that NO ONE IS DOING ANYTHING TO HELP THEM!

I am encouraged by the new wave of activism I see in our country. I am proud of these students who speak truth to power and refuse to be quiet as they are being told to do by administrators and community members. I am disheartened that they need to speak up because we are not.

Last Sunday was Earth Day. We had worship that focused on the urgent need for changed practices if we hope to have a world to leave to our successors. I realized in the midst of that worship that we have a new environmental crisis on our hands. We are not only heating the earth faster than normal by our activities, but we are damaging the environment of our children’s mental health.

I honestly pray that our country can survive all the new crisis’ we have unleashed. I pray for our children to feel safe and nurtured once again rather than ignored. I pray our planet can return to its NORMAL cycles of heating and cooling and that we can once again live in harmony with Creation. I have high hopes. Who hopes with me? Who acts with me? Who speaks with me?

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

**Farewell to Our Wonderful Snow Birds!** We have once again managed to cram a year's worth of events and activities into six months of "season" and it has been a glorious time in our church and congregation. Since October, we have had so many wonderful times together – the annual picnic, amazing choir and soloist music, thought provoking and deep sermons, pageants, special events, Social Justice demonstrations in the community, and more. Thank you all for your commitment to our church community and support of our ministries and outreach, even while you are away. We year-rounders will miss you until you return in the fall, but know you are in our hearts until you are safely back in Punta Gorda's environs. To paraphrase a quote by Ernie Harwell,

**"It's time to for us to say goodbye, but I think goodbyes are sad and I'd much rather say hello. So, let us all say hello to a new adventure until we meet again."**

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**Gun-Free Building Policy:** On April 8, following church and fellowship hour, small groups met in the sanctuary to discuss the implementation of our very vetted and deliberative policy. Four groups practiced using the "talking stick" to hear each other's ideas for nearly 45 minutes. Each participant discussed feelings about the policy in general, ways to make the policy work, and strategies to help keep us safe, and how we might communicate the policy to the groups who use our building.

Since the Leadership Team spent several months discussing and debating the policy, we now want to thoughtfully put the plan into place, so I thank each of the participants in our small group discussions. I learned a lot from each of you! The LT now has a better sense of how we intend to go forward as we consider your input such as posting signs on the doors, a statement in the bulletin, and of course asking ushers to be vigilant at the doors. If you have other suggestions, concerns, or ideas, feel free to communicate them to us.

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### **Reminders and Announcements:**

1. **Magnetic Name Tags:** A small, blue plastic basket has been placed on the table in the back of the church for you to put your clip-on name tag in exchange for a magnetic version! Thanks to some sleuthing by Melissa Brown, we now have an option to magnetize the tags for greater ease of use (and less wear and tear on clothing). CAUTION: The magnets are quite powerful, so if you have a pace maker or other device affected by magnetism, you may need to choose to keep your clip-on version!
2. **Social Justice Activities and Endowment and Outreach:** I am so appreciative and impressed with all the activities our SJT has been involved with this past month! Stay in touch with these folks to find out ways you can be involved in demonstrations, lectures, discussions and more which deal with matters around helping people to live a better life in a cleaner environment. Hats off to you for leading us in these proactive directions! And aren't we pleased to be able to make donations on behalf of the Congregation through the work of our

Endowment Team and support of the children through our annual spring clothing drive? These efforts really show how we are making a difference in our community.

3. **Seeking individuals to take on leadership roles:** These posts need to be filled:
- A Discipleship Chair/Committee.
  - Committee members to support CathyAnn Colson with Stewardship responsibilities.
  - Assistant Clerk

We need these positions filled 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.

4. **Updates to our website support:** Take a look at our website! Jim DeGood is doing a wonderful job of bringing us along into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with updated church information. **Now, here is my request to everyone: please contribute to the website by taking photos of church events, activities, and people doing things in the name of the church!! Please consider taking out your camera or iPhone at any upcoming opportunities and then send these on to Jim. We want the website to reflect *current* events and activities and people involved in doing the work of the Lord! Thank you ---**

**Next LT Meeting:** The May Leadership Team meeting takes place on Tuesday, the 8th from 3:30-5:30 pm. 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.

### ***MINISTER OF MUSIC - Tim Sperber***



I want to thank those who provided special music during the month of April, Lucia and Ana Rivadeneira, Barb Schachtschneider, Lori Larson, Carol Schmuhl, Mary Barnt and Diane Wick. Special thanks to Melissa Brown, our accompanist, for all her hard work.

Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup> was the last Sunday for our full choir to sing until October. Thanks to them for their dedication and hard work providing music for our services.

**Summer Choir** will begin Sunday, May 13. The choir will rehearse from 9:15 – 9:45 am in Faith Hall. They will sing once or twice a month until the fall. I am extending a warm welcome to any of you who would like to join us.

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

We are happy to report that 2 distributions have been recommended by the Endowment Team and have been approved by the Leadership Team. On Sunday, April 8, our Social Justice Team received \$500 to assist their project of providing local education regarding climate change and environmental concerns. The Bernice A. Russell Community Development group received

\$2,500 to help fund their summer camp program that will provide evaluation of students; this will be administered by our own Cooper Street organization.

Two applications were denied because they did not have a good fit with the mission of your Endowment Fund.

The Endowment Team has a number of other worthy applications that will receive due consideration in the weeks ahead. We are grateful for the comments we have received from the congregation and the support shown for the Team.



### ***STEWARDSHIP***

The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. — Ephesians 4: 11 – 12

Please join us in planting the seeds needed to grow and sustain our denomination by making a gift to the **Strengthen the Church** offering. The Strengthen the Church offering supports the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations. Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill on its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities. In 2017, your support made possible:

12 awards totaling almost \$350,000 through the New and Renewing Spiritual Communities grant program!

The Adese Fellowship program launched its first class of 14 future church leaders!

The addition of 24 new faith communities to the UCC!

This is in addition to the great ministry happening in your local conference!

Look for the Strengthen the Church Special Mission Offering on May 20th. If you are not in the area and would like to give, please send your donation to CUCC with "STC offering" notation in the envelope. Thank you!"

**MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk**

We held a Soup and Bread Supper on March 29 before the Maundy Thursday service. I didn't get a head count, but all tables were mostly filled. I estimate around 60 people enjoyed the fellowship.



Thanks to our April hosts: Bill & Jean Ringelstein, Kathy Frantish, Pat Blandford, Diane and Elden Wick, Joe Lawson, Bev Honkola, Linda and Glenn Weaver, Maryann Schafer, Barb Schachtschneider, Lori & Jerry Larson, Kay and Don Winslow, Carol and John Schmuhl

The May sign-up sheet is out, and some slots are filled. We need more, so help out, please.

If you are bringing juice or tea for Coffee Hour, please take any left-over home. The refrigerator gets full, and no one knows if it is ours or AA's. I end up dumping it because it is out of date. Thanks.

**TREASURER – Melissa Brown**



**May 2018 Treasurer's Report**

Financial Results	Mar-18	2018 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$13,080.00	\$40,673.00	\$42,750.00
Expenses	\$11,785.00	\$36,616.00	\$40,748.00
Net Income	\$1,295.00	\$4,057.00	\$2,002.00

As we say good bye to our snowbirds, we also need to say thanks. Our snowbirds' financial contributions these past months will tide us over until their return in the winter. As the treasurer, I am looking at our bank balances, but as a member of the congregation, I am also looking at the non-monetary support our snowbirds make each year to our missions and values. Some of the efforts can be carried on from afar, such as Jim DeGood's website modifications. BUT, without our snowbirds, our Sunday fellowship will be smaller (but the line will be shorter!). Without our snowbirds, our music ministry (choir and bell choir and individual instrumentalists) will be less robust or—in the case of bell choir--non-existent). Without our snowbirds, the social justice ministries will not be as well attended (Wendy's protests) or—even more sobering--on hiatus (Living the Questions, Great Decisions, the community garden project). We will miss you, we wish you safe travels home and back to Punta Gorda, and we look forward to your return.

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.

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

The May Ladies Lunch will be on May 25th at The Bean located in Towles Plaza, 2705 Tamiami Trail just past Dunkin Donuts at 12:00 noon. The sign-up sheet is in the kiosk at the back of the sanctuary. Please join us. We have a great time of conversation and fellowship!



### **LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj**



Thanks to Nadine Sommerfield for hosting the April Book Talk Tea. We had some good discussions covering many different subjects.

May's Book Talk Tea will be at the home of Jan Tulk, 7985 Cleveland Dr., Punta Gorda. Please meet at the church at 12:30 pm, and we will carpool to Jan's house.

I submitted my Reading for Renewal report to the Florida United Church of Christ women. This was the best year yet! We had 17 qualified readers and read a total of 154 books! I'm so proud of our group.

### **SINGLES DINNER – Jim Grunden**

The Singles Dinner group will meet on Wednesday, May 16 at 5:00 pm at the Burger Bar. The sign-up sheet is on the kiosk at the back of the sanctuary.

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

Each week we join hands and voices to end our worship with the peace song, including these words: "With every step I take, let this be my joyous vow: To love with kindness and work for justice that all may be set free." The recently-established Social Justice Ministry committee was formed to help CUCC congregants actively engage in the work for justice. 2018 saw the committee move into action.

- Thirty-five of us travelled to Immokalee FL to meet with and learn from members of the Alliance for Fair Food and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). We learned about the Coalition's work to eliminate farm worker exploitation, human trafficking, and gender-based violence in the fields. Learn more at <https://ciw-online.org/about>.

- Currently 14 major businesses and retailers have joined CIW's Fair Food Program. Wendy's is the final fast-food hold out and has chosen instead to take their supply chain to Mexico. The CIW has called for a Wendy's Boycott which the UCC endorses. To this end, Social Justice Ministry team members demonstrate at Wendy's in Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda, on the Third Thursday of each month from 11 am to 1 PM. Join us on Thursday, May 17, at Wendy's on Cochran Boulevard. To learn more about the purpose of the boycott, see [http://www.ucc.org/boycott\\_wendys](http://www.ucc.org/boycott_wendys).



- SJM team members joined the thousand-strong Charlotte County March for Our Lives and in April stood with FSW students in the National School Walkout. We demonstrated in memory of all students who have fallen victim to gun violence, in support of the Parkland FL students, and to call for timely passage of legislation to address gun violence issues rampant in the US. Find UCC resources and inspiration at <http://www.ucc.org/gun-violence>.
- The Social Justice Ministry team co-hosted with the Citizens Climate Lobby a presentation by Nobel Laureate Dr. Terry Root, professor emerita, Stanford University. 125 community members filled our sanctuary to learn about our changing climate across time, its impact on planet earth, and implications for our future. When Lori Larson mentioned CUCC's solar panels, the audience erupted in applause. To learn more, Dr. Root recommended the documentary *Chasing Ice* (2012), available in the Charlotte County Library system or streaming through Netflix.

Interested in joining one (or more!) of our social justice ministry activities? Talk to one of our team members: Jim DeGood, Chair; Susan James; Lori and Jerry Larson; Sandy James-Nogaj; Carol Schmuhl; M.E. Steele-Pierce, Action Step Coordinator; Linda and Glenn Weaver; Keith and Sandy Weber; and Elden Wick.

Mark Your Calendar! Emancipation Day Celebration, May 19, 10 am to Noon at the Blanchard House, 406 Martin Luther King Blvd., Punta Gorda. Learn more at <http://www.blanchardhousemuseum.org/>.



### 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.



**FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk**



**A Lesson in Gratitude**

In my long-ago teen years, I often slipped into one of those woe-is-me mindsets.

The world seemed bleak and the blues became my theme song.

But my up-beat mother would have none of my doom and gloom. She had a never-fail cure for such a melancholy mood.

“Spend some time counting your blessings,” she’d say. Then she’d add, “We’re all much more fortunate than we have any right to be.”

It was a lesson I’ve tried to follow through the years. But, sadly, I must admit that I sometimes fall into that old “poor me” disposition.

That’s where I was as I sat at the breakfast table one frustrating morning some time ago.

Irritations had been building up for several days and I found myself getting grouchy.

The van’s dratted “check engine” light had once again blinked on, even though the mechanic banished it just the week before.

And, my ever-present arthritis had come to visit my left hand making it throb, just when I needed all my typing fingers working well for a writing project.

The latest bank statement was waiting on my desk. I admit that going over this important document is one of my least favorite chores.

And, though I had just done my weekly shopping, I noticed we’d be running out of milk by the end of the day if I didn’t make another run to the store.

Although none of these irritations was serious, I had let them build up in my mind and put me into the doldrums.

Then I opened the morning paper.

There, along with the news, sports and classifieds, I found a hefty collection of pages I hadn't expected. It was an extensive register, published by the county, showing the properties across our area with outstanding tax bills.

I was startled to find this newspaper section was 103 pages long. Each page had 6 columns of listings. In total, there were thousands of homes and businesses going up for sale. It was a mute testament to the problems so many in our region were dealing with at the time.

I sat for a long while looking at the names and addresses, each representing the broken dreams of a family or an entrepreneur.

And, as I sipped my second cup of coffee my mood started changing, I could almost hear Mom's voice saying, "Count your blessings."

Here in our cozy condo we are safe, comfortable and richly blessed. In spite of my earlier grumpy outlook, I knew we actually have everything we need.

I would pick up some milk my next time out. And the mechanic could surely take care of that pesky check engine light again.

Though my left hand was a bit achy, my right hand was still doing fine. And, fortunately, if I'd stop procrastinating, the bank statement wouldn't take long to resolve.

I keep trying to remember this episode when I get caught up in the little irritations of life and overlook all I've come to take for granted.

My mother is no longer around to remind me to count my blessings. But fortunately, God knows just when to give me a gentle nudge on the importance of gratitude. Some reminders may even come in the morning paper.

## ***MAY CELEBRATORY DATES***

### **MAY BIRTHDAYS**

May 1	George Buckingham
May 3	Edward Schuckman
May 10	Easton Klossner
May 11	Brian Rowlands
May 16	Zoli Szeifert
May 17	Carol Salisbury
May 18	Dorothy Hodgkins
May 20	Judy Lyon
May 21	Anne Swift
May 23	Diane Wick
May 25	Bill Ringelstein
May 28	Myra Nagel
May 31	Cindy Trudeau



### **MAY ANNIVERSARIES**

May 3	Archie & Helen Coll
May 4	Kevin & Kathy Rivadeneira
May 28	Bill & Hazel Klossner

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)