

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



September 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

Bits and Pieces

Part I

I have had quite a few adult conversations in the past couple weeks. So, I wanted to write some thoughts that are a bit less serious.

First, I am thinking about blueberry pancakes. No, I'm not hungry. I am thinking of them because of Gene Engebrecht. I arrived at CUCC with a well-established Men's Breakfast group intact. I have appreciated and embraced this fraternal gathering in seventeen of my twenty-two years of ministry. At first, I was a bit apprehensive going to a "men only" function. I was concerned that it seems sexist. But I am greatly encouraged that there are an equal number of gender restricted gatherings for the women too!

Interestingly, there is a strong tendency for Men's Breakfast, in my seventeen years of attending, to be on Tuesday mornings at 8am. I am curious why that day and time are chosen. I made the mistake of asking once several years ago. I observed that the men who gathered, with the exception of me, were all retired. I also noticed that all of them complained about the early hour that we met. So, I asked them, "If you don't like meeting so early, why do you do it?" I should have expected the answer, "because we've always met at this time!" The tradition started when none of them were retired and it continued even when none of them HAD to be there at 7 or 8am. It changed to a habit rather than a tradition.

Our group at CUCC are also mostly retired folks. The difference about meeting time is that we WANT to meet at that time. We gather for good food and conversation, then go about the rest of our retired/working day refreshed and fully caffeinated. It is more of a better start of the day than a time when we meet.

For the last three years, I have sat across the table from Gene. For three years he ordered the same thing, one blueberry pancake and sugar free syrup. That was it. Now one might think that a simple order like that would be out of the kitchen first. Usually Gene would be last to be served. He was never upset and always thanked the wait staff for his meal.

Last week, as we gathered for breakfast, we were well-aware that Gene would not be with us. Several of us decided to honor his time among us by ordering one blueberry pancake. Wouldn't you know, they were the FIRST orders brought out. The owners of Penny's were honoring Gene that day too. Penny, our waitress and the new owner, was sad that Gene had passed and wanted to show us her pride in our honoring Gene. To be honest, it will be the last time I will order one blueberry pancake, but it won't be the last time I remember Gene sitting with us. Thank you, Gene, for gracing us with your presence and always showing us how to be grateful, even when we are served last.

Part II

As I write these bits and pieces, it is the day of the Florida Primaries for the mid-term elections. Coming from New England, it still amazes me that a church can be the polling place. Had that been suggested in my home town of Charleston Vermont, there would have been a riot! You never suggest that there can be an intersection of faith and politics.

Over the years I have been in discussion with other faith communities about why that repulsion exists, better known as the Separation of Church and State. Being an amateur Constitutional scholar, I know it is not actually a Constitutional issue. It has been interpreted that way and then applied to political contests. Can we think of other issues that have been treated the same way? The intent of the framers was not to eliminate religion from politics nor vice versa, but to insure the right to choose one's religion without state interference. Those are issues about as far separated as possible.

Also, over the years, I have become convinced that Jesus was one of the most political speakers I have ever encountered. However, he was not partisan. He didn't care WHERE institutional corruption came from. He simply wanted it to stop. So, he targeted the church, the government, the wealthy in his commentary about treating the marginalized with dignity and working toward inclusion and fair treatment for all.

At the Annual Meeting of the Florida Conference last year in Daytona, I took a workshop on how to be political without becoming partisan. You see, the church has become a place where it is ASSUMED that there is no place for politics to enter our discussions. I feel that Jesus would firmly disagree. Where we DO need to be careful is that we don't advocate for a partisan cause. We are supposed to allow our faith to intersect with politics. They should inform one another when decisions are being made.

Now, as I sit here, I find how NORMAL it feels to have a polling place in Faith Hall. I see it as a natural extension of our faith in God and our discipleship of Jesus. When we cast our votes, it should be in consideration of the impact on the least in our society and not only our own household. It should be based on the best for all, not a minority.

You will never catch me advocating for a candidate in church. You will, however, hear me loud and often urging us to vote with our faith conscience. I feel strongly that, when we do, we might make better decisions. But that's just my intersection of faith and politics speaking ;)

MODERATOR'S REPORT – Judy Minier, Moderator



Hasn't the summer just flown by! It's been a rainy, but productive time of the year in the life of your church. Now that vacations are being completed and summer travels done, we can look forward once again to getting back into the swing of things relative to the church calendar year. Once more, we will be heading to the holidays, stewardship/pledge drive, the January Annual Meeting, lent, Easter, and well, you get the idea!

Position Filled!! To begin on a really happy note, I'm so glad that my "want-ad" announcement for a Discipleship Team chair generated such positive interest from several people. In the end, two members have stepped forward to tackle the duties of that aspect of our Leadership Team. Please add your thanks to mine in welcoming Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver as Co-Chairs of the Discipleship Team! They have been duly appointed and elected to the LT and will be on the ballot in January at our Annual Meeting to serve in the coming year.

Thank you to others who also approached me about this position; remember, there are other ways to still become involved, including ***being a member*** of any of the Teams such as Discipleship, Stewardship, or Fellowship. We even have an Assistant Clerk post available should you care to take on those duties under the auspices of our current Clerk, Susann Luckenbach. We always welcome people who can give of their time and talents to our church!

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.

Special Leadership Team Roofing Meeting: In late July, the Leadership Team met with a representative of Galloway Roofing and signed a contract for roof repairs with their firm. As you may recall, this action followed our reviews in June of the four bids submitted to us by local licensed roofers. By doing these careful and less expensive repairs now, we can utilize the time before us to launch a Capital Campaign for roof replacement down the road. You'll be hearing more about these plans in the coming months.

Music Ministry: We are seeking a new Minister of Music and will start the search process at our September LT meeting. A committee will be formed to post ads, review resumes, and interview potential candidates. Ideally, it would be helpful to have a person who has experience in ordering music, can conduct our choir, plays the organ and piano, and is a team-player with regard to planning church services. Please let anyone on LT know if you have a recommendation for this position.

On a related note, I'm pleased to report that Melissa Brown will continue to accompany the choir in practices and when performing and will substitute as organist for a service if available. Thank you for all you do, Melissa!

Friday Art Group: I've been told that we have received more cash donations from this group of painters who use our facilities each week. In addition to having monetary benefit from the artists, we are also fortunate to enjoy their completed projects during coffee hour. I find it very interesting each Sunday to see what new artwork has been painted and how the artists are progressing in their skills and talents. My thanks go to Tonya Miller for her dedication to this group and her support to the church with the financial remuneration. This program is truly a win-win situation for all concerned.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 11 from 3:30-5:00 p.m. in the church library.

Remember, we (including 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 feel very fortunate to work with such a dedicated and knowledgeable group on our Team and within the congregation!

I'll end on this little saying that I've decided to post on my refrigerator. I hope you will pause and reflect on its sentiment as I did!

Today will never come again. Be a blessing. Be a friend. Encourage someone. Take time to care. Let your words heal and not wound.

Amen!

MINISTER OF MUSIC

As many of you know, Tim Sperber's employment as music minister has ended. We thank him for his years of service and we wish him well.

We are seeking a new Minister of Music and will start the search process very soon. We will keep you up to date on the search for his replacement.

TREASURER – Melissa Brown

August 2018 Treasurer's Report

Financial Results	18-Jul	2018 Y-T-D	Budget
Donations and Other Income	\$14,122.00	\$95,338.00	\$99,750.00
Expenses	\$12,722.00	\$86,178.00	\$95,077.00
Net Income	\$1,400.00	\$9,160.00	\$4,673.00



July results showed an unexpected net INCOME of \$1,400. Year-to-date income is a positive \$9,160. The boost in income this month was the result of a member of the congregation remitting a large

portion of a pledge in July, knowing that collections are usually low this time of year. This is certainly appreciated and makes paying the bills in the summer a lot easier!

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 despite higher usage.

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
Total	\$3,691.54	\$4,938.07	\$1,246.53

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 Endowment Team reports an over subscription to the matching grant project of "Keeping Families Together"; the goal was passed and \$1,000 from the Endowment Fund was contributed to the UCC Our Churches Wider Mission for this most worthy cause. Thank You!!



Your Endowment Fund investments after 6 months of volatile market activity stand at \$493,000 and so far have earned \$5,720 in dividends; capital gains will be computed at year end to determine distribution amounts for 2019. We have placed a soft hold on additional 2018 distributions, however, all new applications will be reviewed.

A consideration at year end will be to apply all available funds (those not distributed, which now are \$12,400) to our Church's debt reduction. The Endowment charter specifies that any undistributed funds be returned to the investment portfolio; we cannot pass those funds on to future years. If you have questions or comments, please see me or any member of the Endowment Team.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

So much for our quiet summer. It has been a pretty busy one for Fellowship. The last six weeks has seen three memorial services for some of our dearest members. First was Betty Cooley, followed by Bob Whipple, and ending this Saturday, with the service for Gene Engbrecht. I would like to thank the following people for stepping up and helping: Mary Tulip, Neoma Remiger, Susanne Luckenbach, Linda Greenfield, Sandy Nogaj, Marguerite Van Dooren, Molly Hall, Pat Baran, Lou Stayner, Joanne Stoughton, and Ian McLauchlan. I hope I haven't missed anyone. I couldn't do this without your help. Hopefully things will settle down to normal for a while now.



I would like to thank the following people for hosting Coffee Hour for the month of August: Joanne and Lee Arvid, Linda Greenfield, Joyce and Tim Schenk, Bill and Jean Ringelstein, Kathy Frantish, Lou and Lynn Stayner. Please check the sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary for September. We still need someone for the 9th, 23rd, and 30th.

LADIES' LUNCH OUT - Neoma Remiger

Ladies' Lunch Out will be on September 28 at 12:00 noon. We will be having lunch at Rossini's located at the Murdock entrance to the Mall. We will be car pooling from the church leaving at 11:15 am if you would like a ride. We'd love to have you join us.



LIBRARIAN - Sandy James-Nogaj

Nothing to report this month. Have a good month and happy reading!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY - Glenn and Linda Weaver

Racial Justice

As we are returning north for the fall months, we are planning to attend a sanctuary church in Wyoming, MI. The pastor is Rev. Justo Gonzalez and it is a CUCC church. The name is Rios de Agua Viva/Joy Like a River. They are a small congregation facing a number of challenges from the city of Wyoming! They must build a firewall between the residential area and the assembly area, sprinkling system with connection to the street and an ADA shower. The congregation held a Garage Sale in July to try to raise money and area churches are making donations. If you are interested in helping this sanctuary church with a donation, please call the Weavers at 616-516-1896.

FROM THE CHURCH SCRIBE – Joyce Schenk



Labor's Rewards Come in All Shapes

When I was eleven, a hopeless case of summer boredom along with a need to supplement my quarter-a-week allowance, put me in the job market.

I decided to hire myself out as a helper to one of the neighborhood ladies, so I started knocking on doors. At each stop I got a smile and a polite turn down.

But, when I reached Mrs. Haley's house, my luck changed...

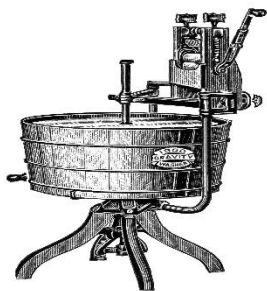
I had heard Mom discussing Mrs. Haley with a neighbor. They spoke sympathetically of Mrs. Haley's recent recovery from tuberculosis. I heard Mom say, "She still seems so weak."

The Haley's place was the smallest house on the block. It sat at the back edge of the lot, almost hidden behind a buffer of trees and bushes, as if trying to escape the stares of well-meaning neighbors.

When I knocked, she answered the door immediately. She was so tiny; we stood there almost eye to eye...a small, pale lady and a nervous eleven-year-old.

Trying to hide my jitters with a rapid-fire sales pitch, I told her quickly how I routinely helped my Mom with all kinds of chores.... washing, cooking, cleaning, gardening, and painting. The list was impressive, and at least half of it was true.

Mrs. Haley's tired eyes looked me over for a long minute. Finally, she said, "Well, I could use some help on wash day."



The next Saturday morning, I was at her house at 8 o'clock. I was ready, I thought, for the simple task of helping this small lady with her laundry. But with Mrs. Haley, wash day was anything but simple.

Since the house was so little, the ancient washing machine and tubs were kept in the shed in the side yard. On wash day, we moved everything into the yard. Then I carried bucket after bucket of near-

boiling water from the house. I poured the bluing into one tub, rigged the hand wringer on another and stretched the clothes line.

That Saturday was my first lesson in the real meaning of the word “work.”

When we were finished, Mrs. Haley thanked me and slipped the agreed-upon dollar into my hand.

At home, I studied the bill. It was unlike any I’d ever seen. Mrs. Haley had carefully folded the bill in an intricate pattern until it was only a tiny sliver of green. As I undid the folds, I found it hard to believe a dollar could be reduced to such a small slice of currency. And I quickly learned that once un-folded, the method of creasing couldn’t be duplicated. It was like trying to put a road map back into its original form.

For the rest of that summer, I spent every Saturday with Mrs. Haley. Our wash days, at first quiet and serious, became filled with conversation and laughter. By the time the season drew to a close, we had formed an unexpected friendship: a recovering TB patient and a pre-teen entrepreneur.

I developed a deep respect for this pale, quiet woman who tried so valiantly to keep up with the demands of her home. She taught me about commitment, responsibility and the value of work.

By summer’s end, I had collected a small pile of Mrs. Haley’s carefully-folded bills. In fact, it was a long time before I could bring myself to use any of those hard-earned dollars. It didn’t seem right to unfold the tiny strips of currency that Mrs. Haley had presented to me with such pride.

I’ve had many different jobs since that summer of my eleventh year. But none have stayed so close in my memory and no pay check has ever been as treasured as those slender slivers of green.



CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

The church office will be closed Monday, September 3 for Labor Day. Summer Hours will continue through September 28 being open Monday – Thursday from 8:30 am -12.30 pm and closed on Fridays.

UPDATING 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.



SEPTEMBER CELEBRATORY DATES

BIRTHDAYS

September 1	Kelly Ford
September 2	Stephen Kline
September 4	Rene Ley
September 5	Keith Weber
September 9	Jerome Noble
September 18	Judy Marchert
September 20	John Baran
September 24	Patricia Baran
September 27	Jackie Szeifert
September 28	Gloria McLaughlin
September 28	Denny Reed

ANNIVERSARIES

September 30	Lynn & Lou Stayner
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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