

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



NOVEMBER 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Mike Ford

Feeling Entitled?

During the Great Depression, FDR put into place programs that would move the country toward employment, health care, and food security. People were wandering the streets simply looking for a place to sleep or for the handouts that would feed them for that day. I still hear the stories my father would tell of life in a little town in northern Vermont. On a fairly regular basis they had someone come to ask for work in exchange for a warm place to sleep and a hot meal. Our country was on the verge of mass starvation and emigration for survival. Sound familiar?

To combat these social realities FDR implemented the WPA, TVA, CCC to get people working again and to rebuild the infrastructure of our country. In addition, he put into place Medicare, Medicaid, Food Stamps, WIC, and other similar programs to ensure the survival of the most marginalized, the elderly and children, the most endangered segment of our society. He decided, rather brilliantly I feel, that the Federal Government should be the source of help people needed. After all, weren't people elected to solve problems?

These programs were called Social Welfare. They saved millions from starvation and homelessness. They prevented people from being excluded from the health care system based on lack of resources. The country began to be able to concentrate on long term solutions to economic disaster. In the mid-1960s the Social Security Administration was added to offer a means to survive for those who were no longer in the workforce, who no longer had a regular paycheck to rely upon.

Not long after these social support programs were instituted, they were all shortened to "Welfare" in the minds of most Americans. This happened largely because politics got involved. Our country became divided into those on Welfare and those not on Welfare. Judgements also soon followed. For the last eighty years or so, many in our country have looked down upon those who need the support these programs provide. The idea began to circulate that those who received benefits were lazy or just "milking the system".

A new way of expressing this prejudice has emerged. Now these programs that save people's lives are called Entitlement Programs. This subtle change gives the impression that those who receive these helps feel entitled in some way, special. The solution is that if we didn't have entitlement programs, people would have to work to support themselves. The bottom line, "why should our tax dollars support THOSE PEOPLE?" We have come from bringing a country back from the precipice of collapse to looking at the people these programs benefit as parasites.

Late last year a tax cut was proposed to ease the burden of taxes and to foster economic growth and job creation. Every advisor, who was allowed to participate, no matter political affiliation, predicted that it would balloon the national deficit and cause inflation. Guess what, for the few (about 10 percent of the population) it was a tremendous benefit. The stock market has soared. Businesses have added employees (though wages have not increased). Growth is happening at a record pace. But that deficit explosion predicted, well that's come along with all that growth. The money has to come from somewhere to pay for the tax cut. Guess where its coming from?

In the last few months, as the national budget is being considered, a few politicians have stepped forward to say that the cuts in spending will HAVE to come from entitlement programs. There is no other way to balance the budget. So, what is being promoted is a legislative program to privatize the Medicare and Social Security programs (which really means absorbing the Trust Fund that supports each, that came from your paycheck each time, be returned to the national budget as surplus). Medicaid, WIC, Three Squares (Food Stamps), SSI (disability pensions), Meals on Wheels, Head Start, etc. will be cut in their funding to reduce spending in order to balance the budget. The burden of continuing the absolutely necessary programs would fall to the states to fund. After all, we need to reduce the reach of the Federal Government, don't we? In short, they will cease to exist.

Let me ask you a question. Do Any of us benefit from ANY of these programs now? I suspect that retirement dollars would not stretch as far if Medicare premiums quadrupled. I suspect that Social Security benefits would need to be reduced too to pay the private companies who would be administrating the programs.

I ask us to be aware of language and the subtle ways it can change the conversation. When you hear a politician stand and promote reducing the entitlement programs, please be certain that that politician does not NNED that benefit to survive. You can be certain that they are comfortable suggesting that you suffer instead of them. I would hope that when we hear of privatizing programs which offer support to the poorest or marginalized we get upset. I hope that we know when we are being lied to about the tax cuts not hurting anyone. I hope we understand that these changes are targeting the poor, the elderly, and children. I hope we understand that it is a declaration of war on those who cannot defend themselves!

If you can't tell already by my rhetoric, I get REALLY steamed when I hear another fat cat politician declare that our country would be better off without the poor or the foreigner or the children using up all of our resources, that we need to eliminate "entitlement" programs. I would ask who really is the entitled one in this situation?

I pray that we are thoughtful in considering who represents us, who will fight for the poor and marginalized. I see Jesus right in the middle of that question. I pray you do as well.

FOR THE TIME BEING

“And The Times, They are Achangin”. I believe this was part of the lyrics to a song in the 60s. I can hear the tune, see the face of the singer, but can I remember his name, not a chance. It was a song created for the turbulent times our country was facing. We were experiencing serious political conflict around Viet Nam, civil unrest in our race relations, boycotts, protests, shootings on college campuses. They were difficult times indeed and they signaled change in a way that told us we were no longer shaping the future without them.

This past week, we have experienced pipe bombs being mailed to political enemies of the current administration. This was done by someone who, though mentally imbalanced, was encouraged by words to take action. Those words came in the form of a FAAAARRRR right website which spews hate and fear and violence to all who don't think their way. We see that the reaction of government is feeble, at best, to try to control the rhetoric or advise a reconsidering of the actions we take.

Eleven people were gunned down in the midst of prayer and Sabbath celebrations in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. People had assembled to breakfast and pray together in three communities that met in the same space. A 97-year-old worshipper was shot to death as she prayed. A family that gathered to celebrate the bris of a new child in the family now has the day marked by the violence of a bigoted madman, again spurred on by anonymous internet voices. We saw the interruption of the funerals for the dead and those mourning them for political gain, despite a request by the senior rabbi to wait two days until they could have their private time to mourn, another feeble attempt to create calm.

Yesterday, a Punta Gorda Police officer stopped by the church and asked for a copy of our worship schedule and meeting times for groups in the church. He informed Mary and I that the PGPD would be increasing patrol frequency near our church and other churches in the area. He didn't need to tell us why.

For the time being I have asked permission of the Leadership Team to take the action of keeping our doors locked, even when we are in the building. I agonized over these thoughts. My experience in my previous life in the military was that the police stopped by because they believe we may be credible threat to our community.

I came to the conclusion that there is a difference between defiance and foolishness. I asked that we lock our doors for the time being, just until our government takes action to decrease the threat we face.

I also believe there is no reason for worry. If we can make the statement that we are being vigilant, that is a message I would enjoy sending. We are by no means offering fear to those evil people who would choose violence. Quite the opposite. We are saying that each person coming through our doors will receive a personal welcome and invite to enter :) People will understand that we are being cautious. In the long run, I feel they will understand why.

My hope is that soon we can leave our doors wide open again. I am also a realist and know that it may be a while before sanity rules again in our society. I want you all to know and feel that we are in this together. We are here to keep one another safe AND to worship God as we choose to!

FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

MODERATOR'S REPORT- Judy Minier



Happy November to one and all! It's been nice to have a few cool days recently to remind us that it is Fall, even in Florida! Welcome back to our friends from up north. It is a welcome change to have folks back in town. The various winter/seasonal activities are starting to get geared up in church and of course, it is great to have some familiar faces back in the pews and to serve as greeters, hosts for coffee hour, serving communion, etc. Sometimes in the summer months, it seems like the same handful of folks often do most of the tasks each week! Clearly, in this month of Thanksgiving, we have much to be grateful for.

Stewardship Position and Nominating Committee for 2019 LT: We have an opening at the helm of Stewardship, an important position as we head into our annual pledge process. The LT continues to deal with many of the tasks related to care of the church, but we also welcome support or assistance if a member of the congregation is able to join the effort. Be on the lookout for information about our annual prayerful approach to committing resources to support our church and its many ministries.

A Nominating Committee has been appointed by the LT and is charged with the task of seeking individuals to be elected in January at the Annual Meeting. If you are asked, we hope you will prayerfully consider agreeing to serve. Working with the rest of the Team members is a very rewarding and uplifting experience!

Music Ministry: The search team (Pastor Mike, Melissa Brown, Joyce Baskovic and me) has begun the work of hiring our new Music Minister. An ad is being submitted to several local sites to post the position requirements. We hope to have a good slate of individuals to interview before Thanksgiving. The plan is to have the new person begin with us in January as we have our interim organist and choir director in place until that time. Thank you, Mike Robinson and Joyce Baskovic for stepping into these roles for the next two months.

The next regularly scheduled Leadership Team meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 13 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 both on our Team and within the congregation!

I'll end with a lovely sentiment, perhaps needed now in these rancorous political times. Good words to live by -

Surround yourself with people who make you laugh.

Love the people who treat you right, pray for the ones who don't.

Life is too short to be anything but happy.

Judy Minier, Moderator

TREASURER – Melissa Brown

October 2018 Treasurer's Report



Financial Results	Sept 2018	2018 Y-T-D	Budget	2017 Y-T-D
Donations and Other Income	\$12,886.30	\$117,708.57	\$128,250.00	\$111,461.98
Expenses	\$10,485.69	\$115,820.76	\$122,242.16	\$125,258.04
Net Income	\$2,400.61	\$1,887.81	\$6,007.84	(13,796.06)

We are back in the black for the month and for the year, but--and there's always a but--we are below budget. We have a shortfall of \$4,120 when compared to budget (\$6,007 – \$1,887), but that is just a timing issue, and I expect by the end of the year to meet our budgeted surplus.

The chart below shows our electrical bills since the installation of the solar panels. From April through September is when we see the most significant savings. The excess kilowatt hours that are produced in the summer months are credited to us at the on-peak rate, but as of October 1 and until the end of March, the excess is credited at the off-peak rate. Look for next month's report to show less of a savings when compared to the prior year. Once we have twelve full months of solar production, Jerry Larson will be looking at the different billing options that FPL offers to see if we are on the billing plan that provides us the greatest savings. In any case, we are still contributing to a greener planet.

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
Sep-18	\$475.96	\$663.43	\$187.47
Total	\$4,652.16	\$6,389.31	\$1,737.15

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.

MUSIC MINISTRY

Mark your calendars now. Christmas with the Celts will be performing at our church on November 29, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. This group, Marcille Wallis and Friends, has been performing at our church since 2000. Come enjoy Celtic music which includes fiddle, guitar, flute, whistle, mandolin and hammer dulcimer, along with vocals from the group and Celtic dance. Tickets purchased through the church office are available for \$10.00.

ENDOWMENT TEAM – Bill Ringelstein, Chair

Despite recent market ups and downs, your Endowment Fund is secure. Certainly, our investments are affected by the fluctuations, but the conservative nature of these positions will see us through. We anticipate a good year-end report that will allow our outreach program, through the Endowment Distributions, to be a strong and vibrant part our Church's ministry.



Please consider the Endowment Fund as we near the end of this tax year. It may be to your advantage to establish a legacy this year.



STEWARDSHIP

Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the [Council for American Indian Ministry \(CAIM\)](#). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities.

Our church will be taking an offering for the Neighbors in Need mission on Sunday, November 18th. Special offering envelopes will be in your church bulletins.

FROM THE LEADERSHIP TEAM – You will receive a letter from the Leadership Team this month offering a time-line for the 2019 Pledge Campaign!

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY TEAM – Linda Greenfield and Linda Weaver, Chairs

Greetings from the Discipleship Lindas!

We want to first thank all of the laymen, lay women and children and ministers (present and retired) for participating in Laity Sunday. We know God heard our heartfelt worship and praises!

Please check your calendars now for the following important November dates ahead:

Sunday, Nov.4-Communion-Set up – Mary & Dick Tulip

Sunday, Nov.11-Social Justice Moment

Sunday, Nov.18- After church - Bring down Christmas decorations

Sunday, Nov.25- After church- Decorate church (No Coffee Hour but a lite lunch after the church is decorated!)

During this advent season, may we pray for open eyes, ears and hearts for the message of the one who came to tell and live the advent of a new kingdom--one so very different from the one of his human birth! A new kingdom on earth--one in which the poor are taken care of, the afflicted are healed, women and children are loved and NOT abused and there is equality for ALL--not just a small number of those in power! This is the message of that baby in the manger. Peace.

MINISTRY FELLOWSHIP TEAM - Jan Tulk

I would like to thank the October hosts:

October 7 – Jan Tulk

October 14 – Jim Grunden, Betty Balmer, Mary Barnt, Judy Lyon and
Glenn Garrett

October 21 – Ian and Sandra McLauchlan, Mike and Carol Robinson

October 28 – Bill Ringelstein, Lynn and Lou Stayner



There are still some open dates in November. Please consider signing up for one of them. Maybe you could do like Betty Balmer and get your table to sign up together. Not that we have assigned seats, but we do seem to sit at the same tables each week. 😊

LADIES' LUNCH OUT – Neoma Remiger

Ladies, won't you join us at our monthly lunch out? It's an opportunity to get to know the "sisters" you sit with on Sunday morning. Our next luncheon will be a High Tea on December 14 at Zoetz at 12:00 noon. A sign-up sheet is available at the kiosk at the back of the church. Due to space considerations at the restaurant, only 20 will be able to attend so sign up early.



LIBRARIAN – Sandy James-Nogaj

Thanks to Molly Hall for hosting this season's first Book Talk Tea. Also, thanks to Neoma Remiger for taking notes while I was out-of-town.

The November tea will be hosted by Neoma at her home on November 9th at 1:00 pm. Please sign up at the kiosk.



Thanksgiving is the Time to Make “Thank You” Memorable

I’ve noticed lately that many popular phrases have become so overused they no longer carry their original meanings.

“Have a nice day.”

“Take care.”

“Not a problem.”

“Welcome to Wal-Mart.”

Unfortunately, one of the growing collections of time-worn phrases is “Thank you.”

You give a quick “Thank you” to the clerk at the hardware, the checker at the grocery, the receptionist at the doctor’s office. You’ve said it so often, it no longer has any sparkle.

They’ve heard it so often, they no longer hear the words as expressions of appreciation.

Thanksgiving is a good time to start making an extra effort to turn our one-size-fits-all “Thank you” into a genuine acknowledgement of gratitude. It takes only a moment of thought to customize our remarks to those we cross paths with throughout the day.

For instance, the busy clerk at the hardware would be pleased to hear, “It’s great that there are folks like you who know just what I need for my project. Thanks for your help.”

The checker at the grocery may have been on her feet for hours by the time you go through her line. You could make her day special with something like, “I always like seeing your smile when I come in. Grocery shopping is much more enjoyable with folks like you around.”

And the doctor’s receptionist would find your visit memorable if you left her with, “I really appreciate the way you try to make these appointments convenient for me. You’re a real asset to the doctor’s practice.”

While face-to-face expressions of gratitude are daily opportunities to give folks a pat on the back, dropping a note of appreciation can provide a memorable recognition for those who have touched our lives without even knowing it. I’ve written notes of thanks to newspaper photographers, teachers, doctors, hotels, restaurants, novelists, even a garbage service.

Few have acknowledged these messages, but I wasn’t looking for a response. The notes were simply my way of expressing gratitude for jobs well done.

At this Thanksgiving time of year, it’s worthwhile to remember that while love makes the world go ‘round, appreciation, well expressed, smooths out some of the bumps in the road.





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. The office will be closed on Thanksgiving Day!

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.



NOVEMBER CELEBRATORY DATES

BIRTHDAYS

November 3	Louise Jankowski
November 6	Isabel James

November 7	Neoma Remiger
November 8	Herb Henry
November 12	Sawyer Ford
November 12	Marguerite VanDooren
November 16	Molly Hall
November 16	Donald Nagel
November 18	Joyce Schenk
November 24	Bob Armstrong
November 24	Audrey Young

ANNIVERSARIES

November 1	Patricia & John Baran
November 5	Lee & Anne Swift
November 11	David & Rene Ley
November 17	John & Carol Schmuhl
November 29	Guy & Linda Greenfield

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