

The NCC UCC *LIFELINE* **November/December 2017**

Pastor's Thoughts

500 years have passed since Martin Luther's stand against certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church, which resulted in what we call the Reformation. 200 years have passed since a group of Protestants decided to build a church on the Norwich Plain. 18 months later, in June 1819, what was then called the South Church in Norwich, Vermont was formed, with Articles of Faith and a Form of Covenant. There is a small, brown pamphlet that was printed for the use of church members, which still exists.

The words of this pamphlet, put together by the first pastor, Rufus W. Bailey, seem to come straight from the lips of the 16th century reformers. To us, they sound quite stern. For the first 100 years of this congregation's life, a body within the church (sometimes called the Examining Committee) would carefully question any potential members for evidence of credible repentance of sin and being "called to a life of regeneration, a work of the Holy Spirit on the heart." Article XI states that "The regenerate only are qualified to become members of the visible church, and as such are entitled to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for them selves, and baptism for themselves and offspring." The Lord's Supper (or Holy Communion or the Eucharist) was celebrated more rarely. In the 1912 manual of the church, January, March, May, July, September and November were designated as the months for the sacrament, on the first Sunday of the month. It is possible that in the nineteenth century, it was celebrated only 4 times a year. Our ancestors in faith had inherited from the congregational separatists of England both a strict sense of unworthiness and a concern that sacraments become too frequent.

Other practices that have become cherished "habits" would definitely have been frowned upon by Rufus Bailey and his congregants: Christmas Eve services with candles, Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday evening services, and all the pomp and joy of Palm Sunday and Easter. The focus was always the word, read from Scripture and preached. Hearing the word was the way to "regeneration" and the food needed for living a Christian life. People had to develop habits of listening quietly for long periods of time that we can hardly imagine today. The sanctuary was designed like a lecture hall: all pews facing and focused on one speaker. Luther's "*sola scriptura*" was the basis for Christian worship, life, and witness.

We look back to our forbears with both fondness and curiosity...maybe tempered with a bit of disbelief. We are grateful to them for building a meetinghouse here, and for caring for it. But, as children and grandchildren will, we have made some different choices, we have some changed understandings of what it means to be faithful. The idea of earning the right or of being "entitled" to receive the Lord's Supper seems a little foreign to me. After all, the story says that Jesus ate with Judas that night, so there don't seem to be valid grounds for exclusion based on good behavior.

Most of us read the Bible rather differently from Rufus Bailey as well. Just as Martin Luther relied on new translations of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures for his theological insights, we

have 200 years of linguistic, historical, textual and cultural studies to aid us in our interpretations. We may have lost some “biblical literacy” in the meantime – the Bible no longer holds pride of place on every home bookshelf – but those who choose to learn can find endless riches of enlightening reading on our sacred texts.

In our church, I sense that we now value the regeneration of society and community over the former emphasis on personal piety. Though social justice issues such as temperance and abolition were hot topics at various times during the 19th century, we now see part of our mission as saving bodies, minds and spirits as well as souls; as reforming society as well as church for the better. Many attend church in order to recharge their “batteries” so that they can make the world a better place. We still follow Jesus, but perhaps with a different emphasis. Our ‘Be the Church’ banner reflects this. In coming months, we will reflect on some of those ‘Be the Church’ injunctions. As Congregationalists, we will depend on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit expressed in our local congregational setting.

So- here we are at the beginning of our third century. The meetinghouse on the plain is the same; the meetinghouse on the plain is different. The building remains at the center of town, while, in many ways, a commitment to church has moved to the margins of our society. We are in a liminal place, straddling past and present, sacred and profane, tradition and innovation. But maybe this is nothing new. Maybe we still can say with John Robinson, as he bid farewell in England to the Pilgrim voyagers in 1620: “I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word.”
Mary

New Sanctuary Committee

At its December meeting the Church Council plans to appoint a committee to research possibilities and make recommendations for the Sanctuary’s carpet/flooring replacement and/or reconfiguration of the pews. The council hopes to have a committee that includes 5 NCC members including 1 from the Mission of Buildings and Finance and 1 from the Mission of Worship and Care. It is anticipated that the committee will research carpet and flooring options, the possibilities of reconfiguring the pews, and visit other churches to observe their sanctuaries. Interested members should give their names to Mary Brownlow or to Amy in the church Office.

“I just had an epiphany!” - New Testament Insights for the New Year

led by Kennet Cracknell, for four UCC churches in the Upper Valley

If you've read enough of the Bible to have questions, this is the class for you! This is a six-week opportunity to dig deeper or to reacquaint yourself with this unique collection of books and letters that are foundational in our Christian faith. Examples of questions that Bible Scholar Kenneth Cracknell will address:

The Gospels; What are they? Why are they sometimes similar, but often, very different? Are they a unique form of text? Why were they written in Greek?

Big Greek Words: LOGOS (Word) PSUCHE (Soul) EPIPHANIA (Epiphany). Some knowledge of Greek is great, but not necessary.

What is the relationship, if any, between our Scriptures and Greek Philosophy? Kenneth will lead interested folks through these and other questions you may have.

Running six weeks, but classes will be self-contained, should you be able to make only a few of them. Childcare provided.

WHEN: Epiphany Sundays, January 7, 2018, - February 11, 2018, 4:30-6:00

WHO: Open to interested laity/clergy of four UCC churches in Hanover, Lyme
Norwich, and Thetford, and members of the community by invitation.

Led by Kenneth Cracknell, professor, minister, life-long Bible scholar. Before his retirement Kenneth was Distinguished Professor in Residence at the Brite Divinity School; he taught at the University of Cambridge, England, and was a consultant in interfaith relations for the World Council of Churches. Kenneth and his wife, Susan White, a retired professor of liturgical studies, have made Norwich their home for the last 11 years. Kenneth's Osher classes and theological discussion groups have been very popular with Upper Valley residents. Originally a "genuine London boy", Kenneth has an abiding interest in and love of Scripture.

WHERE: We'll begin at the Norwich Congregational Church, UCC, and share hosting among the four churches.

RSVP: If you intend to attend one or all of the classes, to your church office.
If you have questions, please call Kenneth at 802-649-3710 or talk with the minister at your church. COME AND SAY "AHA!! NOW I GET IT!"

Thanksgiving Eve Service

The 2017 Norwich Community Thanksgiving Eve service will be hosted by St. Barnabas Episcopal Church and will take place at 5:30 on Wednesday, November 22. All are welcome.

Outreach Ministry Update - November 1, 2017
An overview of the Outreach Ministry Program's activities in 2017

➤ **Offerings**

As of October 31st we have completed five Mission Offerings:

- For January and February, your contributions went to **Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)**, whose Mission is "to enable people to cope with, and reduce the hardships of poverty; create sustainable self-sufficiency; and reduce the causes and move toward the elimination of poverty." Their programs include Family Service / Crisis Intervention for housing, fuel, homelessness prevention, housing stabilization and budget counseling; Head Start, Economic Development, Head Start, "Good Buy" Thrift stores.
- In March and April, we supported the UCC's **One Great Hour of Sharing which is part of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM)**, a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. It works with local, national, and international partners, to provide support to health, education, refugee, agricultural and emergency relief initiatives worldwide. National Disaster, Refugee, Volunteer and Global Ministries programs are all supported by OGHS
- The May and June Offering benefited the **Vermont Foodbank**. VT Foodbank acquires and distributes food to 225 network partners around the state – food shelves, pantries, senior meal programs and other community meal sites – enabling Vermonters in need to eat.
- The July & August Offering was directed to **PeaceTrees Vietnam**. Their Mission is to clear the land of the scars and remnants of war and to plant trees and fresh hope in their place. This hope is created through PeaceTrees Vietnam's work to create healthy futures for the children and families of Central Vietnam, beginning first with ensuring that Quang Tri Province, one of the poorest and most war-torn regions of the country, is a safe place to live.
- In September and October, the Offering supported the UCC's **Neighbors in Need** Program. NIN is a special mission offering of the UCC that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to 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.
- The November and December Offering will be for the UCC's **Christmas Fund** which benefits retired Clergy and their families.

➤ **Ongoing Programs and Areas of Interest**

We are continuing to have a group help at **Listen Dinners** every other month, coordinated by Carol Loveland. We also have people preparing meals and eating with the residents and staff at **Dismas House** once a month. Jeff Nielsen coordinates this program. If anyone is interested in learning more about either program, or becoming a volunteer, please contact Carol or Jeff, (or Amy in the Church office).

➤ **Budget & Special Fund Donations**

Outreach Ministry thanks the members of the Church for providing an annual budget and those in the past who funded the various long-term Special Funds, making it possible for us to support important causes locally and around the world.

- We have been working with the Hartford District of the VT Department for Children & Families on a number of fronts. Earlier this year we contributed money to help furnish a new visit room at the DCF office in White River, where children in foster care can meet with their parents in a safe and pleasant space. This fall with monies from the Hazen & Ellison Funds, we contributed to the **PINS Back to School Program** which donates supplies to children in foster care, and then in December we are contributing money to the **PINS Christmas Stocking Stuffer Program**.
- We continued our support this year for the Dominican Republic Projects, focusing on health screening and library projects at schools near Cotui.
- Support from the NCC's Clevie White Fund has been donated to the **Clevie White Independent Living Fund at Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) Vermont**. This grant supports the HCRS staff that helps clients move from community care to their own apartments.
- In July, a donation was made to the **Second Wind Foundation** in support of their opioid addiction programs.
- At our August meeting we voted to send donations to **The Family Place, COVER and Hartford Dismas House**.
- Also at our August meeting, we discussed with Mary Brownlow potential recipients of a portion of the money available in the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. The decision was to make donations to the heating fuel assistance programs at **Listen** and **SEVCA**, and the food pantry at the **Haven**. The funds given to the Haven will be matched by an anonymous donor.
- Regarding the series of devastating hurricanes this fall, we made a donation in September to **Harvey Relief** and in November a donation will go to **Puerto Rico relief**, both through **UCC Disaster Ministries**. Given the scope and frequency of weather related disasters, we will donate revenue from the **January / February 2018 Mission to UCC Disaster Ministries**
- We have utilized a portion of the money in the Sargent Fund to support "**The Spiritual Roots of Social Action**", a series of four interfaith dialogues hosted by Hanover Friends Meeting (Quakers) at the Hanover Friends Meetinghouse next to Hanover High School. The next event is on January 28, 2018. See the poster on the church bulletin board for further information.

➤ **Please Join Us**

If you have interest in participating in any of our programs or have ideas for new Outreach Ministry opportunities, please contact one of us. Our meetings are also open to anyone who is interested. The next scheduled meeting is November 15, at 7 pm in Mary's office.

Outreach Ministry Leadership Team: Terri Ashley, Doug Britton, Jeff Nielsen, Heidi Webster & Stan Williams

Outreach Ministries Mission Offering -November – December 2017
The UCC Christmas Fund
Remembering Those Who Serve Our Church

For 116 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a tangible expression of God’s love and light in the world. One of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in kindheartedness to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

In 2016, UCC congregations and members generously contributed \$1,562,260 to the Offering. This enabled the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, the charitable arm of the Pension Boards, to provide, on behalf of the whole Church, Supplementation of Small Annuities, Retiree Health Premium Supplementation, Emergency Grants, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to individuals and families in need.

In 2016, gifts to the UCC Christmas Fund enabled:

- Small pension supplementation for 448 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,507,787)
- Health benefits supplementation for 216 retired clergy and lay employees (\$487,338)
- Emergency grants for 50 individuals and families (\$90,927)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 503 retired clergy and lay employees (\$233,800)
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The theme of the 2017 Christmas Fund Offering is **Shepherding the Light**, and the UCC goal is to raise \$1.7 million to help support these ministries of light and love. The recipients of these gifts have faithfully served the church and now, in their time of need, we can be the church to them. We invite and encourage you to shepherd God’s light and support this year’s appeal.



Please use the yellow Mission envelopes in the pews to make donations to the Christmas Fund during November & December 2017



Randall Balmer with Mary Brownlow



Cider pressing at the 200th Celebration

More Celebrating of the Church's 200th Anniversary



Church Council Minutes - Sept 24 2017

Present: Hilary White, Ryan Calsbeek, Brittany Calsbeek, Mary Brownlow, Willemien Miller, Chipper Ashley, Heidi Webster

1. Ministry of Religious Education

The statement of purpose for Christian Education was reviewed. A motion was made and passed unanimously to accept the following:

For all people to seek and develop an awareness of God in our lives, especially through the life and witness of Jesus Christ, and for them to learn to respond in faith and love. In various ways, we hope that they may

- learn who they are as a child of God, with worth and purpose*
- grow in relationship to the Christian community*
- fulfill their role as disciples of Christ in the work of compassion and justice*
- allow the Spirit of God to inform their human relationships*
- find grounding and hope in the Christian tradition*

2. Ministry of Worship and Care

Chipper introduced a draft of the new church brochure. A few comments were made to bring back for more reflection.

3. Outreach Ministry

We have not met since the last Council meeting. There have been several tragedies recently, and not a lot of money left in the Outreach budget. We talked about ways to raise money, including a one-time mission offering, or a supper kind of event. We could link it to the church PayPal account.

We discussed the Be the Church initiative, which would have all of the church missions discussing one aspect of the Be the Church initiative each month. Heidi sent Doug Britton's suggested breakdown of each aspect, and Mary will forward the original Be the Church document.

Building and Finance Ministry – no meeting

Carpet is still being considered. Otherwise things are going smoothly.

Their next meeting is October 24.

E. Pastoral Appraisal form for review

The Deacons did a lot of work on this last year. There haven't been revisions. Willemien wondered if it needs to happen every year. The group sentiment seemed to be that yearly is important. Timing is not mentioned in the bylaws. There was discussion about which questions to use, who sees the originals, and how the answers are collated and shared with Mary. Some minor changes were made.

Chipper moved to accept the evaluation document as edited. Approved unanimously.

F. Pastoral Concerns

There are still 200th anniversary events left. The Randall Balmer lecture will be October 18, and a special worship service is planned on November 19th. Tacy is taking a few weeks off.

A couple of funerals are coming up.

G. Other Business

Discussion of the communication workshop with Nancy Brown coming up on November 4th. We have a handout to pass along during our ministry meetings. About 60 people can come. We decided to survey and get numbers of church members going before opening it up to people outside the church.

Next meeting: October 29

Annual Giving

Did you know that ...

- We ask for pledges in the fall because we work on the budget in the winter? **Pledging helps us plan!**
- 75% of our annual operating budget comes from pledges? **We depend on you!**
- A pledge is just a promise -- payment can be made at a later date. **Any amount helps; pay when you are able!**
- There are many ways to pay. **Ask our office manager, Amy Frost, if you have questions!**
- We are celebrating the wrap up of our pledge drive on November 19 - it's also the wrap up of our 200th anniversary celebrations **-and it's Pie Sunday at coffee hour!**

Sunday, November 19th will be the wrap-up of our 200th anniversary year. Please join us after church for a special coffee hour and Pie Potluck celebration. Feel free to bring a pie to share!

Join us as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first worship service in our sanctuary on November 19. We will hear again the piece commissioned during our sabbatical renewal time, "Joy Like a River of Brightness" by Kathy Wonson Eddy. We will hear the Scripture that was read at that first 1817 service. And we will celebrate after worship with pie at coffee hour: bring your own to share around, or just enjoy the efforts of your friends!

Light in the Longest Night: A Service of Solace

*December 21, 7 pm
a quiet, reflective service*

For some, this season, with the constant refrain of family, of gathering, of celebration, giving, affluence and happiness is a source of more pain than gladness. Even in the Christmas season, or maybe especially in the Christmas season, we may need space to name loss, insecurity, fear of violence, or estrangement.

The Solstice, when the longest night stretches before us, may be a time when we need community and solace. At this service, we will have an opportunity to share and hear prayers, scripture, and music that acknowledge that divine presence is also for those who mourn or struggle in other ways: that we all need Holy Light to shine in our darkness.

All are welcome, regardless of church affiliation, or lack of it.

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**AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION
WORSHIPING ON SUNDAYS AT 10 AM**