

The NCC UCC *LIFELINE* March/April 2017

Pastor's Thoughts

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Psalm 133:1

I have been spending some time poking around in our church archives, much of which is stored at the Norwich Historical Society. It is an eclectic mix of documents, including handwritten notes of meetings by ministers of the early 1800's, photographs, sermons, and records of earlier centennial, sesquicentennial, and other celebrations of church life.

Those handwritten notes of the 1810's, 20's and 30's are hard to read, with their fading brown ink and idiosyncratic script. But one thing I notice in the old records is the perennial strife that surfaces in human communities, and how it was managed. As I have noted before, our church was built in 1817, at exactly the same time as the first congregational meeting house in town, one mile away, was being rebuilt. The debate about the best location for a meeting house was contentious. The Reverend James Woodward, in the first church, argued that the town could not support two churches, and he had a point. Others, who lived down at "the Plain" saw the new location as forward-looking and more sensible. Though our meeting house was completed in 1817, it was not until 2 years later that those who had supported it were given permission to form the "South Religious Society." Relationships between the two congregations were often strained, and ministers were tugged one way and another as members engaged in slander, personal criticism, and financial complaints. Much of this seems unusually intrusive and personal to our eyes. *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!* But how often we fall short. In 1853, the controversy ended with the dissolution and dismantling of the North Church Meeting House.

Another chapter of our church history is the involvement of some members in the political affairs of their time. In the 1830's and 1840's many abolitionist groups began to form in Vermont, and they often were rooted in church life. In Norwich, following a lecture by Rev. Alanson St. Clair at a deacon's house (that of Sylvester Morris, in whose memory our stained glass window was given) the Norwich Female Abolition Society was formed. There were two points of controversy here: the slavery issue itself and women as vocal advocates of political change. For some, the latter was the more hot-button issue, and petitions to the Congress from the women of the time included such soothing protestations as "when pleading for the downtrodden and despised we are not violating the proprieties of that relation to society and government our sex should sustain." (from a letter from the women of Sterling, VT, quoted in <https://vermonthistory.org/journal/82/VHS8201WomenWereAmong.pdf>) I can imagine that the Norwich Church folks had heated discussions about both slavery and the rights of women. *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!* But how often we fall short. Decades later, the institution of slavery ended. More decades later, women were given the vote.

More recently, in 1969, Yorke Peeler preached a sermon, whose text I found in the archives. Apparently, the background of the sermon was the contentious issue of serving Holy Communion. Questions had been asked – as still happens – about why grape juice was served

instead of wine. Yorke had passed the idea along to the Deacons, who made a decision to serve both wine and juice (called a split- tray, as trays with small glass cups were used) at an upcoming communion service. This had generated a lot of discussion, letters and phone calls. Yorke explained in his sermon the history of using grape juice instead of wine, going back in our church to the 1830's. In fact, from the 1830's to 1909, membership in the church was limited to those who agreed not to make, sell or use "ardent spirits" – we were a "Temperance Church." Yorke described the controversy as "a struggle between one kind of traditionalist and another kind of traditionalist...leading only to confusion, bewilderment, and antagonism." *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!* But how often we fall short. As we know, using grape juice has remained our practice.

I bring up these stories because I need to be reminded that controversies are a constant in the life of communities of faith. Some may seem petty and small-minded. Others may come to us from the larger world outside this town. Some are based on opinion, some on "tradition" of one kind or another, some on our most deeply held moral values and instincts. In the last 200 years, I am sure that many have been wounded by dissension and division. But I hold fast to the hope – or rather the conviction - that many more have been fed, nurtured, consoled and energized by the spirit of this place. We still engage in thoughtful reflection on our shared and several callings by God. We still try to "Be the Church. Though our priorities may change with seasons and decades and centuries, we are still people of prayer. So I pray, with the Psalmist, *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!* How often we fall short, but how often we find the grace to continue.

Mary

Holy Week Calendar

Sunday, April 9 at 10 am: Palm/Passion Sunday Service with the Hallelujah Hollah Choir choir singing.

Wednesday, April 12 at 5:30 pm: Final Lenten Prayers for Guidance and Peace.

Thursday, April 13 at 7 pm: Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service

Sunday, April 16 at 7 am: Early Morning Easter Service at Hillside Cemetery.

Sunday, April 16 at 10 am: Easter Sunday Service in the sanctuary



NCCUCC from on high: Drone Photos

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Norwich Congregational Church February 5, 2017

Moderator John Severinghaus brought the meeting to order at 11:40 AM. Mary Brownlow began with a prayer.

Mary nominated John Severinghaus for moderator. Seconded by John Langhus. John Severinghaus noted that if the proposed changes to the bylaws are accepted, the role of the moderator will be taken over by the chair or vice chair of Church Council.

Gary Brooks called the question. The motion was passed unanimously.

Barbara Duncan moved to accept the minutes of the 2015 annual meeting. Don Helms seconded. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

Doug James moved to adopt the proposed 2017 budget. Gary Brooks seconded. Treasurer Joanne Egner reviewed some highlights of the budget.

- We ended 2016 with a significant surplus. This was applied to the capital maintenance reserve.
- There are a number of anticipated capital maintenance expenses.
- The parsonage income and interest was also applied to the capital maintenance reserve.
- Savings in 2016 included a savings on oil due to the mild winter, and combining the office manager/finance positions used less time.
- There was a significant increase in non-pledge gifts.
- The amount taken from investments was reduced to 4%.
- The parsonage mortgage was extended instead of taking the balloon payment next year.
- There was a 2% increase in salaries across the board.
- The addition of solar collectors has significantly reduced the electric bill.

Mary Brownlow commented on how extremely lucky we are between being careful with money and the generosity of the people in the church. She mentioned that other churches around Vermont are not so fortunate.

Christopher Ashley asked about funding for clock repair and was assured money was available. He said that he hopes to have the bell working this year when it warms up.

All voted in favor of the proposed 2017 budget.

Joanne Egner moved to consider and vote on reports C – L and N – P. George Thomas seconded.

Discussion of Reports:

C: Pastor – no questions or discussion

D: Elders – no questions or discussion

E: Clerk – no questions or discussion

F: Transition Team for Structural Reorganization – no questions or discussion

G: Ministry of Spiritual Formation & Nurture -

Joanne Egner asked about paid nursery care. Mary Brownlow responded that the eighth graders that are currently covering the nursery are too young to be paid.

H: Ministry of Outreach -

There was a correction on p. 13 – should be 2016 Monthly Mission Collections.

I: Dominican Republic Projects – no questions or discussion

J: Ministry of Worship – no questions or discussion

K: Ministry of Stewardship -

John Langhus spoke about the solar panels on the roof of the parish hall installed by Norwich Technologies. It was paid for 50% by a grant from Green Mountain Power, and 50% from the Woodworth Fund. He said we should have zero electricity costs going forward.

L: Giving Committee – Barbara Duncan thanked Sonya Stover for all her work even though she was not present

N: Walter and Elizabeth Woodworth Fund

Jane Helms noted a math error on p. 18. The total project cost for the solar panels should be \$37,708.

O: Music Staff Report

Mary Brownlow noted that because of additional money becoming available from the Clevie White Fund, we were able to have Samantha Moffatt play the hammered dulcimer at the 9 pm Christmas Eve service.

P: Investment Committee – no discussion or questions.

John Severinghaus then invited discussion and consideration of adopting the proposed bylaw revisions, which are attached. Hillary White moved to adopt the bylaw revisions. Gary Brooks seconded.

Hillary briefly reviewed the changes.

- This is a simple structure and process.
- We will be a nimble/agile church in order to carry out our goals.
- The ministry model is continuing.
- Church council is back.

Bob Miller reviewed three big areas of change.

- The elimination of the following officers of the church: clerk, assistant clerk, moderator and assistant moderator. Church council will be back and will take on some of the previous Diaconate duties.
- Boards and committees are gone with the switch to the ministries model. Ideally there will be fewer leaders and more dynamic involvement from more people.
- There is a change in terms of office. All officers and leaders have one year terms, with the ability to serve up to five years. After a one year hiatus a person could come back to a position.

The elders voted to recommend these changes to the church. Dick McGaw asked if the name of the officers of each ministry would be “chair”. There was a short discussion of nomenclature.

Hillary amended her motion to change language in Article VI, paragraphs 2 and 3 to:

The goals of the Ministry Model are to: promote a Nimble/Agile Organization (within the structure of our Church Council and our Ministries); adopt a system of fluid circles of semi-self-management (what we now call Energy Groups or Ad Hoc Committees – guided by and answerable to our Ministries and/or Church Council); assign Tasks to these energy groups or to any other Church Council/Ministry-appointed groups so there is clarity and definition of the objectives and goals for each project; and assign Point People or Coordinators who lead the group tasked with a project and report back to their Ministries and/or Church Council. We will pursue these goals in a way that is driven by our overall mission as stated in our Covenant.

Our aspirational goals are most important, sprinkled throughout the organization: healing, nurturing one another, inspiring each other, communicating and connecting with one another and our community, and broadening participation. Our overarching organizational goals should help enable and facilitate these covenantal and aspirational goals.

Gary Brooks agreed to the amendment.

Susan White asked about the “nimble/agile” nomenclature vs. more church-related language.

Hillary replied that it is so we can be responsive to our church and outside community. Rita Severinghaus said that the words “faithfully responsive” resonated with her. Jane Helms suggested changing “Nimble/Agile” in the first paragraph to “an Agile Spirit-led Organization”. She also suggested the following language changes to the second paragraph: after the word “organization:” we add “being faithfully responsive,” before the word “healing”.

Hillary and Gary accepted these changes.

The vote to amend the bylaws changes was unanimous in favor. The vote to amend the bylaws was also voted unanimously in favor.

Barbara Duncan moved the NCC UCC Nominating Slate for 2017 as put forward by the Nominating Committee. Joanne Egner seconded.

Mary Brownlow brought up the need for nominations to the nominating committee. She also mentioned that we still need a Hospitality Coordinator and a second person to coordinate the Listen dinners.

Bob Miller noted an omission: that Jenn Langhus should be on the Ministry of Worship and Care.

The slate was accepted on a unanimous vote.

John Severinghaus turned the meeting over to the Vice Chair of the Church Council, Willemien Miller. John Severinghaus moved to close the meeting and Susan White seconded. The vote to close was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Webster

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS WINTER 2017

A work in progress...

Greetings from upstairs! In case you all were wondering what we are up to, the students have begun work on a multi-week project creating a large, woven net out of paper and producing many, many fish to go inside.

Based on the passage from Matthew 4:19 we have been designing our net with a exhibition in mind for the grown-ups to see and actively participate in...Stay tuned for more, and watch out, these young disciples are honing their fishing skills!

Danielle Taylor, Sunday School Coordinator

Book Discussion

"Silence reminds me to take my soul with me wherever I go."

This is how one little girl in a public school in little town in western North Dakota responded to author Kathleen Norris' writing prompts about noise and silence. As parents, that's something we hope for our children, that wherever they go, and for as long as they live, they carry within them their souls, their identity as beloved children of God. Toward this goal, we're offering a kids' book to help parents of young- through-elementary aged children develop their own spiritual vocabularies. We have 12 copies of a book written for 5th and 6th graders by Katherine Paterson, "Who Am I?" that parents can take home and read. Yes, it's a short book for kids, but it can also help parents think about how they might talk with their children about issues of life and faith.

Copies can be picked up from the back of the church (one per family, please), beginning in March. For those who want to discuss the book, we're planning a pizza dinner for the whole family, followed by activities for kids while parents have some discussion time, **Saturday April 29th, 5:30-7:30 pm.** If you have questions, contact Mary Brownlow or Ann Beams

New Member Profile: Smith & Ginny Reed



Smith and Ginny Reed moved to the Upper Valley from Minnesota in 1985. After 25+ years in Hanover, NH in 2012, they moved to Lake Morey in Fairlee. With this move, the drive to their church in New London - Kearsarge Community Presbyterian Church - became impractical. After much looking and visiting, Ginny and Smith are pleased to become a part of the NCC community.

Smith and Ginny both grew up in the St. Louis area. They sort of knew each other in high school through their Presbyterian church's youth group, and started dating when in college. Married in 1970, they have three children and four grandchildren. (An interesting fact is that when their second daughter, Karen, was in high school (early-mid 1990's), she worked in William Rigby's lab.)

Smith's career (a licensed professional engineer) has been primarily in the field of machine design, with notable experience in the design and manufacture of outdoor power equipment, consumer products and manufacturing processes and machinery. For the past 25 years, he has provided engineering expertise assistance to courts around the country helping jurors understand the technical issues of law suits before them. In spare time, he enjoys wood working, home improvement projects, and playing and enjoying music. When possible, long-distance trains are the way to travel.

Ginny has had two careers - first as a nurse and nurse-midwife, the second as a researcher (evaluation research) and teacher at the Geisel School of Medicine (course director for a required fourth-year course). She loves learning and has been 'back to school' three times since completing her undergraduate work. She'll be retiring in June and is looking forward to having more time to pursue her interests in distance running, having experiences with the grandchildren, and continuing to learn and be involved in her local community.

New Members Shari & David Gouwens Joined our church on Christmas Day



Norwich Congregational Church-200th Anniversary Timeline of Events

Below is a brief description of events we are planning to commemorate the church's 200th anniversary. We would love to hear your comments and ideas-please contact us at norwichcongregational200th@gmail.com

- March-we will have a celebration potluck dinner on March 25 to share our plans and to gather thoughts and ideas from the congregation.
- June 11-The children will perform a play commemorating the history of the church, with a celebration coffee hour afterwards.
- July- July (tentatively starting July 8th) we will have an exhibition in the parish hall and parlor depicting various aspects of the church's history.
- September-On September 16th we will host a homecoming celebration featuring former pastors and friends of the church.
- October 18 at 7 pm-There will be the first in a series of annual lectures given by guest speakers.
- November- November 19th is the 200th anniversary of the first service in our sanctuary. We will culminate our celebration year with a special service with both historical and contemporary elements. Deb, Sherri and George

From the Lifeline 50 Years Ago:

About A Hundred Years Ago

By the good graces of Marjorie Butler, I have received more information about Deacon Sylvester Morris – to whom the stained glass window of our church is dedicated. At a time when we are involved in the rededication of our meeting house such information is of particular interest.

Deacon Sylvester Morris lived in Norwich about a hundred years ago. He was in the prime of his life, and was an original, distinctive and positive thinker, actively carrying out his convictions. From early manhood he was opposed to slavery and, when all the abolitionists in Windsor County numbered less than ten, he cast the only ballot for the Liberty Party. Forty years later he again cast a solitary ballot for the candidate of the Prohibition Party.

Deacon Morris was well acquainted in Hanover, having been in business there and owning property on Main Street. In the time of fugitive slaves fleeing from the South, he was a conductor on the underground (railroad) and one of his stations for slaves was the home of an aged Negro woman who, for many years, lived near the south end of Main Street. It has not been learned yet whether he ever hid any of the escaped slaves in Norwich.

It is an established fact that assistance was provided for fleeing slaves on the way to Canada. For some years a Sewing Circle* existed in Norwich with the sole purpose of providing clothing and bedding for these people. This information was gleaned from a small record book which belongs to Dr. Richard Bartlett and has been displayed at meetings of the Norwich Historical Society.

This information about Sylvester Morris was obtained from “The Landmark” in an obituary written at the time of his death in 1886 at the age of 89.

Yours in Christ,
J. Yorke Peeler, Jr. (November 1967)

**Actually called the Norwich Female Abolition Society (1843-1850)*

Draft Church Council Minutes, February 19, 2017

Present: Ryan Calsbeek (Chair CC), Willemien Miller (VChair CC), Brittny Calsbeek (Ed.), Terri Ashley (Outreach), John Langhus (Bldg&Fin), Christopher Ashley (Worship), Hillary White (Past Chair), Mary Brownlow, (Pastor)

1. Mary asked each person to introduce themselves and give a brief reason why they were serving in their current Church role.
2. Strategies for increasing & improving involvement to broaden participation and avoid leadership burnout were discussed. Suggestions mentioned were: posting sign up sheets, using the colored papers in the pews, asking people what they were interested in doing/being part of, having a display similar to the holiday gift tree with various tasks listed, using a Facebook page. Two other specific items discussed: providing a visual chart or display that represents the current roles/duties/tasks and those people in the congregation performing them. Secondly the need for people to make coffee and clean up on Sundays. This discussion will continue at the next CC meeting.
3. Future Meetings: Each ministry has already had or has scheduled a meeting. Ryan asked that each representative convey to their ministry what was discussed today, asking for input, and to provide members of the Church Council with summaries and/or minutes of their meetings prior to the next CC meeting. The next two CC meetings were scheduled for after worship on March 19th and April 9th.
4. Mary presented the ad hoc group's planning regarding the 200th anniversary of the Norwich Church. Plans included: speakers, a banner, congregational celebrations and exhibits. The group plans to ask the Woodworth Fund for funding. Currently they are looking for more suggestions and feedback.

Submitted by Christopher Ashley



Emma and Sasha helped with the February Listen Dinner in WRJ



February Listen Dinner

March – April 2017 Mission Offering

One Great HOUR OF SHARING

One Great Hour of Sharing, as part of Our Churches Wider Mission, is the special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that carries God's message of love and hope to people in crisis. The UCC works with international partners to provide sources of clean water, food, education and health care, small business micro-credit, advocacy and resettlement for refugees and displaced persons, and emergency relief and rehabilitation. OGHS also supports domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response.

Words cannot capture the anguish of people when they lose everything in a disaster or must leave it behind while fleeing war or conflict. Through One Great Hour of Sharing, lives are literally changed daily. Your support provides clean water, food, medicines, shelter, healthcare, education and so much more.

In 2015, the OGHS offering was \$2.2 million. An additional \$831 thousand was given to the United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries in support of specific disaster relief efforts. You can find OGHS on the web: www.ucc.org/oghs, and on Facebook and Twitter.

On average, of every dollar given to One Great Hour of Sharing, 95 cents is used directly for mission programming, and the remaining 5 cents is used to create interpretation materials. Administrative costs are paid by gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission National Basic Support.

To donate, use the yellow "Mission Offering" envelopes in the pews. Thank you!
Outreach Ministry

Celebration Pot Luck Supper

On Saturday, March 25, we will have a Celebration Pot Luck Supper at 5:30. The main point is to have fun, but we will also be kicking off our 200th Anniversary activities. In honor of our church building's 200th birthday, you may

- bring "historical" food for the pot luck
- wear a historical costume
- bring a song or poem dating from 1817
- or just come to enjoy each other's company

We will be sharing a timeline of other Anniversary events and looking for your ideas to make them more memorable. See you there!

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