

The NCC UCC *LIFELINE*

September/October 2017

Pastor's Thoughts

Who owns the church? This might seem like an odd question: we are Congregationalists, so doesn't the congregation own the church? Or at least the physical aspects of the church?

In some Baptist and Pentecostal churches, church property is owned directly by the pastor and his family. If you belong to a denomination with a more hierarchical structure like the Roman Catholic Church, all congregational property belongs to the archdiocese. But regardless of the tradition or polity, people will invest (whether time, money, or devotion) in churches, and this is both wonderful and complicated. The natural human instinct for ownership, or territory, or power seems to come into play. And we even see this acted out in the pews.

John Coke Fowler, writing in England in 1844, gives a medieval example "So in a quotation from the twelfth chapter of a synod at Exeter, holden by Bishop Quivil, in the year 1287, we have the following passage [13/14] translated from the Latin: 'We have also heard that the parishioners of divers places do oftentimes wrangle about their seats in church, two or more claiming the same seat; whence arises great scandal to the Church, and the divine offices are sore let and hindered: wherefore we decree that none shall henceforth call any seat in the church his own, save noblemen and patrons; but he who shall first enter, shall take his place where he will.'" Back in the 1200's, "noblemen and patrons" were given rights that were not shared by all, and the rest were "first come, first served."

400 years on, a church at Watertown, Connecticut, suffered similar problems, and passed the following rule: " It is ordered that the next Sabbath Day every person shall take his or her seat appointed to them, and not go to any other seat where others are placed : And if any one of the inhabitants shall act contrary, he shall for the first offence be reproved by the deacons, and for a second pay a fine of two shillings, and a like fine for each offence ever after."* I am trying to imagine fining some poor person who wanders into **our** Sunday worship and sits in the "wrong" pew!

In our own church, buying a pew was a way to raise funds for construction, and the annual dues on that pew functioned as pledges do today: to support the operating budget of the church. Thomas Emerson, who paid for the Revere bell in our steeple in 1817, also purchased a number of pews, so he was a substantial supporter of the church (or the South Meeting House, as it was then known). We know from records in Tracy hall that he sold his right to several pews to Jacob Burton in 1835 with some very specific instructions: "Thos. Emerson to Jacob Burton and others for \$200: certain number of pews situated in the South Meeting House - #13 seat on north side of broad aisle, also #47 on south side being a wall pew, also #9 one third more or less of this one on south side of broad aisle, also #32 on north side being a wall pew. All in trust to aforesaid for support of minister if Congregational Calvinistic and strictly Orthodox. NB Provided that should church become unorthodox it will revert back to me and my heirs. I also give use of my own pew, formerly occupied by myself to said church for the time being, saving 2 seats for Mr. and Mrs Russell (Emerson's sister and brother-in-law)." Similar conditions were given when silver cups, platters and pitcher were given to the church for use at communion...that the church remain "orthodox and Calvinistic." Later, Thomas Emerson sold pew #14 with fewer conditions.

Thomas Emerson invested time, energy and devotion to the church. Did he then “own” a piece of it? After reading all those pew numbers and descriptions, I realized that “south” and north” pews became “east” and “west” pews when the church was moved and rotated 90 degrees. Then the pews were removed and replaced altogether less than 100 years after they were originally built. Emerson’s heirs no longer live here, have special seats, nor any say in whether we are Calvinistic and Orthodox. All of that effort to control the use of space – not to mention whom gets to sit where – has become a historical curiosity rather than a part of our congregational life and mission.

Nowadays, we raise funds for our annual budget or for special projects through the generosity of members and friends, with no expectation of recompense in terms of seating or preferred theologies. We think of belonging rather than ownership. Nowadays, we do not give “noblemen and patrons” special seats or treatment. Though I do notice that people tend to sit in “their” favorite pew, this is not a mark of status or longevity. Sometimes I see that people feel some “ownership” of special programs or projects, but our polity is a safeguard against those ventures becoming solely an expression of personal need or vanity.

In the coming months and years, we may decide to make some changes. Pews may be painted to cover scratch and kick marks. Pews may be installed to allow for more comfortable seating. Pews may be removed to make more space. No one will own them, this time around. The flooring may change, as it has several times in the past. Lighting and sound – technologies that our ancestors could hardly imagine – may be improved. We do all these things as faithful stewards (not owners!) of the wonderful place built 200 years ago, that has been changed and improved many times over.

I think that, when it comes to discerning the future of the church, whether it is space, furnishings, theology, or governance, we need reminding. The church belongs to God. The mission of the church is to follow where God leads. We get to be participants, and to offer, with no strings attached, our “time, talent, substance and influence.” We do this in response to the extravagant love God offers us. Our generosity will always lag behind God’s because God is continually surprising us with new life, new possibilities, and amazing grace. We have learned to share our pews with each other and with friends from outside our congregation. Thanks be to God!

Mary

* from Earle, Alice Morse [The Sabbath in Puritan New England, 1892](#)



Guest Preacher Connie Moser with Priscilla Vincent



Guest Preacher Jim Antal with Susan White and Bob Miller

The Norwich Congregational Church, UCC
invites you to our

200th Anniversary Homecoming Celebration
Saturday, September 16:
4-6 pm community open house
6 pm light supper
7pm gathering in the Sanctuary
followed by Birthday Cake!

Stop by and enjoy our 200th Anniversary Historical exhibit in the Parish Hall and
Hallway. (Thank you Deb Van Arman and Shari Gowens)

All are welcome!



200th Anniversary Lecture on Faith and Society – Oct. 18, 2017 at 7:30 pm

Randall Balmer will present: “God is Still Speaking, Are We Listening?: 500 Years of Protestantism, 200 Years in Norwich”

Randall Balmer, an Episcopal priest, holds the John Phillips Chair in Religion, the oldest endowed professorship at Dartmouth College. Prior to coming to Dartmouth in 2012, he was a professor of American religious history at Columbia University for twenty-seven years and a visiting professor at Yale, Princeton, Northwestern and Emory universities. He was a visiting professor at Yale Divinity School from 2004 to 2008. He is a columnist for the *Valley News*, and his Op-eds have appeared in newspapers across the country, including the *Des Moines Register*, the *Washington Post*, the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, the *Washington Post*, the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and the *New York Times*. He is the author of more than a dozen books, including *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* and *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter*. His second book, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, now in its fifth edition, has been made into an award-winning, three-part series for PBS.

Sunday School Fall News 2017

Welcome Back! So many exciting things to report about Sunday School coming into this new year!

First our core curriculum: We so enjoyed using the online curriculum called “Seasons of the Spirit” that we decided to continue with this program for another year. If you would like to look for yourself, the URL is www.seasonsonline.ca. This is a lectionary-based, year round curriculum offering an enormous wealth of resources for us to tap into. From music and art suggestions, to classroom projects, to connecting current events with weekly lectionary readings, I have barely tapped into what this program offers and hope to dig deeper this year!

WHAT’S NEW? Jenn Langhus has spearheaded an effort to incorporate more music into our Sunday School room by teaching our kids traditional Sunday school songs that many learned as children themselves. Think Father Abraham, Jesus Love Me, This Little Light, etc... Gunnar Langhus will generously donate his time and talents to visit our class every other week for a 10-15 minute sing-a-long with the kids. On November 19 during church we hope to have a presentation for everyone to show off what we have learned!

Additionally, we want to welcome two other Confirmation Class graduates, Emma Taylor and Sonja Lippman, who will work in our nursery for the school year.
Danielle Taylor, Sunday School Coordinator

Ministry of Religious Education Update

The Ministry of Religious Education has been working on a Statement of Purpose for Education Throughout Life for the NCC UC. The goals of our education program are:

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

We welcome comments and suggestions as we prepare to bring it to Church Council.
Dawn Thomas, Laura Beliveau, Brittny Calsbeek, Molly Caterini, Danielle Taylor

Ministry of Religious Education introduces the OWL Program

This year, our church is cooperating with the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Upper Valley to offer a program for our young people. It is called ‘Our Whole Lives’ (OWL) and is the values-based sexuality education program published by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. This fall, we will be running the module for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. The Norwich Congregational Church, UCC, the UU Congregation of the Upper Valley and the North Universalist Chapel Society will present this dynamic, interactive, age-appropriate class for our kids. While Hollywood spends billions trying to show kids only one side of sexuality, the OWL program at this age level focuses on our values of Respect, Relationship, and Responsibility.

We invite parents who are curious about this program - or who already know this would be great for their child - to meet at the UU Meetinghouse (320 Route 5 South, Norwich, VT) on Sunday, September 24th at 4PM. We will get to know one another, the program, and the teachers as well as work out the best schedule for our busy families.

This ten-workshop curriculum is designed to help children ages nine through twelve to gain the knowledge, life principles, and skills they need to understand and express their sexuality in holistic, life-enhancing ways.

Like the other Our Whole Lives programs for different age groups, this comprehensive, developmentally appropriate program introduces key topics like values, body image, gender and sexual identity, peer pressure, and healthy relationships with sensitivity and inclusiveness. The underlying values of the program reflect the justice-oriented traditions of its publishers

The updated second edition introduces new content on body image, social media/Internet, and consent. Participants will read [It's Perfectly Normal](#) by Robie H. Harris.

Opera North Resident Artists

This summer we were fortunate enough to have the music of Opera North's Resident Artists for 4 Sundays. We are grateful to the Clevie White Fund for ongoing support and sponsorship of the Resident Artists participation in our summer series.



Centering Circle Update

Centering Circle is our congregation's contemplative prayer group. Using the ancient practice of centering prayer or the "prayer of the heart," we meet every week for times of silence, listening, and speaking. This fall, we will be reading a book by Brother David Stendl-Rast titled [Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness](#). If anyone would like to join us in this book study, please feel free to come by. We meet in the parlor on Tuesdays from 5:30-6:50, and will begin this book discussion on September 5. Copies of the book will be available at the Norwich Bookstore.

Adult Education: Second Hour October 1 following worship

David Gouwens will teach a class: "Here I Stand!: Martin Luther on Faith"

Five hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther issued his Ninety-Five Theses against indulgences, commemorated annually as Reformation Day. This session invites you into the heart of Luther's Reformation theology: his 'Here I stand' conviction that 'justification by faith' is 'the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.' What did Luther mean by this? Why was it for him good news? How might it be good news for us today?

Save the Date!

How to Listen so other will Speak And Speak so others will Listen

Caring Communication for Our Congregation

November 4, 2017 – 9:00 am-2:30 pm

We live in a social and political climate that is seemingly more polarized than ever. Whole segments of our country feel abandoned economically; social issues have become battle cries rather than issues bringing us together for dialogue and too many political leaders seem to function in ways which deepens the divide rather than healing wounds. We, as a nation, seem to have lost the art of talking with each other in caring and meaningful ways.

With that backdrop, the Church Council would like to offer an opportunity for our church community to come together and explore how to promote healthy, caring and effective communication within our church community - which we hope would then spread out into our world. The workshop will explore potholes we often fall into when we are trying to listen to or speak about difficult issues. We'll have a chance to explore factors that impact healthy communications and have the opportunity to practice effective listening and speaking. The Circle Process will be introduced, and we'll have a chance to think about how this process might be helpful in our congregation. We will have a chance to practice that process as well.

Nancy Brown has been a trainer in this field for over 20 years and comes highly recommended by our friends from the Bradford Congregational Church. She has a background in mediation, conflict transformation, Healthy Congregations and human services administration. She works hard to make the content meaningful and to ensure the group has some fun along the way. We hope you will join us on Nov. 4, 2017 from 9:00 to 2:30. Please arrive by 8:45 to chat and pick up a cup of coffee and a treat before the beginning of the workshop, which will begin promptly at 9:00. Lunch will be provided.

The Council encourages all of the church's ministries to attend and hopes many others will want to participate as well. Please let anyone on the Church Council know if you have any questions or comments.

Outreach Ministry Update -- An overview of O.M. activities in 2017

➤ Offerings

As of August 31st have completed four 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.

Mission offerings for the balance of 2017:

- In September and October the Offering goes to 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 are contributing to a **Back to School Program** which donates supplies to children in foster care, and then in December we will contribute money for their **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.
- **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 September 13 at 7 pm in Mary's office.
Outreach Ministry Leadership Team: Terri Ashley, Doug Britton, Jeff Nielsen, Heidi Webster & Stan Williams

Outreach Ministry Mission Offering -- September & October 2017

Neighbors in Need

The 2017 NIN theme is "Protect the Sacred: In a Just World, Clean Water is Life."

Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the UCC 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 the 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 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. Funding is provided through donations to the Neighbors in Need offering.

Neighbors in Need helps make a better world possible.

To make a donation, please use the yellow envelopes in the pews, during September and October

DRAFT Church Council Minutes -- August 6, 2017

Present: Ryan Calsbeek (Chair CC), Willemien Miller (VChair CC), Mary Brownlow, (Pastor), Terri Ashley (Outreach), Doug James (Buildings&Finance), Christopher Ashley (Worship),
Others: Marty James, Hillary White

Prayer: Mary

Minutes of 6-18-2017 were approved unanimously.

From the Agenda:

A. Updates from the Four Missions:

MofB&F:

-The proposal to repair the stained glass window in the Sanctuary (\$18,000) and the proposal to refurbish the clear glass windows in the Sanctuary (\$59,200) are moving forward. The majority of the funds have been pledged by individual donors with the remaining amount, \$25,750, coming from a grant approved by the Woodworth Fund Committee.

Motion: Terri moved that the Church Council approve the grant for \$25,750- in two payments: September 2017 and June 2018- from the Woodward Fund for the restoration of the Sanctuary windows. 2nd: Doug, Unanimous

-Christopher reported that work to repair the clock's hourly bell ringing is planned for the end of August.

No updates from the other missions occurred as they had not met in July.

B. Review and Discussion of Guest Ministers/Sermons During Mary's Break:

-Following considerable discussion of the sermon delivered by Jim Antal, Tacy's reaction to it, and other members' reactions, no action was taken other than to reaffirm the need for Nancy Brown's workshop on Healthy Conversations in the fall.

C. Update on Nancy Brown and Healthy Communications:

-Workshop is scheduled for Saturday, November 4, 2017 from 9AM-2:30PM with lunch included. The focus will be: "How to listen so that others will speak and how to speak so that others will listen." Members of the CC recognized that we needed a campaign make the congregation aware of the workshop and to promote attendance.

By consensus the CC agreed that Mary could invite other church groups and we would apply for a \$2,000 grant from the Woodworth Fund to pay for Nancy's fee and costs, and the lunch. Ryan will apply for the grant.

D. Pastoral Concerns:

-Daily UV: Nothing to report; Mary has not had a conversation with them yet.

-Discussion on the need to "take the temperature" of the congregation regarding possible changes to the Sanctuary. This led to Doug reporting that he had identified a flooring retailer who could match our current carpet; this possibility might reduce the cost and change the discussion. It was also suggested to do this after Nancy Brown's workshop.

E Other Business

-The CC was reminded of the Pastoral Evaluation. It was suggested that this be discussed at our next meeting. Willemien will bring information on the process from the previous evaluation.

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