



Tidings

Monthly news for members & friends from Niantic Community Church

December 2011

FROM THE PASTOR AND TEACHER

Dear Friends,

Advent gets squeezed between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Seasonal greetings jump from Turkey-Day to Santa Claus. Not much Advent in there — which makes sense, because Advent doesn't turn a profit.

But Advent is for prophets. "Turn back!" they say. "Watch where you're going!" From 8,000 years ago to now, God's prophets have an amazingly consistent message. They see the shopping season as a massive holiday juggernaut about to run us over, and shout their loudest to yank us out of the way.

Advent is for penitence: for asking what's gone wrong. Before a doctor can come up with a diagnosis, she has to see what the problems are. The prophet-doctors know warning signs. Spending to acquire stuff, instead of giving where there's need. Trying to recreate a treasured memory, instead of treasuring the surprising presence of the Holy One here and now. Misplacing our trust, by relying on human institutions that have all the sin of human beings, only impersonal and magnified by power.

Advent is for daring to look what's wrong in the face, in your own life and in the world, and crying to God for relief. The prophet-doctors know the cure: it will always involve a sudden injection of the flickering, searing light of God's mystery. That's free of charge — but it will change you deeply.

Advent is for preparing: God will send a healing gift, and there's clutter blocking our souls. Here's good news: that kind of preparation is inexpensive, and you can do it with only what you have on hand. Give the gifts of your time and affection — they are worth more than what you could buy. Make decorations — holiday catalogs give you lots of paper to cut up. Russ Kirby has planned an "Advent for Giving" that will help youth remember that gifts at this time of year are really supposed to be for the Christ Child — and anyone who, like him, is hungry and impoverished. Check out "2011 Simplify the Holidays Challenge" on www.newdream.org.



simplify the holidays

It gets dark early, these days, so try this: turn down the lamps and light a candle. Say: "God of Advent, make me ready. Bring your power and your light into my darkness. Come, Holy One."

Advent blessings to you,

Pastor John A. Nelson

Worship in December

Sunday Worship at 9:00 & 11:15am

December 4th: Second Sunday of Advent

Texts: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Pastor John A. Nelson: "The Re-gifted Gospel"

December 11th: Third Sunday of Advent

Texts: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126 (or Luke 1:47-55); 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

The Annual Christmas Cantata

December 18th: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55 (or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26); Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Pastor John A. Nelson: "Quiet Revolutions"

December 21st (Wednesday, 7pm): The Service of Light

Christmas is a time of joy and thanksgiving for many. Yet hard realities do enter our lives, making it difficult to share in the festivities of the holiday season. With messages of cheer all around, there is little space for living with grief, or depression, or fear.

But God has a word of comfort and vision for all of us whose hearts are aching. Held on the longest night of the year, the Service of Light (sometimes referred to as "Blue Christmas") is a quiet, hopeful time of worship. Through scripture, song, and prayer we remember the light that forever shines through the darkness.

December 24th • Christmas Eve

Texts: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

5:00pm: Family Christmas Eve service, with Living Crèche

8:00pm: A Service of Lessons and Carols

11:00pm: Candlelight Communion Service

December 25th • Christmas Day

One service only, at 10AM
Come as you are;
pajamas welcome!

Texts: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Pastor John A. Nelson, telling a Christmas story for all ages.



Church School for Adults

Sessions will take place between the 9 & 11:15 services, in the Fellowship Room. Come to one, some, or all: you are always welcome! Church School for adults helps us to better know our scripture, our tradition, our fellow congregants, and ourselves.

Childcare available if requested! — please speak to Russ or Pastor John

In Advent we began another timely discussion — this one focused on the materialism of our society, and the Bible's invitation to turn away and live in the richness of God's grace.

December 4th

No class: please enjoy the Alternative Christmas Market in the Dining Hall!

December 11th

Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption Society Today: "The Decalogue"

December 18th

Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption Society Today: "Countering Caesar"

December 25th

No Adult church school!

Christian Education and Youth

Russ Kirby, DRE-YM

In December, we are celebrating an “Advent of Giving” with our children and youth. Some time ago, a parent mentioned that her child was more into the “getting” of Christmas, than the “giving.” She was looking for ways to help her child learn to give during the Christmas season. Out of that request came the “Advent of Giving” idea.

Each weekend during Advent we have a different opportunity for your child and family to practice giving within the family of Niantic Community Church with wonderfully simple experiences to share the love of the Christmas Lord with others.

Sunday, December 4 “December Diaper Drive” for the New London Diaper Bank. Bring 1-2 packages of new, disposable diapers for larger children, or pull-ups.

Sunday, December 11 Toy Drive for the “Christmas Toy Project.” Bring in a new toy (under \$10 value), to be given to children of incarcerated mothers. Try to bring something appropriate for a child the same age and gender as the youth or child bringing it so we get a good mix.

Saturday, December 17, 10 AM-1 PM Kids and Cookies Project. All youth and children, parents and those young at heart, bring 1 or 2 tubes of your favorite cookie dough without nuts or peanut butter. We’ll bake them, enjoy lunch together and then take them to civil servants and others in the community who will enjoy them!

Sunday, December 18, All Youth and Children, 6:30 PM. Join all of your NCC family, lifting up voices in song to usher in the last week before Christmas. This is a great time to contribute a “joyful noise” to God as we make way for the Son!

The Senior Youth Summer Mission Trip next year will be to Chicago, Illinois, June 22-30, 2012! We are still accepting registrations, as of this writing. Registration is a \$60 non-refundable deposit per person, and there are *4 registration scholarships available*, thanks to a couple very generous families. If you need a scholarship, please talk with Russ. Details on the trip can be found on the church website.

Outreach Committee

NCC Alternative Marketplace December 4 and 11

No need to spend your time in traffic jams and lines at the mall, do your holiday shopping at NCC and give gifts with a purpose.



Coat and Sweatshirt Drive

The Outreach Committee is collecting gently used adult and children's winter coats, fleece jackets and winter vests as well as adult size sweatshirt and sweatpants over the next few weeks. The adult clothing will be brought to the St James Shelter and Homeless Hospitality Center and the children's jackets to the New London School system or Covenant Shelter system for distribution.

What would Jesus Buy? Find out at movie night, Friday, Dec 2, 7-9 p.m. Free admission, refreshments served, at this funny and thought provoking take on consumerism and the struggle to remember what Christmas is all about. Join us at the big screen in the multi-purpose room. Call the church office to reserve your seats. (860)739-6208. Rated PG.



Open, Affirming, Reconciling - Then and Now

Just over 15 years ago, Niantic Community Church set out on a mission to become more inclusive and open its doors to everyone. It took nearly 6 years to accomplish this extraordinary task, but with the hard work and drive of a number of people in the congregation, Niantic Community Church voted to become an Open, Affirming, Reconciling Congregation in January 2001. Those of you that were members at that time may remember what the process included, but there are many of us that are new to NCC. Below is an explanation of that challenging journey and what has occurred since the vote was taken.

Niantic Community Church's Journey in becoming Open, Affirming, Reconciling Congregation

May 1996 - Prudential Board approved the establishment of an ad-hoc committee to form a study proposal of our church becoming an open, affirming/reconciling congregation. This decision was the result of the New England Annual Conference {UMC} passing a resolution for all churches to engage in an intentional study of homosexuality and the church. The committee was comprised of Ellen Ashburn, Ellen McCormick, Frank Mirecki, Judy Sleights and Ron Johnson as Chair.

March - June 1997 - NCC held six informational sessions around homosexuality and the church, and a discussion of the issues of becoming an open, affirming/reconciling congregation. These sessions included:

- 1} What have the journeys been of other churches who have become open, affirming/reconciling?
 - 2} What are the human realities {faces} of homosexuality and what does science say about homosexuality?
 - 3} What does the Bible say about homosexuality?
 - 4} A joint meeting with members of the local PFLAG {Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays}.
 - 5} A joint meeting with the People's Forum of New London and specifically their experience with being "shut out" by the church.
 - 6} How do we minister to the LGBT {Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender} community?
- After these informational sessions, it was determined

that the NCC congregation was not ready to take a vote to become more inclusive.

July - August 2001 - The ad-hoc committee, now a task force, conducted four "listening meetings" to discuss the our church becoming an Open and Affirming/Reconciling Congregation. This enabled the entire congregation to share their views and have questions answered. The task force {Ellen Ashburn, John Mahon, Rich Basham, Peg Herzberg, Ron Johnson and Ed Hemstreet as Convener} now became an advocate for NCC to become OAR as it felt that it was time to hold the vote after the four information sessions.

January 13, 2002 - A special meeting of the entire congregation was held to vote on the recommendation to become an Open and Affirming/Reconciling Congregation. After members shared their views and stories, a vote was held and NCC became an Open, Affirming/Reconciling Congregation. The task force was kept in existence to find ways to make our church open and welcoming to all persons.

January 30, 2005 - The task force became a standing committee of the church whose mission was written into the constitution of the church. Initial members of the committee were John Mahon, Judy Sleights, Dave Mut, Ed Hemstreet, Judy DeVey, Marion McKenzie and Ron Johnson as chair.

One might ask at this point....."Now that NCC became an Open, Affirming, Reconciling Congregation what does that really mean and how do we demonstrate our inclusiveness to all?" Stay tuned to next month's Tidings and your questions will be answered.

For now, **please mark your calendars for January 29, 2012 to celebrate "God's Yes!"**

Blessings,
Jackie Kalajainen
OAR Chair



An Update on the Barbara Fund

Some years ago my wife Bette and I established a fund to offer accredited academic college courses to qualified inmates at York Correctional Institution. You were part of that endeavor with your generous contributions and we thought you would like to know where the program stands now.

After an initial outpouring of individual gifts and grants, income slowed to a trickle. Corporate grants sustained us for the next three years, but even they began to fall away. Finally, we reached a total operating budget of nearly \$46,100.

But that figure does not go very far since courses at most colleges and universities begin at \$7000 per student. To keep our program functioning, we explored other venues. This summer we were fortunate to be invited to join the prestigious Wesleyan University's Center for Prison Education. Our association with their program will greatly enhance our grant writing success.

A second academic program we have joined is A Prisoner's Guerrilla Correspondence Program. Sound funny? Yes I suppose it does, but the work it does in guiding inmates through academic programs, from high school through graduate school, is phenomenal. With this program, we can reach more students and be a greater influence in their academic journeys.

All programs are accredited, taught by university faculty, and all credits earned are transferable, and the courses are relatively inexpensive...\$700 to \$800 per course per student. Application for our students is the same as for students everywhere. They take examinations, write essays, and list past academic achievements. Currently, we have three students enrolled in business, sociology, and math. Three more are waiting their acceptance letters. We are looking forward to a significant growth in the program with your help and God's grace.

Peace & Thanks
John and Bette Mahon

History Quiz & Trivia

Each Sunday the children gather at the front of the church to listen to Rev. Nelson give "A Thought for Young Minds". The children then head off to their Church School classes. The question this month is when did Sunday School begin in our church?

Future of Summer Suppers...

At the November 21, 2011 meeting of the Prudential Board, the following motion was approved: "The Prudential Board will call a congregational meeting in February 2012 to reconsider summer suppers or replace them with different types of community outreach, proposals for which will have been collected by current Vice-President Cindy King."

One Table, Many Meals—On Sale Now!

Looking for the perfect gift for the person who has everything; the unexpected guest; or that forgotten relative? Look no further! Shop locally, in your church office. ***One Table, Many Meals*** is the NCC cookbook chock full of 624 tasty, tried and true recipes for those who like to cook and those who like to eat. \$10



From the Parish Nurse

Marie LaTourette



Childhood Vaccinations - Mistrust lingers with some young parents today because they have no experience with vaccine preventable diseases.

They are more afraid of the vaccine than the disease. Please talk frankly with your pediatrician. The MMR vaccine has been one of the most prominent targets despite the lack of evidence linking it to Autism.

Marriage is Good For The Heart - Happily wedded people who undergo bypass surgery are more than three times as likely to be alive 15 years later than their unmarried counterparts, according to an online study in *Health Psychology*.

Christmas Shopping - Everyone does hair-cuts and oil changes and movie nights and dining out so why not support out local merchants and give gift certificates this year.

Alzheimer's Support Groups

Waterford Public Library
1st Thursday 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

Waterford Senior Center
2nd Thursday 10:00 a.m.

Have a wonderful Christmas,
Marie

Annual Christmas Toy Project

Wednesday, December 14

9:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.



Niantic Community Church is the host for the annual Christmas Toy Project- an amazing undertaking by area churches and individuals. This project ensures that the children of mothers at York Correctional Institution will receive gifts "from their mom" each year.

How can you help? There are many ways. You can donate gifts and place them in a box in the narthex or outside the church office beginning in mid-November. Gifts for children ages infant through 16 are needed. Please be mindful when purchasing that these will be mailed to the recipients. Smaller and sturdier gifts are best. We also need gift wrap, gift bags, ribbon, gift tags, tape and mailing tape. NCC Outreach sponsors a portion of the postage costs, but additional dollars are always necessary. If you care to contribute in a monetary way, just make your check payable to NCC with "Christmas Toy Project Postage" or "Christmas Toy Project Gifts" (if you are unable to shop) in the memo line. And please, join us if you are able on Wednesday, December 14 from 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Stop in for any part of the day that you can.

From the Community Minister



In January I will celebrate four wonderful years here at Niantic Community Church. It's hard to believe. During that time, I have been blessed with the opportunity to be a part of many joyful and spiritually enriching experiences, not the least of which have been several labyrinth walks. Parish Life has sponsored walks that have come to us, and walks that were at other locations. Some were indoors and some were outside. Volunteers picked up labyrinths on loan from as far as two hours away while other events involved facilitators and their labyrinths coming to us. A couple years ago, Parish Life designated chili cook-off proceeds toward the purchase of our own portable labyrinth and did so again this year with the proceeds from the Calendar Dinner.

I am pleased to announce that we now have in our possession, one, a' la Chartres – Vision Quest, 24 foot, poly canvas-8 circuit labyrinth. The staff opened it recently to make sure it was all in order and a reverent silence filled the multi-purpose room as we looked at the new labyrinth. It was purchased from The Labyrinth Company in Riverside, Connecticut.

Great thanks to all who supported the events that made this addition to our ministry possible. To quell the concerns of a few folks who wondered where on earth we would keep such a massive item, I just took measurements for the storage box I am about to purchase, and we'll need a box that is 15" x 20" x 22". It rolls up real nicely into a nifty little bundle about the size of small comforter. So small, yet so powerful.

A group will be meeting this week to begin planning our labyrinth ministry and if you feel called to be a part of it, please join us. We are meeting Thursday, Dec. 1 at 7:00 p.m. Our first labyrinth walk will be scheduled soon, and Pastor John will be blessing this ancient spiritual tool for transformation. I hope you'll join us to learn more about walking this sacred path, and come to experience our Vision Quest labyrinth for yourself.

Peace and abundant blessings,
Patty Chaffee
Community Minister

The Peace Project.....yours and mine by Sue Basham

Peace is something that we all pray for. The Peace Project has become a passion for me, and is an effort to increase awareness about bullying. As a teacher I was a part of our school's Student Teacher Assistance Team (STAT). This was a subject we dealt with often.

Not until these last few years when a big part of the news has been suicides related to bullying, did it hit me that I needed to do my part to stop this. As a church we have many opportunities to educate ourselves, our children and our community.

Through programs offered by the Kaleidoscope Children's Theater and National Guard we have an opportunity to begin our own anti-bullying campaign, instilling a spirit of peace in our community and beyond.

We all know someone who is or has been bullied. Please be a part of this effort to make peace among our children and youth.... and make bullying a thing of the past.

There are many ways you can get involved. Volunteers are needed to plan Peace Project events, schedule speakers, help out at the events, supply refreshments or just dialogue about what we can do to make a difference.

I know you want to be involved. Call me to tell me how (860-442-8671) or leave a message in the church office and I'll get back to you.

Andy Sherwood and Friends present

Christmas in New London

A Jazz Concert to Benefit Habitat for
Humanity of Southeastern Connecticut



Friday, December 9, at 7:00 P.M.

First Baptist Church, 268 State Street

New London, Connecticut

For tickets call: 860.447.0388 or

860.442.7890

or visit the Habitat Office, 377 Broad Street,

New London

Suggested Donation: \$12 Adults, \$6 Children

History Quiz Answer

Answer: In 1820 four women gathered the children together in the Congregational Meeting House to learn about their religion. There were many adults who were opposed to this and believed that the only way to worship God was to attend church services. The women persisted and were given the "privilege of the gallery" and they met with the children between the morning and afternoon services.

Trivia: The Methodist Sabbath School was organized in 1856.

The Healing Art of Photography - Take II

A continuation of our interactive
conversation about the discovery of God
from behind the lens.

"It doesn't matter if you don't have a sophisticated camera, if you have never studied photography...what matters is that something intimate and precious and sacred is being brought to life and shared with another. That's what healing is all about."

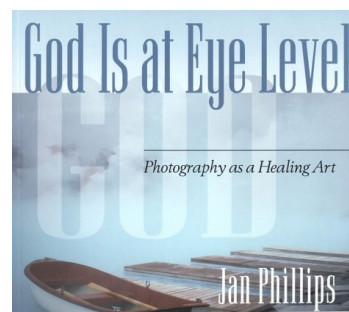
-Jan Phillips

1st Thursday

7:00-9:00 p.m.

Monthly

Beginning November 3



This is an interactive program that will require use of a camera, developing prints, and time outside of the group session. God Is at Eye Level by Jan Phillips, is necessary for group discussion.

Register in the church office at (860)739-6208 or email questions to

Patty@NianticCommunityChurch.org.

Books can be obtained through Amazon.com or Jan Phillips website, www.JanPhillips.com or ask us for help.

Niantic Community Church

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9:00 a.m.
and
11:15 a.m.

Pastor & Teacher:

John A. Nelson

Community Minister:

Patty Chaffee

Director of Religious Education and Youth

Ministries:

Russ Kirby

Church Secretary:

Judy Snitkin

Parish Nurse:

Marie LaTourette

Music Director:

Paul Althouse

Children's Center Director:

Kathy Tiller

*Deadline for the January edition of Tidings
is Dec. 15th.*

*Please e-mail submissions to
Tidings@TheDatums.com*