



Niantic Community Church

# Tidings

March 2024

Monthly news for members & friends  
from Niantic Community Church

## WELCOME TO NCC!

We are an Open, Affirming, Reconciling  
Congregation.

A Federated Church of the United Church of  
Christ and the United Methodist Church.

No matter who you are, and where you are on  
your life's journey, you are welcome here.



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Easter is early this year, so we are preparing early. During the season of Lent, we have been focusing on Covenants in worship. Covenants God has with us, and covenants that we have with one another. Covenants still hold, even if we do not always hold to them. Perhaps the most familiar covenant is the marriage covenant, which includes in the traditional vows: “...To love and to cherish, from this day forward, until we are parted by death.” This holds on good days and bad days, days apart and days together, days of sickness and health, and so on. In the same way, God calls us into covenant; and that holds whether we are feeling spiritual or not, successful or not, inspired or not. The focus of a covenant is on the relationship, not the outcome. Even Jesus faced temptations in the wilderness, when his covenant with God was tested. And it held steady on, of course!

As we prepare for this early Easter this year, I’d like to invite you into a time of consideration of your covenants with each other and with God. Some of these covenants are clear, others may be things we take for granted, and some may be challenging right now. God's covenants are all around us, hidden in plain sight: water, air, light, land, stone, bread, in the Word, etc.

By the time Easter arrives, and the disciples are looking in the empty tomb, the covenant that held them then, will still be holding us.

Lenten Blessings,

*Rev Erica*

P.S. In previous churches, people asked me sometimes what I'm reading and watching. A snapshot follows on the next page:

(continued)

Rev. Erica Avena March article, cont.

Reading:

*Between the Listening and the Telling* by Mark Yaconelli

*The Other side of Prospect* by Nicholas Dawidoff,

*Ambition and Survival: Becoming a Poet* by Christian Wiman,

*Building the City Beautiful: the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* by David Brownlee;

Podcast Listening: <https://faith.yale.edu/media/listeners-dare>



### [Listeners Dare | YCFC](#)

How can we develop the courage and charity and generosity to listen? The virtuous posture of a listener carries so much weight in the rare achievement of mutual understanding and the miracle of communication. When you factor in the concept of listening to the Word of God, the stakes go up! Will Willimon (Duke Divinity School) joins Evan Rosa to discuss the act of listening and the rare achievement it seems to be; the definition and purpose of a sermon, and what that might mean for its listeners; how to cultivate the charity and courage to listen; and the inherent risk involved in genuinely and generously listening to the gospel.

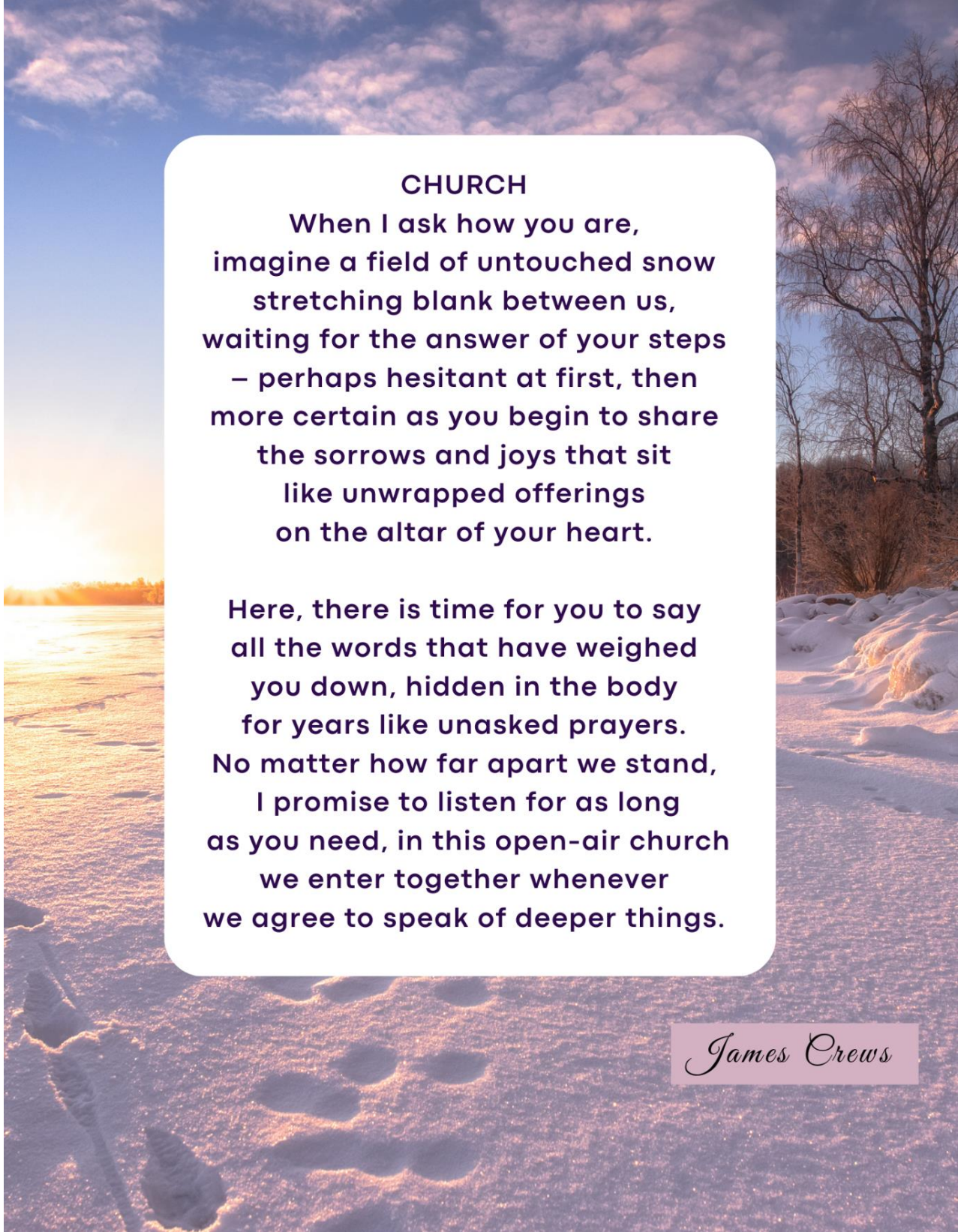
[faith.yale.edu](https://faith.yale.edu)

Watching: *Killers of the Flower Moon*, *Return to Seoul*, *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem*, and of course UCONN Basketball!



Here is a Prayer of Concern for Palestine and Israel from the leadership of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ shared on February 28:

<https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/statement-of-prayer-and-concern-for-palestine-and-israel-18277346>



## CHURCH

When I ask how you are,  
imagine a field of untouched snow  
stretching blank between us,  
waiting for the answer of your steps  
– perhaps hesitant at first, then  
more certain as you begin to share  
the sorrows and joys that sit  
like unwrapped offerings  
on the altar of your heart.

Here, there is time for you to say  
all the words that have weighed  
you down, hidden in the body  
for years like unasked prayers.  
No matter how far apart we stand,  
I promise to listen for as long  
as you need, in this open-air church  
we enter together whenever  
we agree to speak of deeper things.

*James Crews*



Niantic Community Church

# Holy Week 2024

Worship Services

**Palm Sunday** *March 24, 9:00 a.m.*

Procession of the Palms

**Maundy Thursday** *March 28 at 6:30 p.m.*

Service of Holy Communion

**Good Friday** *March 29 at 6:30 p.m.*

Service of Tenebrae

**Easter Sunday!** *March 31*

6:00 a.m. Ecumenical Sunrise Service  
at McCook Park

9:00 a.m. Easter Worship

11:00 a.m. Easter Worship

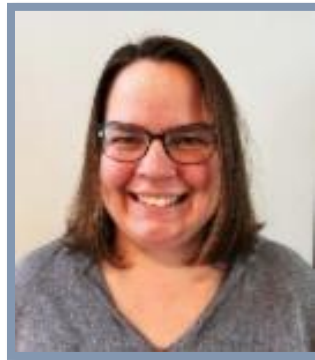
Our worship services are held in our Sanctuary and live-streamed on facebook and youtube. Our building is handicapped accessible.

170 Pennsylvania Ave, Niantic, CT 06357  
860-739-6208  
[www.NianticCommunityChurch.org](http://www.NianticCommunityChurch.org)



*“Working from within” is a series in Tidings to highlight faithful church members who provide sustained contributions to the missions of the Church without fanfare.*

**Holly Buhler**



Many of you have seen Holly Buhler, but you may not know her, as she spends much of worship time with the Church School classes. This makes perfect sense, as Holly has been an educator for 16 years, and is currently teaching Kindergarten in Clinton, Ct. She brings a love of early childhood education to her involvement with our NCC children. She is currently a member of the Settled Pastor Search Committee, which has given her a chance to meet, and get to know, many of our congregation members.

Holly grew up in Berlin, Ct, and her family was very involved in the church, including holiday pageants, Sunday School and choir. She moved to East Lyme and joined the church six years ago. Her husband, Chad, is a local, and Holly’s mother-in-law, Liz Buhler, has been an active member of NCC for many years. Holly says when she is not working, she is busy chauffeuring (she means “cheering on”!) her two children, Makenna and Colton, who are active in theater, dance, singing, karate, soccer, baseball and basketball.

Holly joined NCC to be part of “something bigger, and she wanted her children to have the same Christian experiences that she had as a child. NCC is blessed to have Holly and her family as part of our community.

Submitted by Nancy Hunt

# **Clan O’Cleary Concert**

**Sunday,  
March 10  
3:00 p.m.**



**Niantic Community Church  
170 Pennsylvania Ave ~860.739. 6208**



**Clan O’Cleary Concert – March 10 at 3:00pm in the Sanctuary.  
Come join in fellowship and song in the spirit of St. Patrick’s Day!**

**Event is free and open to the public.**

**A free-will offering for the church**

**Refreshments will be offered after the concert.**

**St Patrick’s  
Day occurs  
on 17 March  
every year.  
It is the date  
that St  
Patrick died.**



**Clovers -  
called  
shamrocks -  
are the  
emblem of  
St Patrick.**



### ***Faith Formation for Children & Youth***

Our Nursery Care and Sunday School during Worship has been well attended and we are grateful for our wonderful teachers and Christian Education Board.

Club 26 (Grades 2 through 6) youngsters have been participating in a service project focused on hunger. The group meets Sundays from 10:30am-11:30am.

Thanks to Craig Woody, Ted Montgomery and Rich LaFredo for moving sofas and boxed items from the newly organized youth room, and moving the shelves in order to store your generous donations of non-perishable food items.

COLLECTING: Chips (single serve size) Fruit Snacks, Granola Bars, and Juice boxes. Please leave your donation in the labeled bins (red lid) outside the office. THANK YOU for your support.




A fun Family Event: Easter Egg Hunt will be held after worship on Palm Sunday! All children can participate from Nursery to Grade 6. Please bring an Easter basket for your children (child) to collect eggs.

Marsha Swan, Children & Youth Faith Formation Coordinator

[Marsha@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:Marsha@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

**Faith Formation for Children & Youth**

**CONFIRMATION CLASS**   
**SCHEDULE 2024**

Meets alternate Wednesdays  
5:30-6:45pm in the Fellowship Room.  
Led by Pastors Erica and Kaleigh

**March 13**  
**March 28 (Maundy Thursday)**  
*Meals will be provided!*

Confirmation class will meet at 5:30 p.m. on March 13 and on March 28 Maundy Thursday. Thank you to Sandra Tarallo, Linda Helvig, Liz Buhler, Joanne Moore, Steph and Frank Chan for providing delicious meals for the class at our meetings in January and February. A June date is being planned for Confirmation Sunday.

Honor and remember loved ones with Easter flowers. Our Sanctuary will be decorated with the flowers during Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Dedication order forms are available in the Narthex.

**EASTER FLOWER DEDICATIONS**

**Order forms in the Narthex**  
**due date - March 17**



**March Madness begins with Selection Sunday on March 17, 2024!**

Selection Sunday: Sunday, March 17

First Four: March 19-20

First round: March 21-22

Second round: March 23-24

Sweet 16: March 28-29

Elite Eight: March 30-31

Final Four: Saturday, April 6 at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

NCAA championship game: Monday, April 8 at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.





## Faith in Action Special Offering #1 - The Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Fund



Welcome to March and with it, the first of 2024's Special Offerings! Our first Special Offering has the goal of raising as much in funds as we did last year so that we are able to partner with the Mystic Congregational Church to sponsor a Scholarship for the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Fund.

How much is a scholarship? \$25,000!

Well that's impossible, right? Not necessarily! Here's how we can do it. First, as mentioned, Niantic Community Church is partnering with Mystic Congregational Church because both of our congregations feel this is an important ministry. That means Niantic Community Church is responsible to raise just half of those funds - \$12,500.

Okay that's still impossible, right? Not necessarily, again! Here's where the second piece of good news comes in.

We have truly heroic Christians among us in our congregation. Just like last year, we have currently at least one anonymous person (could be the person sitting next to you in the pew or on Zoom) who has agreed to match a certain amount of the funds we raise. While this won't cut the amount we have to raise in half, it does lower it significantly.

Thank you for whatever you can do and for considering this important ministry. If you wish to become a matching gift donor please just pull one of our ministers aside and confidentially let them know, or you can speak to the church president Carol Donovan, or anyone else with whom you feel comfortable that is involved with this ministry. If you wish, no one will know your name but we may announce that we have another anonymous hero sitting among us in the congregation.

We are living a miracle, just like we did last year, and like we are reminded each time we see Calvin. This is such an exciting opportunity - we can really make a difference in a person who will have a great impact in our community.

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day  
live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin,  
but by the content of their character.*

*- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Submitted by Peter Heaney, Faith in Action chairperson

NCC volunteers served 120 people a healthy meal at the New London Community Meal Center/DINE in February. Thanks to Donna Hathaway and the **many** NCC volunteers and contributors to this very impactful mission work every month.



**A hot cup of coffee to start the day is a treasure.** Even though it does not have nutritional value, it is very important at the New London hospitality center and DINE. Sometimes when I make the delivery, the shelf is full of cans of coffee. This past delivery, as I walked into DINE, four staff members said "We need that coffee today!" The shelf had only one last can of coffee, plenty of room to add our donation of 20 POUNDS of coffee. God provides!

Submitted by Susan Gagliardi, NCC volunteer.

Friends,

In the November issue of *Tidings*, I told you that I would soon be starting my Capstone Project. At Lexington Theological Seminary, the Capstone Project is the final activity that is completed before I am approved for graduation.



My project is called “*The HELM Model for Effective Mission Planning*.” It is an evaluation, planning, and budgeting tool for resourcing the church’s ministries and missions. The letters in HELM stands for **H**uman resource, **E**nthusiasm, **L**eadership, and **M**onetary resource.

As the church has exited the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope and shape of our missions and ministries has necessarily changed, as did our demographic make-up. The amount of volunteer hours has increased for some activities, and decreased for others. Likewise, the *enthusiasm* for those functions has changed, as well. The HELM model is designed in a way that will allow church leaders and planners to adjust the shape and scope of the church’s missions and ministries easily to align with the congregation’s enthusiasm, the availability of volunteer and staff hours, as well as monetary resources. Using HELM, a ministry or mission can change as the congregation does. Regular surveys of the congregation and staff keep the numbers up-to-date, and a simple planning tool helps the Ministry Team Leaders adjust as the numbers change.

My work starts today. Please complete the HELM Data Form at your earliest opportunity. You can access it now by scanning this QR code or clicking the link here: <https://www.emailmeform.com/builder/form/CkeubiHd6oR5>



You can also complete a paper form. <Click here> to print a pdf form. There are blank copies in the Narthex at church or I can e-mail one to you. If you need a form, or have trouble with the electronic form, e-mail me at [jeff.birch@lextheo.edu](mailto:jeff.birch@lextheo.edu).

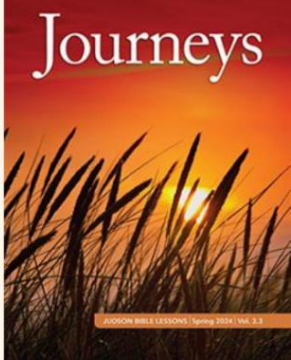
A final note. I designed this model for NCC, and it’s based on the way NCC functions and governs itself. Like all the work I’ve done with you, NCC is my learning space and my example. My remaining time among you allows only for the development and testing of the HELM model to get done. What you do with the finished product is the decision of church leadership.

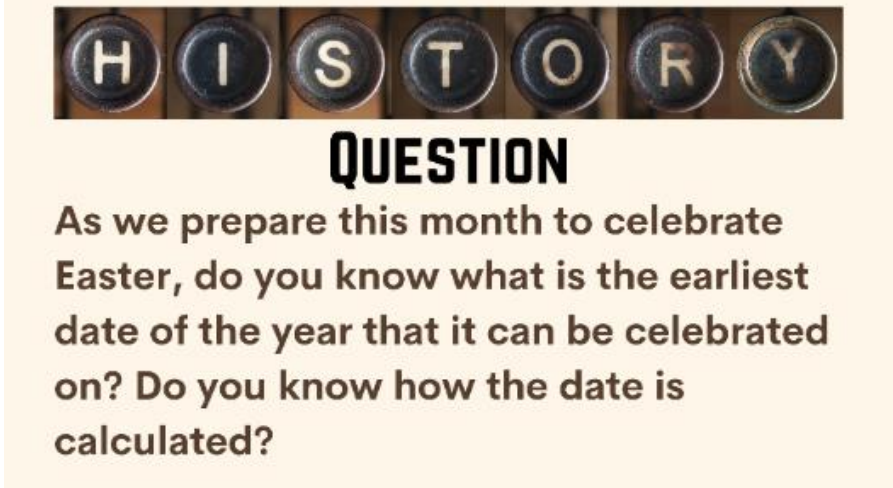
You, the people of NCC, have made this possible for me. You will forever be in my heart. I look forward to our final months together!

God bless you all!

Jeff Birch

Faith & Fellowship

<p>In silence we come to know and love the Divine Mystery that is within us.</p>  <p><b>Centering Prayer</b></p> <p>The Centering Prayer group meets each Tuesday 4:30 – 5:50pm (Hybrid) in the Fellowship Room. All are welcome. Contact <a href="mailto:daveoat@gmail.com">daveoat@gmail.com</a></p>	 <p><b>NCC</b></p> <p><b>BOOK CLUB</b></p> <p>Sunday, March 17, 7pm at NCC We will discuss "The Lost Bookshop" by Evie Woods. Hope to see you then!</p>
<p><b>Bible Study (Hybrid)</b> <b>Wednesdays at 10am</b> <i>Led by Rev. Erica Avena</i></p> <p>Journeys booklet available in the church office for a suggested donation of \$13.00</p> 	<p><b>ANYTHING GOES...</b> minimize, simplify, organize!</p> <p>Letting go of what we no longer want/need, makes room for what IS important. Bring unwanted items to the group &amp; give away. Unclaimed items are donated to charity immediately following our gathering.</p> <p>10 a.m. / 3rd Monday of each month in the Fellowship room.</p>



**HISTORY**

**QUESTION**

As we prepare this month to celebrate Easter, do you know what is the earliest date of the year that it can be celebrated on? Do you know how the date is calculated?

(Hint: look for the answer elsewhere in this issue of Tidings!)

### Announcements



#### **DRUM CIRCLE**

1st & 3rd Fridays  
6:00pm-7:00pm  
Multi-purpose Room,  
**March 1st & 15**  
*Led by Karen Fox*

Drum Circle held on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month. No drumming experience required! Just a desire to connect with others in a unique way. A variety of drums are provided. If you have a special one, please bring it!

#### **APRIL TIDINGS**

Articles due on or  
before **March 20**

*Issue published early April*



#### **Looking ahead to April – Save the Dates**

**Red Cross Blood Drive – April 12**

**Rummage Sale – April 27**

**Quarterly Congregational Meeting – April 28**

**Walk Against Homelessness – April 28**



#### **ANSWER & TRIVIA**

Easter is the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or soonest after March 21st, which is the date of the vernal equinox. That can be as early as March 22nd or as late as April 25th.



The last time that Easter occurred on March 22nd was 1818 and will happen again on that date in 2353. The last time for April 25th was 1943 and the next will be 2038. Easter is delayed one week if the full moon falls on a Sunday.

**NCC Pastors and Staff**

Interim Minister - Rev. Erica Avena [erica.avena@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:erica.avena@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Associate Pastor, Congregational Care – Rev. Kaleigh Rasmussen  
[kaleigh@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:kaleigh@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Music Minister– Lynne Floyd [lynne@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:lynne@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Men’s Choir & Bell Choir Director– Nan Rigdon [nan@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:nan@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Seminarian/Student Minister – Jeff Birch [jeff.birch@lextheo.edu](mailto:jeff.birch@lextheo.edu)

Children & Youth Faith Formation Coordinator – Marsha Swan  
[marsha@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:marsha@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Communications/Office Manager – Theresa Cleary [theresa@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:theresa@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Financial Secretary – Ted Montgomery [ted@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:ted@nianticcommunitychurch.org)

Bookkeeper – Robin Goldschlager [robin@nianticcommunitychurch.org](mailto:robin@nianticcommunitychurch.org)



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