Norwich Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
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Pastor: The Rev. Mary Brownlow

AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION
WORSHIPPING ON SUNDAYS AT 10 AM
The Lifeline has been on sabbatical since October. Here are some important messages for January 2016

Our Christmas Eve beeswax creche

**Annual Meeting Warning**

Warning of the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Norwich Congregational Church, UCC

Notice is hereby given of the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Norwich Congregational Church, UCC to be held after worship on Sunday, February 7, 2016 to transact the following business:

- to hold opening prayer;
- to elect a Moderator and an Assistant Moderator;
- to approve the minutes of the 2014 Annual Meeting;*
- to discuss and adopt a budget for 2016;
- to hear and act upon the reports of officers and committees
- to vote on the following resolution:

**Resolved:**

To authorize the members of the Norwich Congregational Church, UCC to act in a manner consistent with the Ministries Model of governance as developed by the Church Council. The Ministries Model replaces the current Boards and Committees with Deacon Leaders and 4 Ministries: Spiritual Formation and Nurture, Outreach, Worship, and Stewardship.

In accordance with Article XII of the by-laws, adopted February 10, 2013, the following by-laws will be suspended for the period between February 7, 2016, and the Annual Meeting in 2017:

- Article VI. Relationship Among Church Bodies and with the Congregation;
- Article VII. Church Council, Paragraphs 1 and 2;
- Article VIII. Boards; and
- Article IX. Committees, Paragraphs 1-7.

In addition, for the period of the suspension, when the current, unsuspended by-laws refer to “Church Council,” they will be interpreted to refer to the “Deacon Leaders” under the Ministries Model. Also, when the current, unsuspended by-laws refer to “Trustees” or “Board of Trustees,” they will be interpreted to refer to the “Stewardship Ministry” under the Ministries Model.

During the period of the suspension, it is intended that the by-laws be interpreted in a way both to support the trial implementation of the Ministries Model and to ensure the mission and legal operation of the Church.

- to elect officers and Ministry leaders for 2016
- to conduct whatever other business may properly be brought before the meeting

*Minutes will be printed in the Annual Report
By-Law Changes

Additional information on the Resolution regarding by law changes

I. The Ministries Model of governance in 2016 will retain the following officer functions and roles from the current by laws:
Pastor, Moderator, Assistant Moderator, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Collector, and Assistant Collector.

II. The broadly defined areas of ministry in this model are:
A. DEACONS LEADERS
   1. Assisting pastor in pastoral ministry
   2. Articulating and facilitating plans for the future
   3. Facilitating communication and institutional memory
   4. Decision-making between congregational meetings
B. SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND NURTURE MINISTRY
   1. Education of all ages
   2. Confirmation and Youth Work
   3. Called to Care and Visitation
   4. Welcome and Hospitality and Fellowship (aside from Sunday mornings)
C. OUTREACH MINISTRY
   1. Mission Projects
   2. Community Events
   3. Ecumenical/Interfaith Connections
   4. Delegates to UCC Association and Conference
D. WORSHIP MINISTRY (Sunday Morning Tasks)
   1. Worship leadership, i.e. Readers, serving communion
   2. Music
   3. Greeting and Ushering
   4. Offering Hospitality
   5. Care and Beautification of Sanctuary (including flowers)
E. STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY
   1. Financial Oversight
   2. Buildings and Grounds
   3. Investment
   4. Giving and Donations (Includes Treasurer/assistant, Collector/assistant)

III. Broad Participation: The goal of each Ministry is to encourage broad participation on many levels. Ad hoc groups may develop within ministries as needs and energies arise.

IV. Deacons as somewhat re-defined under this model: 4-6 Deacons are additional “arms” for the pastor to work within the congregation. This shared pastoral ministry will have a finger on the pulse of congregational life (this was done by the deacons in 2010 through “Cottage Meetings”), and so be able to envision and recommend new opportunities in our life together. Though they would not necessarily take leadership positions within the 4 Ministries, they would be in regular communication with those ministry leaders via Ministry Representatives or any other useful connections needed for taking the pulse of the church.

V. An ad hoc governance transition team will monitor the implementation and description of the new Ministries Model and prepare a written revision of the by laws.
Thank you, Lilly Endowment Grant for Clergy and Congregational Renewal!

Goodbye to Mary as she departs on her 2015 Sabbatical

Dr. Anthony Leach leads a workshop on Gospel Singing in June 2015

Kathy Wonson Eddy and Kathy Sherlock-Green at our September 27, 2015 Musical Celebration Rehearsal
January/February 2016 Mission Offering

Supporting the English Language Learning Program of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program

In light of the heightened concern for refugees from areas in conflict throughout the world, the Board of Mission has selected the English Language Learning Program of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, as recipient of the January and February Mission Offering. The Church is also hosting an event on January 19 with representatives from VRRP who will discuss the various programs of their organization and opportunities to become involved.

Who Are We? The English Language Learning (ELL) department of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), a field office of USCRI is made up of qualified, dedicated, and caring teachers and volunteers who provide English language instruction, free of charge to the USCRI/VRRP refugees and asylees, ages 17 to 65, who enter our communities in Vermont. Our program is unique with its high quality English Language Learning program. All of our staff and volunteer teachers and tutors are trained professionals in the fields of education, linguistics or speech/language pathology. The ELL program at USCRI/VRRP is made up of dedicated part-time teachers, tutors, and assistant teachers to provide the ELL Service to over 500 individuals. All tutor and teacher assistants receive ELL training through the ELL Coordinator at the VRRP office in Colchester, VT.

Our goal is to assist refugees and asylum seekers with learning English through spoken and written language instruction. We believe that by doing this, we are giving them tools to make their families stronger and the communities in which they live and work richer by adding ambitious people to the local economy and bringing global diversity to Vermont. We assist families in moving from situations of desperation to opportunity by facilitating linguistic and cultural understanding so they can successfully integrate and thrive in their new American home.

Our history of providing language education and support services to adult refugee and asylee population dates back nearly three decades.

Who Do We Serve?
Vermont has been a welcoming community for refugees and asylees for nearly 35 years. New Americans have enriched our communities with their unique job skills, cultural perspectives, education, customs, languages, and stories. They enter our communities without much more than a hope for the future without global conflict and poverty, aspiring only for a future of new friendships, safety, education, and employment. They strive to embrace integration into a foreign culture in which they are challenged to thrive, learn a new language, and secure employment, education, and independence. Integration is a two-way process that places the demand on both the refugee and receiving community.

The USCRI/VRRP ELL program goes beyond ensuring our clients are provided with more than basic needs for survival. Our team provides carefully planned English services to ease adaptation into new communities and to ensure that the refugee and asylees enjoy the social, economic, and cultural life of their new homeland. Please join us in supporting VRRP through your donation to the Mission Offering and learn more about opportunities to get involved with their Vermont based programs. For more information go to: http://www.refugees.org/about-us/where-we-work/vrrp/
We Are All Vermonters: Cultivating Our Roots in Common Ground

Laurie Stavrand will speak on:
Who is a refugee?
Who is coming to Vermont?
How do they come here?
What happens after they are here?
The story of an individual’s journey.
Q & A

The Norwich Congregational Church, UCC
15 Church Street, Norwich VT
Tuesday, January 19 at 7:00 pm
Pastor’s Letter: Thoughts for the New Year

But the cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms forever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its center: it can grow without changing... The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travelers.

-G.K.Chesterton 1874-1936

I found the above quote last summer, when I had some time for far-ranging reading. I was struck by the image of the ever-extending cross. So often, these days, we are presented with other images: graphs of declining church attendance, empty pews, and smaller groups gathering in church activities. But Chesterton tells us that, rather than contracting spiritually, we can fling open our arms and our doors, confident in the paradoxical power symbolized by the cross.

In 2015, we were blessed with the opportunity for sabbatical renewal for both pastor and congregation through the generosity of a grant from the Lilly Endowment. For me, this involved learning and reading and resting and experiencing worship in other places. One of the gifts I received was not so much a certain kind of knowledge or set of facts, but a chance to look at my beloved home church with new eyes. I also realized that going away for 3 months or trying out a change for 3 months is not a bad thing.

Time and time again, I have been surprised by new workings of the Spirit in situations that seemed demanding or disquieting. Our congregation displays wonderful gifts of creativity and perseverance. In December, our tradition of a Junior Choir Advent Musical was re-imagined into a dramatic reading of ‘Babushka.’ The newly formed Hallelujah Hollah Choir, young people from 4th to 12th grade, sang their way through the story under Kathy Sherlock-Green’s inspired direction and with Tacy Colaiacomo’s wonderful accompaniment. It was different from previous years, but their offering infused our worship with great energy.

![Cast of “Babushka” on December 13, 2015](image)

This is one example of people working together to find new ways of being a church in the 2010’s. I can think of many others. The ‘arithmetic’ of this process is hard to pin down, but it does involve both subtraction and addition. It involves seeking broader participation from many church members, but not necessarily more work for any one member. We may stop doing some things and start doing others…but then, this has been going on since the church was formed 2000 years ago.

Another example of working together to find our best expressions of faith is the church reorganization project. For some time, the Church Council has been considering changes in our by laws and church committee structure, based both on feedback from the 2010 Cottage Meetings and by continued input from church members and leaders. In 2015, serious work on reorganization began. The Church Council is now ready to present a way forward: a resolution for our Annual meeting and a proposed new structure. The idea is to retain enough of our old structure and enough institutional memory from the current hard working board and committee members to try something new. In the new structure, there is room for every member or friend of the church to participate: from prayer to action, from large concepts to
concrete tasks, from light-hearted fellowship to profound intellectual and ethical work. The structure is organized into “Ministries,” recognizing that, in a church of the Congregational tradition, each of us ministers to others, using the gifts that the Spirit bestows.

As with any change, the transition will involve some stretching. In some ways, it is a cultural change as much as a structural change. Rather than the “it’s easier if I just do it myself” approach (I admit that I am often guilty of this), it means re-training ourselves to seek out others to share the work and the joy of ministry. It means taking a little more time to recruit and to train for small tasks, knowing that the benefits of inclusion and connection are beyond calculation.

You will find a warning for the 2015 Annual Meeting with a resolution about this structure change elsewhere in this mailing. Also included is more information about the details of the 4 Ministries of Spiritual Formation and Nurture, Outreach, Worship, and Stewardship and how they might function. In the hallway of the church, we have put up newsprint sheets with some of these details so that you can see where there is energy and interest and room for growth. I hope that you will read this, consider the changes, ask questions about them, and work towards renewal of our congregation in structure, purpose and action.

Just as “The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travelers,” I pray that you will open your arms and your hearts to the exciting future promised to us by God.

Mary

**New Member Profile**

We welcome our newest member to the Norwich Congregational Church, UCC, Bradley T. Fuller. Brad was born in Manchester, CT. He retired from Southern New England Telephone in 1990 and moved to North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. In 2003, he became a Vermonter – moving first to South Royalton and then to Wilder in 2011. He was married in Japan in 1958 and has two children two grandchildren. His wife, Meiko, died in 2011. He rode motorcycles for 50 years and now enjoys sports cars.