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November & December 2008 North Star  
A publication of North Congregational Church, UCC

413-549-0500 Church Office  
413-323-0377 Co-Pastors Nada Sellers and Patricia Koons

Web Address: [www.north-church.org](http://www.north-church.org)

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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North Congregational Church  
North Congregational Church, UCC  
PO Box 9613  
North Amherst, MA 01059-9613

***Time Sensitive Material  
Please Open Immediately!***

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## North Star

Celebrating 182 Years of Ministry  
North Church – UCC News

1826-2008  
November & December 2008



Unconditionally Welcoming, Decidedly Christian

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### In Our Thoughts...

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In most seasons of our lives, there are the joys and the challenges; the smooth places and the heartbreakers... Congregations also move through seasons of change and growth or decline, and there are a whole range of reasons why this is so: changing demographics, distinctive cultures and patterns both within and outside of the church's doors, muffled messages, luke-warm commitments, competing opportunities, conflict or dissensions of various sorts – this doesn't just happen overnight!

Somehow, we tend to simplify things on the communal level, believing that if we're just friendly enough or get a few more of the "right kind of people" who will "give to the church," we'll get back on the right path, the church will be full again and things will be back to the way they used to be, when churches could open their doors, invite people in and watch as the church grew.

On a recent Saturday in October, five of us from North Church spent a Saturday with Jim Griffith and teams from 27 other UCC churches, in order to explore what it takes for a church to add numerical growth. We were reminded that more than 80% of those who visit churches so do because they are invited by a someone, and that churches intent on building relationships with those in their surrounding community, rather than simply hoping to "attract" people through programs or events, are the ones that grow. When you come right down to it, North Church is located in the midst of a large group of people that might very well be interested in finding a church home: Students, faculty/staff and families of UMass as well as surrounding colleges and universities, are the largest single demographic in our community. What is North Church willing to do about this? How can we be inviting and accessible to students of all sorts? What would it look like to get the message out and how could North Church change to meet this striking demographic of our region?

October's Executive Council meeting took a closer look at some of the information flowing out of the growth workshop, noticing some of the demands of finding opportunities to connect with and get to know younger students and families: issues about when we meet for worship, how and when we hold planning meetings, how we share leadership and the sorts of gatherings we sponsor or support were all in play. Consensus held that planning to move toward a younger, educated, mobile and transitioning population sounds like an exciting challenge; what might God have in store?  
*(continued on next page...)*

Shelter Sunday on October 19<sup>th</sup>, provided a way for NCC to greet neighbors throughout our community, in order to seek donations for social service groups that care for the hungry and homeless in our region. Speaking with people as they stood in their doorways, talking about their own needs and hopes, gave many of us the realization that all around us are hundreds and hundreds of students, seniors, and lower income tenants who are scrapping to get by without enough support. What might God be saying to North Church?

As your pastors, Pat and I see the convergence in the efforts to reach beyond our corner at Pine and Pleasant, with a focus on reaching out to the wider population of apartment dwellers, especially students, and their families, as well as with our congregation's commitment to marginalized LGBT people on their spiritual journeys. We ask for your consideration as a new team forms to guide Community Outreach efforts; if you want be a part of something new, let us know! Pray for insight and energy; and in the coming seasons of Thanksgiving and Advent, let's remain vigilant for how we might each respond to what God is doing in our midst!

Peace,  
Pastors Nada & Patricia

## Spiritual Care & Nurture

"... every prayer makes a difference."

- Keep the following in your prayers as they continue living with serious illnesses: Alice Maslanka (and Alison and Malissa); Bill and his new spouse (Chris' cousin)
- Be in prayer for those who have health concerns and/or set-backs in recent weeks: Neal Normandin, Lucile Sevoine, Dottie Jenks & family, Margaret Bates, Pauline Richmond, Lester Sottile, Jeanette Serwa, Alison's grandfather and Lucille Benda
- Remember those who struggle in deep places with burdens and anxieties, that God might bring healing and peace: Diane (Chris' friend), Shari Belden
- Give thanks for the safe return of Steven Giard from Iraq (Dottie's grandson)
- Pray for Marky Jean-Pierre's study in France and for his safe return in December.
- Send a note of encouragement along with prayers for safety and growth to these students: Scott Serwa, Rhys Evans, Mel D. & Sonia P.
- Lift up the emerging interest of North Church to reach out to its student community in new, energizing ways. Pray that the church might begin to make wise choices and open itself to fresh winds of the Spirit!

If you have any prayer concerns please contact the Pastors at 413-323-0377 or Ginger Fowler, Ministry Commission Coordinator at 413-658-5654.

## FYI

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Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Communion, DST change, Second Stewardship Sunday

Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>: Alternative Holiday Fair in North Church Parish Hall from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>: Third Stewardship Sunday

Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>: Executive Council Meeting - 7pm in the Parish Hall basement.

Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>: Book Group meeting

Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>: Stewardship Mailing

Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>: Workshop with Class Action concerning the Women Building Bridges Grant program with the Survival Center. It will be held in partnership with First Hadley church, in North Church's Parish Hall from 9:30 to 11:30am. Please pre-register for the workshop by Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>.

Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>: Book Group (last Screwtape meeting)

Nov. 19<sup>th</sup>: Bible Study

Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>: Pledge Sunday

Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>: Thanksgiving – Office closed

Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>: First Sunday of Advent

Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>: Second Sunday of Advent

Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>: Bible Study

Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>: Third Sunday of Advent

Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>: Christmas Eve – Evening Service of music planned for 6:30pm; office closed

Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>: Christmas – Office closed

Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>: Last Sunday of 2008

## Birthdays in November & December

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November	1 <sup>st</sup> – Sheryl Hall	December	6 <sup>th</sup> – Jon Manter
	11 <sup>th</sup> – Jenna Sellers		23 <sup>rd</sup> – Chris Normandin
	21 <sup>st</sup> – Jonathan Evans		25 <sup>th</sup> – Jesus
	22 <sup>nd</sup> – Patience Bousel		

*We would like to have the birthdays of everyone at North Church, so please reply to [nccadmin@crocker.com](mailto:nccadmin@crocker.com) with yours, even if you think we might have once had it. Thanks.*

## What about Christmas Eve?

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Christmas Eve worship services aren't always the most important thing on peoples' lists of "Things to DO" as Advent and Christmas time roll around, but here's something to consider: Lots of people like to visit special services such as this, and this year, North Church is planning for an evening of welcome for neighbors, family and friends. Plan to be there for Dec. 24th at 6:30pm, when musicians and readers will share in "Voices of Christmas." More info coming soon!

## Understanding Class in Our Personal Lives Sat., Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> - 9:30-11:30am

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NCC is in the midst of finding ways to reach out to our neighbors in order to become a spiritual home for all sorts of people. Our interest in the Building Bridges Grant Project has grown out of our interest in partnering with our neighbors at the Amherst Survival Center, and joining this effort are three other UCCs—First Hadley & South Amherst, & Haydenville.

The first workshop focused on congregational specifics, will be held at NCC in partnership with First Hadley Church folks, and facilitated by Class Action—a local organization nationally recognized for creating cross-class dialogue. Exploring our own journeys through the class in our society, we hope to understand ourselves and others better. Creative and fun games, exercises, writing, art, and small-group sharing.

**We invite you to join us for this exciting launch to a special journey!**

**Please pre-register for the Workshop** — So we can have a sense of numbers to plan for food, workshop materials, and child care, please let Nada know if you're coming, by November 9<sup>th</sup>.

**REMINDER:** The workshop will be held at North UCC, 1199 North Pleasant St., Amherst. Let's arrive a little early, and make sure we extend a warm welcome. Thank you!

## Alternative Holiday Gift Fair

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We are eagerly looking forward to this fair on Saturday, November 8 from 10AM – 3PM in Parish Hall. It is the first time such an event has been held in this area, although similar events are popular in other parts of the country. Pastors Nada and Pat have experience with this sort of fair, and introduced the basic idea to us last year.

Setting up shop at the fair will be: Amherst Survival Center, Heifer International, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Collective Copies making available Worker Cooperative Products, Olive Branch Olive Oil, SERRV International, Foundation Honor for Haiti, Habitat for Humanity, Church World Service, United Church of Christ Global Ministries, Hitchcock Center for the Environment and Solentiname, Nicaragua Friendship Group of Western Massachusetts. North Church members will handle the tables for SERRV, Global Ministries and FONHOH, and all the rest of the organizations will send their own representatives.

Shoppers will find gift cards for everything from solar stoves to baskets of food for school children along with fair trade foods (coffee, tea, chocolate, nuts and more), beautiful handcrafted items from around the world, holiday cards, books, plus much more. Light lunch items will be available. Come & bring lots of neighbors and friends!

See you at the Fair!



## Blanket Drive

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Do you have extra blankets at home?

North Church is supporting the Amherst Survival Center and the cold in our community by collecting new and/or used blankets and comforters of all sizes and materials. Place your donations on the small table in the front left of the sanctuary, now and through Advent.



The North Church table at the Simple Gifts Farm Festival in Sept '08

## Simple Gifts Farm Harvest Festival

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On the last Sunday of September there was a great festival at the Simple Gifts Farm located in North Amherst. A small group from North Church helped in the festivities. Barbara collected a great number of gourds and mini pumpkins from local farms. With these odd shaped gourds and pumpkins, kids of all ages at the festival decorated and painted them in various colors. It was very enjoyable to see smiling faces and the different designs the kids made. Angie Sottile, Asaph Murfin, and Steve Brown also helped out at the table with me. Before long, all of the pumpkins were painted and were set to dry in the sun. They were smiling out to the crowd of grown-ups and kids that helped to decorate them.

I hope that next year a larger group from North Church can take part in the festival. We will certainly need to bring more pumpkins because they were very popular.

Ginger Fowler

## Stewardship

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At North Church, we focus on stewardship year-round. As always, during this year, we've seen a tremendous number of individual acts of stewardship, as well as those of the whole group working together. But, this year also has been unique in that we have tried to be good stewards of the funds raised from the sale of the parsonage and have used some of the money toward much-needed repairs and improvements in the church and parish hall.

Although we concentrate on stewardship all year, this late fall season is the special time of year when individuals consider their personal financial commitment to North Church for the following year.

This year's national stewardship theme from the United Church of Christ comes from Psalms 11:24 (The Message): *"The world of the generous gets larger and larger."* Proverbs 11:24 (The Message), definitely a thought-provoking passage. Stewardship talks during worship services have already begun, and as in previous years, we look forward to the always-moving stories of our fellow congregants as they tell why they commit their financial resources to North Church.

Letters explaining the pledging process, along with pledge cards, will be sent to members and friends during the week of November 10, and the pledges will be dedicated on November 23. If you have any questions now or after you receive the mailing, please contact Barbara Jenkins, Stewardship Chairperson, 253-2929.

## Margaret C. Ells Elementary School Project

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On October 27, I went to represent North Church in giving our gifts of school supplies to the teachers at Sheryl Hall's school in Springfield - Margaret C. Ells Elementary. Springfield is a perpetually underfunded school district with enormous need. North Church, with Ginger and Barbara's encouragement, helps to collect needed supplies so the teachers are not paying out of pocket. We filled three dining hall tables with donations of crayons, markers, paper, pencils, gluesticks, etc.

The teachers were SO appreciative and each one stopped to thank me. They were astounded that our little group could be so generous in helping a school in a different city and sustaining that giving year after year. Thank you all so very much from the teachers at M.C. Ells!

Chris Normandin

## Neighbors in Need

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Through the thoughtful and generous donations from North Church attendees, we are able to send a check for \$369.00 to this year's UCC Neighbors in Need campaign. In these difficult and uncertain financial times, it is a stretch for many of us to find the extra money for charity giving. However, that is the very reason that NIN giving is even more critical this year – great need and limited funds. Thank you to all who gave from their heart to help others in need this year.

Chris Normandin

## A Word of Encouragement

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We've received some good feedback about North Church recently. One person who belongs to another church but worships with us sometimes wrote: *Thanks so much to everyone at your church for organizing this (Shelter Sunday door-to-door visits in North Amherst). As an outsider looking in, I can see that North Church is truly an example of Christian witnessing.* A newcomer reported that coming to North Church has made a tremendous difference in her life over the past weeks. And, another newcomer observed that people who attend North Church appear to want very sincerely to be there to worship and learn.

We are grateful for the feedback and grateful to our pastors and fellow congregants for encouraging us to live out our mission of "inviting others to join us in our journey to worship and serve Jesus, as we share God's love in word and deed."

Barbara Jenkins, Moderator

## Shelter Sunday

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On Sunday, October 19, fourteen people associated with North Church headed out to knock on doors in North Amherst. Their efforts were part of Shelter Sunday, a town-wide endeavor to collect donations for local agencies that provide meals and shelter.

Five of those canvassers were Boy Scouts and their parents from the North Church-sponsored Troop 504. We thank Lyle Denit, Scoutmaster, and Mary Jane Laus, North Church's liaison to the troop, for coordinating efforts so that the Scouts could participate. We're also grateful for Mary Jane's efforts in organizing a lunch for all and for cleaning up afterwards.

We raised \$530 for the critical work of the agencies and, also, very importantly, learned a lot about our neighbors in North Amherst.

During the service that Sunday morning, Nada and Pat had shared demographic information about North Amherst as both a part of our ongoing efforts to reach out to our neighbors and to prepare for the specific work of the afternoon. Many of the canvassers noted that what they found as they knocked on doors corresponded to the statistics we had learned about earlier in the day: high percentage of dwellings were apartments with singles -- either students or elderly people; more low income people than in other parts of Amherst; ethnic diversity due to the student population primarily; short-time rather than long-term residents. Several contacted residents reported not being able to donate because they themselves were recipients of help from the Amherst Survival Center because of their financial need.

Upon their return, canvassers were very enthusiastic about meeting their neighbors and are looking forward to hearing more about a group being developed by the pastors for exploring outreach ideas. Shelter Sunday turned out to be not only significant for people in need and the agencies that serve them, but also for the people of North Church who walked about the neighborhood.

Barbara Jenkins, Shelter Sunday coordinator for North Church

## Wish List

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*Editor's note: We will be posting a wish list of items needed here at church. Items do not need to be brand-new; they do, however, need to be in good condition. Donated items not found to be suitable will be taken to the Amherst Transfer Station's Trash to Treasure.*

- Good quality framed pictures/posters suitable for hanging on wall for display
- Comfortable chairs for seating groups
- "new" energy efficient light bulbs (have 4 sets installed at present)

## Puzzle-Making Parishioners Prove Perseverance

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The Fish Stix puzzle has finally been completed, after almost six months of diligent work. Although the puzzle table was at a vulnerable height, never did even the curiosity of an exuberant toddler disturb the growing accurate placement of the pieces. Each Sunday after fellowship time, a variety of North Church folks sat down to work on this puzzle, made extremely challenging by the many straight-sided pieces designed to trick even the best puzzlers. Mark this date -- October 26 --as the day Bill Wiley and Ginger Fowler were there to put in the final pieces. Congratulations, all! What's next, puzzle fans?

## From the Kitchen

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*This recipe was submitted by Chris Normandin:*

### CHRIS' PUMPKIN COOKIES

1 cup sugar (or ½ Splenda & ½ sugar)  
1 cup canned pumpkin  
¼ cup butter  
¼ cup applesauce  
1 Tbsp grated orange peel  
2 cups whole wheat flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
1 tsp baking soda  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp salt  
½ cup chopped walnuts  
½ - 1 cup dark choc chips

Heat oven to 375. Mix sugar, pumpkin, butter, applesauce and orange peel. Stir in flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Stir in chips and nuts. Drop dough by teaspoonfuls onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake until light brown, 8-10 minutes. Immediately remove from cookie sheet and cool.



## Newsletter Deadline

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The deadline for our January-February Newsletter will be December 15th. Please send all Newsletter submissions to me at [nccadmin@crocker.com](mailto:nccadmin@crocker.com). I am more than happy to receive anyone's entries anytime before the deadline. Let me know that the email is specifically for the Newsletter by putting 'Newsletter' in the subject line. Thank you!

Lee Steventon

## A New Face in the Church Office

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*The following is an interview with Lee Steventon, the new admin, conducted by Barbara Jenkins.*

### ***Why did you think that working as an administrative assistant at North Church would be a good match for you?***

Back when I first started attending UMass, the first work-study position I was hired for was an office assistant position, much like the admin assistant position here. I left for a tutoring job that paid more, but it wasn't as fulfilling. I still want to try actual teaching in 4 years or so, but it turns out that being an administrative assistant is something that I'm good at and also enjoy. As for North Church itself, I definitely find it much easier to work in an open and accepting environment. I used to assistant-teach Baha'i Sunday school (as a volunteer) in Northampton, back in high school, and it was tough to reach out to the teens, and talk to them about bullies and peer pressure, because I was trying to remain closeted from the whole religious community at the same time. After years of trying to hide who I am from everyone, I felt smothered. I knew from talking to my friend Michael, who used to be a part of the congregation here, that I'd be accepted here. I can't say that about most of the jobs I've had.

### ***Besides working here, what other work are you doing/will be doing?***

I currently volunteer my time as the Treasurer of the Pioneer Valley Gamer Collective (PVGC). The PVGC cooperatively owns and runs Worlds Apart Games in downtown Amherst, staffed entirely by volunteers. It's a gaming store whose mission is to build community, and it's a great place to spend one's free time. I will also be resuming my UMass career in the Spring as a half-time student in the Linguistics-Anthropology joint major.

### ***When not working, how do you like to spend your time?***

I spend at least half of my free time playing various games in Worlds Apart. We have had a lot of local game designers come in on Sunday afternoons to demonstrate their games and sell them through us, so the weekends go by pretty quickly. Other than that, I try to make time to see the occasional movie with my friends, whether it's a new release, a "Friday Night Rewind" of an old classic, or my hundredth time seeing the Rocky Horror Picture Show. When I manage to find time to myself, I like to spend it with a good book or graphic novel.

### ***Where are you living now and where did you live when you were younger?***

Right now I live in Sunderland. I moved there because it was actually cheaper per-month than living on campus, and all of the gamer friends I made at UMass live there, too. Before I left for college, I lived in Easthampton. My mother and I had moved there from Vermont when I was about seven. Even after having lived there for 12 years, Easthampton never replaced Vermont as "home" to me, but Sunderland may accomplish that in as little as four.