
January & February 2010 North Star
A publication of North Congregational Church, UCC

413-549-0500 Church Office

Web Address: www.north-church.org

Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m.

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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

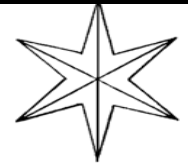
***Time Sensitive Material
Please Open Immediately!***

North Star

North Church – UCC News

January & February 2010

Unconditionally Welcoming, Decidedly Christian



In Our Thoughts...

*Our church is one place that I let more people in than anywhere else in my life.
I do feel very comfortable there and that is why I could overcome my fear
and anxiety of it all and testify my faith and belief in God to our church.*

-- "Courtney" giving testimony about the importance of her church family
(*Tell It Like It Is*, L. Daniel. Alban Inst. 2006, p.145)

The new year has just about arrived, as North Amherst and surroundings experience the arrival of a deep blast of frigid weather just after Christmas day. I know that Winter Solstice has just occurred on the 21st, and although the wind is howling, I'm already holding out for those warmer days of Spring! Over the next several months, as we watch for lingering light, there are other shadows that linger for our congregation. We are in the midst of a discernment process, which seeks to identify the best options for moving forward as a viable congregation in 2010 and beyond (please see article below). We are faced with the realities of dwindling resources, diminutive membership, busy lives and shifting priorities – all at a time when the challenges of building a small church call for increasing passion and determination.

When it comes right down to it, here's the rub: given the realities, how shall we pursue our calling to be an invitational, welcoming congregation that seeks to following Jesus in word and deed in our community and throughout the world (vision statement, June, 2006) in 2010? If you haven't asked yourself about this recently, try giving this your full attention over the next several weeks: What do I LOVE about North Church and whom can I invite to come and check it out? How can my church be a church home for all sorts of people? What part will I play in helping others to learn about North Church and how can we make a difference together?

Over the months of January and February, as we approach our Annual Meeting on Feb. 28th, our worship services and small group discussions will offer chances to reflect on these themes. Let's seize the opportunities we have to be together, and to learn more about being God's people. Happy New Year to all!

Pastor Nada

Congregational Discernment Process Underway

An all-church open meeting was held in the Bates room, following worship on December 13th, for continuing discussion about the challenges North Church faces in continuing on as a viable congregation. Eighteen people participated, as Facilitator Sheryl Hall, acting on behalf of the Pastoral Relations Committee, guided a discernment process that affirmed our current foci in ministry and mission, and identified seven different options for the congregation to explore as it seeks to move forward.

The three top choices, as selected by all participants were as follows: 1) Sharing Space in our facilities (rental); 2) Changing Current Levels of Commitment to our common purpose as a church; and 3) Exploring Options for Merging with another congregation (either they join North Church or we join up at another location). Each person in attendance then self-selected into 3 "Action Teams" which plan to investigate all aspects of what it would take to pursue these 3 courses of action. Coordinators for the Action Teams are: Mary Jane Laus, (Shared Space); Angie Sottile, (Change Level of Commitment); and Sarah Serwa (Merging).

Over the next several weeks, members will be investigating and researching information related to these possible options for North Church. Sunday, January 10th has been set as a check-in date for all action teams and Sunday, January 24th will be reserved for oral reporting. Your prayers and participation are most welcome; if you have questions or would like to become more involved, please contact Barbara Jenkins (413-253-2929) or Pastor Nada (413-549-0500).

-- The Pastoral Relations Committee & Pastor Nada Sellers

North Church Stewardship

From a total amount of \$27,460.00 pledged for 2009 by 18 pledging individuals and couples, we have received by the end of the year, a total of \$27,491.00. We anticipate surpassing our pledged amount by an even greater amount because some people are still in the process of completing their 2009 pledges. Thank you, everyone!

The weekly offerings beyond pledged amounts came to \$3,147.00 for the year. The amount budgeted for offerings was \$1,600 -- almost twice as much was actually given. Thank you, everyone!

Total income from pledges and offerings totals \$30,638.

For the year 2010, twenty-one pledges have been offered with the promise of a total of \$32,724.00.

North Church Stewardship Team

FYI

- January 6** 7PM, Bible Study at Patti & Jenna's home in Easthampton
- January 10** Action Team meetings, after worship
- January 11** 7PM, Executive Council Meeting
- January 12** Healing Group meets for lunch – check with Pastor Nada if interested
- January 12** 4PM – 8PM, 2nd Annual Empty Bowls Dinner at The Pub in Amherst to benefit the Amherst Survival Center; \$25 in advance, \$30 at door
- January 13** 7PM, Book Group meeting in Pastor Nada's Study (next book TBD)
- January 16** 9AM – 12PM, Annual Martin Luther King Breakfast at Amherst Middle School
- January 23-24** 24-hr Game & Knit-A-Thon at Worlds Apart Games, to benefit Warmer Winters
- January 24** Action Team presentations, after worship
- February 12** Amherst Survival Center - Chinese New Year Dinner plus Dumpling Class
- February 17** Amherst Survival Center - Black History Dinner (Location TBA)
- February 17** Ash Wednesday, First Day of Lent
- February 20** Good Eats – Dumpling Cooking with Wei Lin Greeney (Location TBA)
- February 28** Annual Meeting, following worship

Birthdays in January & February

January	15th – Mary Jane Laus	February	12th – Thomas Simpson
			24th – Carrie Pinheiro
			28th – Lee Steventon

We would like to have the birthdays of everyone at North Church, so if you have not already done so, please reply to nccadmin@crocker.com with yours. Thanks!

Ways to Serve

FIN Fund:

Friends In Need, the North Church emergency needs fund, is a pastor's discretion-based resource, provided by the congregation as a service to our communities. Providing gift cards and vouchers for groceries, gas, small sums of cash for rent or crisis needs, the fund allows North Church to respond to some of the individual requests that it receives each month. Donations can be made in the offering plate, using the FIN Fund box on the Worship Table, or in consultation with Bill Wiley. *Contact:* Bill W. at 549-2860 or glacierb1@peoplepc.com

Amherst Survival Center Donations:

Please consider gifts for ASC's food pantry during this season of feeding hungry people. Food can be collected here at NCC, and we will deliver it for you. Designating the first Sunday of each month for sharing our gifts at the communion table, as was previously done, would be a great pattern to restore. Suggestions are: peanut butter, canned goods, non-perishables. *Contact:* 549-3968 or survivalcenter@verizon.net

Town of Amherst Warming Place:

First Baptist Church in Amherst, has become the site for a town-sponsored "warming place" where homeless or stranded people can come in from the cold, receive a warm drink and a safe place to be for temporary shelter from the elements. Town leaders welcome assistance with volunteers, as the site is staffed by grant-supported professionals from the Center for Human Development in Springfield, as well as by local volunteers. It is open 7 days a week from 9pm to 7 am, between December and April. *Contact:* Jane Banks (of Jesse's House) at 658-0060

North Church Work Projects:

The Parish Hall improvement project, involving the basement, stairwell, and kitchen are all underway and in need of extra energies in order to reach completion. Work Days for painting, sorting, cleaning, rearranging are pending.

Contact: Barbara at 253-2929 or Pastor Nada at 549-0500 or northcongoucc@yahoo.com

Visitation:

In support of NCC elders and others in our community, we hope to increase the visits and visitors who can help offer encouragement to Dottie Jenks who resides in Cozy Corners Nursing Center in Sunderland. *Contact:* Pastor Nada at 549-0500 or northcongoucc@yahoo.com

Letter Campaign Coordinator:

Interested in helping organize and encourage letter-writing from NCC on issues of importance in our community, state, country and the world? Here's the role for you: let's help get the word out that we want to be heard on the issues that impact all of us!

Contact: Pastor Nada at 549-0500 or northcongoucc@yahoo.com

Meet North Church's Newest Member

Born in Virginia, I grew up in many towns in Maryland, New York State, Maine, New Jersey - wherever Montgomery Ward sent my father to his next post. I graduated from Goucher College in Towson, MD in 1968, then began a long career in child protective services, first in Baltimore, MD and then for the State of New Jersey. I received my MSW from Rutgers University Graduate School of Social Work in 1974. During my 34 years with the NJ Division of Youth and Family Services, I held several positions: intake social worker, training specialist, training supervisor, quality assurance specialist, executive assistant to an assistant director and policy administrator. My most important job, however, has been that of mother to my daughter Gabrielle, now 27, who was raised in Yardley, PA, our home for over 20 years. Gabby's dad passed away at our home in 1990. In 1994, I was successful in searching for my biological mother, who had placed me for adoption as an infant. In the process, I discovered two biological half-sisters - quite amazing for someone who grew up as an only child! In 2000, I moved my parents up to PA from Florida and cared for them in their final years.

After taking early retirement, my partner Cindy and I moved to this area in 2004, to help care for Cindy's mother and to be closer to our summer place in Downeast Maine. Not long after moving here, Cindy was diagnosed with an incurable cancer. We traveled, hoping for the best, but her illness worsened in the summer of 2008, and she passed away in December. I began "church shopping" in late winter, 2009. I knew of North Church from Cindy's time at Fisher Hospice, just down the street. I had looked at the signboard and banner many times and felt drawn to North Church, but other area churches seemed a whole lot closer to my house in Florence. I knew I was in the right place on my first visit. Since coming to North Church, I have participated in the Book Group, Bible Study, Healing Group, Good Eats, PRIDE parade, Relay for Life, the Alternative Holiday Gift Fair and fishing! I hope to strengthen North Church in any way I can. Other interests are enjoying time with my daughter and friends, reading, writing and attending to two demanding cats.

Good Eats

No Good Eats group sessions were held in November and December, but Mary Jane Laus represented North Church well by roasting two of the Amherst Survival Center turkeys in the North Church ovens and taking them to the meal served by the Amherst Survival Center.

Charity Game-A-Thon in Amherst

On the weekend of January 23rd-24th, from noon to noon, Worlds Apart Games (in downtown Amherst, next to the fire station) is teaming up with Warmer Winters to run the first ever Worlds Apart Charity Game-A-Thon.

Warmer Winters (www.warmerwinters.org) is an organization based in Leominster that helps the poor of the community by producing warm, quality clothing (hats, scarves, sweaters, etc.) for people who need them.

Participants are encouraged to collect sponsors to raise money for Warmer Winters. People can also help out by knitting while gaming. Neither is required to participate. The more, the merrier!

There will always be at least one game running for the 24-hour event, but not all participants need to be active for the entire event. There will be plenty of opportunities for gamers and knitters to take breaks for food and short naps. Folks can also help out on Sat., then go home to sleep.

Another easy way to help out with this event is to purchase food from Papa Gino's Pizza over Game-A-Thon weekend. Just mention our event, and they will contribute a portion of the sale to Warmer Winters.

If you have any questions about this great event, or would like to receive a sponsor packet, e-mail Michael Whitehouse at gm@pvgaming.org.



Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for our March-April newsletter will be February 21st. Please send all Newsletter submissions to me at nccadmin@crocker.com. I am more than happy to receive anyone's entries any time before the deadline. Let me know that the email is specifically for the Newsletter by putting 'Newsletter' somewhere in the subject line. Thank you! Lee Steventon

This newsletter is produced by NCC with special help from Barbara Jenkins, Bill Wiley and Nada Sellers; layout and final copy by Lee Steventon. Your submissions are welcome, subject to review and possible editing. Questions? Please contact us at nccadmin@crocker.com.

QUICK – *Can You Identify This Personality?*

My roots go back 2,000 years, but I am very much now and today. I am not strict with tradition or dripping in rituals.

Instead, I embrace modern intelligent thinking:

Acceptance.
Inclusiveness.
Justice.

I can even be light-hearted! My open-armed approach is appealing to people of all races and lifestyles -- which might explain why my congregations are diverse and unique.

Another funny thing happens when you're less judgmental. You allow people to search, discover, and flourish...

In the end, my personality is reflective of Jesus:

Open.
Embracing.
Nurturing.
And eternally relevant!

I am... The United Church of Christ!

-- adapted from UCC's "Personality Profile," God is Still Speaking

Gibbles 'n Bits

Before we leave Christmas behind for another year, can you name that tune? The following Christmas songs might have been written by government officials. What are the original titles?

1. Move Hither the Entire Assembly of Those Who Are Loyal In Their Belief
2. Embellish Interior Passageways
3. Vertically Challenged Adolescent Percussionist
4. Soundless Nocturnal Period
5. Majestic Triplet Referred To In The First Person Plural
6. Precious Metal Musical Devices
7. Caribou With Vermillion Olfactory Appendage
8. Omnipotent Supreme Being Elicit Respite to Ecstatic Distinguished Males

(check the next newsletter for the answers)

January 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	31 <small>New Year's Eve</small>	1 <small>New Year's Day</small>	2
3 Communion Service	4	5 Admin. Team Meeting	6 Bible Study	7	8	9
10 Action Team Meetings	11 Exec. Council Meeting	12 Healing Group Lunch Empty Bowls Dinner	13 Book Group	14	15 MJ Laus's birthday	16 AMS - MLK Breakfast
17	18	19	20	21	22	23 24-hour game-a-thon & knit-a-thon at Worlds Apart Games
24 24-hour game-a-thon & knit-a-thon Action Team Presentations	25	26	27	28	29	30

February 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12 Survival Ctr. Chinese New Year Dinner	13
14	15	16	17 Ash Wed. <small>First Day of Lent</small> Survival Ctr. Black History Dinner	18	19	20 Good Eats: Dumpling Cooking
21 Newsletter Deadline	22	23	24	25	26	27
28 Annual Meeting	1	2	3	4	5	6