



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

THE CORNERSTONE

Ridgebury Congregational Church
605 Ridgebury Road
Ridgefield, CT 06877

From the Pastor

Ave Ridgeburians!

So here we are—the holiday season already! Thanksgiving is pretty much all over but the shouting, and Christmas is so near you can almost smell it.

But for a lot of people, this holiday season is a bit different from other recent ones. What with an economy that's pretty much headed for the dumpster, ongoing wars, and upcoming change of administrations, Holiday Season '08 is, let's be honest, not going to be nearly as merry for many of us as it was cracked up to be. For a lot of us, the holidays are going to be even more stressful than usual—as if they weren't stressful enough—and it may leave some folks thinking: why do I even bother with this?

Well, as a public service to the stressed, the frustrated, and the concerned, let me herewith offer the Minister's brief discussion of: "Reasons the Holiday Season Matters (Even if You Might Not Feel Like Very Holidayish)."

First, let's mention two things to be thankful for (and these are things for which I know I'm thankful!): First, you might want to consider being thankful that you're part of a church whose members are always ready to support you, even during uncertain times, and to help spread the stress around. Second, you can be thankful that your church is in some ways in the best shape its been in years. We will be welcoming 13 new members later on in December (which brings our new member total for the year to 17). As reported by the Stewardship Committee elsewhere in this issue of *The Cornerstone*, our recently completed stewardship campaign brought in such a surplus of pledges that we will be able—for the first time in ages—to begin 2009 with a positive budget. (Oh, and if you are one of the reasons for that good financial news, you might want to stop and give yourself a little credit.) Now that I've given you a couple of things to get you started, you can probably come up with other things to be thankful for if you give the idea a try.

Second, let me remind you of something I said last year (at least I think it was last year) when we were all facing the stress of last year's holiday rush: Ultimately, for Christians at least, the holidays aren't about shopping, big dinners, pretending to be jolly, trips to relatives you'd rather avoid, or any of the other junk our hopelessly commercialized culture tells you the holiday season is about. What the holidays are really all about is taking time to remember what God has done for us through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, and the difference God can make in our lives as result of that gift. It's about gathering together with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Once again we hear the stories of John in the wilderness, of Mary and the archangel Gabriel, of Joseph and Mary and their firstborn son in Bethlehem—and remembering that even in the midst of uncertain times, God's gifts and God's promises are things that are always certain.

Cheers,

John



It is hard to believe that we are already talking about the beginning of Advent season at Ridgebury Church. This is always a very special time for all of us as it seems to bring us together in so many different ways. The memory of being with someone special, the wonderful songs, the bible lessons, but most of all coming together and being thankful for the many blessings and friendships we all have.

Advent begins on November 30th with families and youth helping us with our worship services each week.

December 7th is Family Sunday and Communion. Again we can be thankful for our youth as they and their teachers assist in our worship service.

On December 20th with the help of many elves our Meeting House will be hung with the traditional greens. If you would like to help, please contact Marsha Albats or Liz Rowe.

On Christmas Eve there will be two services. Both services will be filled with scripture and song. Communion will be received at our late service. Rev. Heeckt and the Deacons will be working hard to make these services both meaningful and spiritual.

During the month of December the Confirmation class will be busy collecting gifts and food for a holiday meal for a family they have adopted for Christmas. We are very proud of how they are reaching out to help someone else.

Mark on your calendar - January 10th. We will again celebrate with our youth the production of "Birthday Party for Jesus". This will be "dinner theater" with a pot luck dinner to be shared by all. More information to follow in the next Cornerstone.

I want to take this time, on behalf of the Deacons and I, to thank each of you for your dedication and support that each of you give to Ridgebury Church. Also, a special thank you to the Confirmation class and their parents for their support. Without all of you we could not have the wonderful family we have. God Bless all of you and Merry Christmas to you and your extended families

God Bless,
Sharon Straiton
Chairman of Deacons



There's a chill in the air!!! Winter is making its appearance. But, there is warmth inside Ridgebury Church. Our Thanksgiving food drive is in progress. All the plans are in place for the confirmation class and the congregation to support two families for Christmas. People are shopping for their Angel Tree person. The December 7th Missions Fair will bring many groups to us at one time. We can shop for Christmas and support many needy and deserving agencies. I think that's called, "One stop shopping".

Many members and friends contribute to these efforts and we are all so much richer for it. Sincerest thanks to all who make this time of year so special including the Missions Committee, the confirmation class, the Deacons, the Flower Committee, the Stewardship Committee and every Ridgebury Congregational Church participant.

It's wonderful to feel the warmth generated by our Ridgebury Church families. We can and are making a difference well beyond our 4 walls. The year 2009 promises to provide more of the same opportunities. So, bring on the snow --- we'll be just fine --- okay, a moderate amount of snow.

Christ's love be with you,
Elizabeth Sganga



Put your right hand over your left shoulder, or your left hand over your right shoulder, and pat yourselves on the back! Why?? Because YOU deserve credit for pledging your support to Ridgebury Church for 2009.

It's always satisfying to report the particulars of a successful campaign and here they are:

42 responses with pledges have been received totaling \$73,286

13 new pledges received for 2009

13 pledges were increased from last year

We are grateful for all who give of their "time, talent and treasures" in so many ways. We're truly blessed to have such a supportive fellowship.

My best wishes to you all for a Merry Christmas. Remember pledging is always in season—a gentle reminder to complete your 2008 pledge.

On behalf of the Stewardship Committee
Chris Miller For the Committee

A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in Ridgefield because he was short of time and couldn't find a vacant space. Then he put a note under the windshield wiper that read: "I have circled the block five times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment, "Forgive us our trespasses."

When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with his note:

"I've circled this block for five years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. "Lead us not into temptation."

From the Missions Committee

By now, the Christmas Mission Fair is upon us. Please plan to attend, purchase a lunch, and shop alternatively this year! Remember to bring your wrapped Angel Tree gifts. If you were planning to donate baked goods or items for the white elephant table, kindly have them at Shield's Hall by Saturday, December 6 for pricing and setup.

Thank you for the Thanksgiving donations to the *IAM* food pantry. They are much appreciated. If you signed up to assist in providing Christmas dinner for a family, don't forget to bring the food to Shield's Hall by the requested time.

On Sunday, December 21, you will find an envelope in the bulletin for the annual Christmas Fund Offering. The money raised by this goes to the UCC Pension Boards' Ministerial Assistance Program and will be used to help clergy and lay individuals and their families who are in need. Thank you in advance for your support.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

I wish to contribute chancel poinsettias for December services at Ridgebury Congregational Church.

Please note in the bulletin that the flowers honor:

- The memory of _____
- The birth of _____
- The marriage/anniversary of _____
- The birthday of _____
- The glory of God _____
- With thanks for _____

The plants will decorate the church from Dec. 20th through Christmas, after which they may be taken home.

Number of 8" poinsettias (@\$15) _____

Number of 6" poinsettias (@\$8.00) _____

Optional donation for church decorations _____

Please send acknowledgement card _____

Name:

Address:

Please make checks out to Ridgebury Congregational Church (noting "Flowers"), on or BEFORE Dec. 1st.

Drop this form and your check in the collection plate, place in the "flowers" mailbox in Shields Hall, or mail to:

Flower Committee
Ridgebury Congregational Church, UCC
605 Ridgebury Road
Ridgefield, CT 06877

An acknowledgement card will be sent to the honoree upon request.

LADIES' ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER

December 3, 2008

Chuck's Steak House

20 Segar Street, Danbury, CT

Please reserve December 3rd on your calendar and plan to attend our annual Ladies' Christmas dinner. We will gather at Chuck's Steak House at 6:30 PM. The cost will be \$30.00 per person. (This includes salad bar, entrée, dessert, tax and gratuity.)

It's always a great time to get together and enjoy good food and the company of one another.

Everyone will be receiving a personal invitation with more details.

Questions? Contact Betty Miller, Liz Sganga or Sharon Straiton.

Let me introduce you to . . .

By Liz Rowe

Brien Locke (aka John O'Brien Locke) has been a member of our church since 1999 and serves as a Trustee and as our newly appointed Vice Moderator.

Brien was born on June 11, 1941 and is an only child of John and Ruth O'Brien Locke. A family disagreement about his name surfaced as his mother wanted him to be called Brien and his dad wanted him to be called John. His mom won and from then on he was called "Brien". His grandfather was the Post Master and both his parents were clerks at the local post office.

He was raised in Williamstown, Massachusetts and during his childhood lived with his parents, aunt and grandparents in a duplex in the center of town. He graduated from high school in 1959 and attended UMASS in Amherst, where he received a BA in American History. After graduation, he went to Law School for two years at BU, then moved to Rockville, MD where he worked as a stock clerk at Sprague Electronics. After a year, he returned to Williamstown and went back to UMASS in Amherst where he received his MAT. He student taught in Palmer, MA and after a year returned to Williamstown. In 1967, he was a substitute teacher at a regional high school in Williamstown. After a year, he was offered a full time position there as a history teacher, where he taught for 29 years.

Brien traveled to Europe with foreign language teachers on their exchange trips during school vacations and in 1982, participated for a year in a Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program in Wales. He also took a year long sabbatical from teaching and worked at Sturbridge Village where he was a tour guide to students visiting. Some of his lesson plans were published and used years later.

One of Brien's great interests is politics. In the mid 1980's, Brien was involved in the Finance Committee in Williamstown and after encouragement from friends and family, decided to campaign for selectman of his home town. In 1984 he won the campaign and served for 12 years as a volunteer Selectman. Politics also introduced him to his wife, Phyllis, who was campaigning for her brother in Williamstown. She met Brien and within a year they were married. This was Brien's first marriage and was instantly adopted into our family (Liz, Matt and their children). Since they married, they have lived in Williamstown, Ridgefield and Oregon. He and Phyllis have a condo in Oregon where they visit during the summer to be with Matthew and his family. They also own a timeshare in Cancun where they escape in the winter.

Brien has been substitute teaching and loves working and being with the kids. When he's not working, he enjoys playing tennis and attends history courses offered through the town. Brien loves watching baseball (through his grandfather's influence he became a NY Yankees fan), and is a UCONN Husky Fan.



On December 19, the choir is planning to Christmas carol in the neighboring Ridgebury area. We would love to have other members of the congregation join us. Just bring warm clothes and a flashlight and meet us at Shield's Hall at 7:30. If you like us and the experience of singing with us. Perhaps we can entice you to become a participating choir member!

Just in case you were wondering, the choir will be singing at the 11:00 Christmas Eve service this year. Special music will be provided by Donna Barber at the 6:00 service.

We are planning on buying new tables for Shields Hall. We are thinking about a combination of round and long tables. We are looking for someone with floor planning (or similar) experience to help us with this project. If you can help, it would be greatly appreciated.

Please contact Sue Bankes , Chair or Trustees at smbankes@sbcglobal.net.

Thank you.

DECEMBER Birthdays



- 4 Mandy Gallaway
- 5 Linda Hayward
- 6 Dottie Dever
- 8 Jo Hampton
- 12 Dottie Rogers
- 14 Phyllis Locke
- 21 Jessica Parrott
- 24 Bruce Gallaway
- 28 Sheila Hislop
- 29 David Marker
- 31 Paul Albats

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E-mail Us: Office@Ridgeburychu

December 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30 <i>First Sunday of Advent [Christian]</i>	1 7p Deacons	2 7p Adult Discussion	3 1:30p Adult Discussion Group	4 7:15p AA Meets	5	6 5p Vespers Service
7 Family Sunday <i>10a Service with Communion</i> <i>11a Mission Fair</i> <i>Second Sunday of Advent [Christian]</i>	8 7p Trustees <i>Immaculate Conception [Christian]</i>	9 7p Adult Discussion	10 1:30p Adult Discussion Group 7:30p Choir Practice	11 7:15p AA Meets	12	13 5p Vespers Service
14 <i>10a New Members</i> <i>Third Sunday of Advent [Christian]</i>	15	16 7p Adult Discussion	17 1:30p Adult Discussion Group 7:30p Choir Practice	18 7:15p AA Meets	19	20 5p Vespers Service
21 <i>Fourth Sunday of Advent [Christian]</i>	22 7p Council Meeting	23 7p Adult Discussion	24 5p Christmas Eve Family Worship Service 11p Christmas Eve Worship Service <i>Christmas Eve [Christian]</i>	25 7:15p AA Meets <i>Christmas [USA]</i>	26 <i>Kwanzaa Begins [USA]</i>	27 5p Vespers Service
28 <i>11a Missions</i>	29	30 7p Adult Discussion	31 <i>New Year's Eve [USA]</i>	1 7:15p AA Meets <i>New Year's Day [USA]</i> <i>Mary - Mother of God [Christian]</i>	2	3 5p Vespers Service