



## JANUARY NEWSLETTER

### THE CORNERSTONE

Ridgebury Congregational Church  
605 Ridgebury Road  
Ridgefield, CT 06877

From the Pastor

Ave Ridgeburians!

So here we are, all set for the start of a new year, and the Church Council and the Pastoral Relations Committee have a little gift for you to start the year off right—a survey!

As I mentioned before worship this week, one of the sections of my contract mandates that the Church Council undertake an annual evaluation of how all of us in the Congregation: you, me, everybody, are doing in fulfilling “our mutual goals and responsibilities;” or, to put it another way, it’s a chance for the Council to reflect on the sort of job we’re doing at being Ridgebury Congregational Church.

Well, that all sounds well and good; after all, there’s nothing wrong with trying to figure out how we’re all doing, the only catch is my contract doesn’t spell out what those mutual goals and responsibilities are. Since the Church Council is already busy doing its regular Church Council stuff, it delegated the responsibility for working out our mutual goals and responsibilities to the Pastoral Relations Committee, who have recently completed their work, and are ready to share it with all of you.

Now, before I go any further, let me take a moment for a brief shout-out for the Pastoral Relations Committee, who have done yeoman service pulling all of this together. As best as I can tell, the Church has never tried to do anything like this before, and everyone on Pastoral Relations has just worked their tailfeathers off on this! They have put in a great deal of time, effort, and concern to get this document right, and I think they’ve done a great job.

But coming up with a great set of “mutual goals and responsibilities” was one thing, getting the Congregation to participate in the evaluation process was something else. You see, when Pastoral Relations simply presented their document as a list of statements about what the Church should be doing, even the best-intentioned people’s eyes had an unfortunate tendency to glaze over. Then came the vital insight: why not make it into a survey! That way, instead of the document simply being a list of things the Church *should be* doing, the document became a way of asking people how they thought the Church *is* doing. The survey idea made an already valuable document all the more so, and it is in that form that the Pastoral Relations Committee will be sending it out to all the members of Ridgebury Congregational Church.

When you get your copy, you will see that the survey asks for your thoughts on how we as a church are doing in fulfilling three main goals: encouraging participation in the body of Christ; encouraging the mutual spiritual growth of the Congregation; and encouraging people, as individuals, to continue to pursue a deeper relationship with God. Then, under each of the three main goals, there are a number of practical ways we try to fulfill each big goal. What we’re asking you to do is to give us your honest appraisal of how you think the church, as a whole is doing at fulfilling those big goals in practical ways. There’s a 5 point scale for each practical activity and a place for you to add additional comments if you are interested in doing so.

Finally, at the end of the survey is what I think may be the single most important part of the whole document. There is a place for you to suggest other ways the Congregation might strive to fulfill its mission. It’s a big world out there, and many of you may have all sorts of great ideas about new ways we can reach out to it—so don’t be shy, suggest away!

The bit about making suggestions lends itself to a brief mention of how the Church will use your responses. One way Pastoral Relations and Council will use them is to evaluate how we’re doing as a Congregation right now. The other, just as important, is as a resource for considering the Church’s future. As I’ve mentioned on more than one occasion, Ridgebury Congregational Church is at an interesting point in its history. We’re not the church we were a couple years ago, but we’re not quite the church we’re going to become yet, either. This survey will allow our Congregation’s leadership to get information they can use to help chart our course in the future.

So, what are we doing well, what aren’t we doing so well, and what new things might we do in the future? You’ll get your chance to answer all of those questions when you get your survey. So please, oh please, read it over, consider it thoughtfully and prayerfully, and then **FILL IT OUT AND SEND IT IN!**

John



As we end this year and begin to plan for next year, there are many things that I am thankful for and most of all, it is each of you.

In September, when the Deacons began to plan for the year, we said we would only plan till the end of December and then would meet again in January and plan until June.

I have looked back and with your help we have done an awful lot, but it could not have been accomplished without each of you helping and supporting the Deacons.

Sunday School began with a rainy pot luck dinner but with lots of enthusiasm. I extend many thanks to Sally Miller and Elizabeth Sganga and to all the young people who have participated in our church school.

We have a very wonderful group of confirmands who are meeting regularly and have become a part of our church community by participating in many of our activities. It is nice to see them joining with all of us.

Saturday Vesper Services continue with a small gathering of people, but some very loyal to the service. It is our hope that this will grow. It is a great alternative when Sunday morning service is impossible for you to attend.

A few special acknowledgements to some special people - Jean Early and Barbara Kapp for your help with music at both of our services, Wynd Harris for the donation of a sound system so that everyone can hear, Jean Stouter for the beautiful pewter baptismal pitcher, and Irene Stebbins for the additional bibles.

A big welcome to the "very" little ones who were baptized over the past months and to all our new members, you are all special people.

On January 10th, the Sunday School will be presenting "A Birthday Party for Jesus". This will be dinner theater at its best. Prior to the play, we will have a pot luck dinner and after the play we will all join in the birthday party. There will be no Saturday Vesper Service that night.

Finally, I want to thank all the Deacons for all the hard work and time you give to Ridgebury Church and to Rev. Heckt for all his patience and guidance as he works with all of us.

God Bless,

Sharon Straiton  
Chairman of Deacons



New Year, New Members, New Ideas, and New Plans -- we're off to a busy start in 2009!!! You will be hearing about bylaw review, architectural study and financial information at our next congregational meeting in January. Council, through the Pastoral Relations Committee, is also gathering information concerning our Goals and Responsibilities Survey. This is all being done in order to steer Ridgebury Congregational Church, its members and friends, in the right direction for the future. Your input is welcome and encouraged.

My best wishes for all in 2009. May we find the resilience and confidence we need during these unsettling times in our country by our faith in God through Jesus Christ who showed us the way

Christ's love be with you,  
Elizabeth Sganga



With the completion of the 2008 Stewardship Campaign, we can look forward to 2009 with promise. We have had a "jolly good" response from the members and friends of the church. What is even more heartening is we received 14 new pledges for a grand total of 43 for 2009. Not bad when you consider last year there were 35 pledging units. If you're thinking the math doesn't add up, it's because we did lose some pledges for various reasons. But here's the good part: We have for budget planning purposes, \$74,382 in committed funds for 2009. Considering today's economic times, we have to be proud of the fact our "little white church on the corner" has caring and dedicated members. Speaking for the entire Stewardship Committee, we say "thanks" for the fellowship and commitment in making this a success.

On behalf of the Stewardship Committee  
Chris Miller for the Committee

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An Irish priest was driving on I-84 and was stopped for speeding in Connecticut. The state trooper smelled alcohol on the priest's breath and then sees an empty wine bottle on the floor of the car. He says, "Sir, have you been drinking?" "Just water", says the priest. The trooper says, "Then why do I smell wine?" The priest looks at the bottle and says, "Good Lord! He's done it again!"

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#### From the Missions Committee

Thank you one and all for the **marvelous** response to the Christmas Fair for Missions. We on the committee certainly had a good time and from where we stood it appeared as though everyone else was enjoying the good food, fellowship and opportunity to give in alternative ways.

The final tally after expenses shows that in addition to the Angel gifts purchased for the residents of the *Women's Shelter* and food donations for holiday meals for clients of the *IAM Pantry*, \$1999 was raised for various other charities. \$580 to *Heifer International*, \$418 to Church World Service, \$640 to *Ten Thousand Villages*, and \$361 to our own *Ridgebury Congregational Church*.

Besides thanking all those who spent their money and who contributed by bringing wonderful items for the bake/white elephant table, and gifts for the Angel Tree recipients, we would like to thank those individuals not on the committee who worked with us to make the Fair a success. The names Nancy Boersma, Karen and Jim Edwards, Barbara Kapp, Sally Miller, and Tyler and Courtney Welton come to mind; their help was invaluable. (The writer, whose memory fails her at times, apologizes for any omissions.)

Thanks once again, and we look forward to another good Fair next year!

## *Let me introduce you to . . .*

*By Liz Rowe*

**Shannon Dickson** and her husband, Tod, are new members of Ridgebury Congregational Church. They found our church through a mailing that had been sent to all new residents in the area. Since our church was close by, they visited us on a Sunday in January 2008, the same Sunday our Christmas pageant was held. They really liked the small, unified feeling of our church, and our minister, and in the spring became members. Shannon looks forward to getting involved in a Social Committee at Ridgebury in the future. She loves the children sermon and thinks John does a very good job.

Shannon was born in Ottawa, Canada and grew up with two families in Toronto and Montreal. Shannon's birth mother had an adventurous life and her nanny's family became her surrogate family. Shannon's second family had eighteen biological children making it a fun filled home with lots of love and attention. Her "adopted" parents as she called her nannies were a traditional French Canadian family who enforced a very strict Roman Catholic upbringing, very different from that of her mother's free spirited lifestyle. Even though she was an only child, her nannies children became her siblings and she considers them as part of her family.

She attended George Brown College for Hospitality, as well as a vocational school for travel in Toronto and completed a Business Communication course at St. Mary's University while living in Halifax. She currently works as a reporting analyst for a travel management company where she has worked for over ten years, and is on maternity leave (she wishes the U.S. had longer maternity leave laws). When Shannon goes back to work, Katie will be at daycare within walking distance of their home.

Shannon and Tod met at a party in Toronto. He is from Florida, but was working towards his PhD in electrical engineering at the University of Toronto. After dating for a year and a half, they were married in a small legal ceremony in city hall in Toronto. In 2006, Tod accepted a job at IBM in Yorktown Heights, NY. He also teaches part time at Columbia University in New York. After waiting a year for her green card, Shannon joined Tod in Danbury in October 2007. Shannon had never lived in the U.S. so this is a whole new experience for her. Once settled, they decided to have a second wedding on their first anniversary for their families at the Stonehenge Inn in Ridgefield.

This has been an extremely busy year for Shannon and Tod. They are proud parents to Katie who was born in August. Shannon is enjoying motherhood immensely and it's getting more fun as each day goes by. She and Tod share 50/50 in the parenting responsibilities and give each other an R&R day once a week. Shannon enjoys finding a great bargain and is passionate about cooking.

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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](mailto:smbankes@sbcglobal.net).

Thank you.



- 1 Sally Yarrish
- 12 Stefanie Shevlin
- 14 Dana Marker
- 16 Sue Bankes
- 16 Dorothy Crofut
- 18 Beth Shonk
- 19 Thomas Trolle
- 28 Lessley Burke
- 29 Karen Edwards

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### January 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 11a Missions	29	30	31 New Year's Eve [USA]	1 7:15p AA Meets  New Year's Day [USA] Mary - Mother of God [Christian]	2	3 5p Vespers Service
4 Family Sunday	5 7p Deacons Meet	6 Epiphany [Christian]	7 1:30p Adult Discussion Group  7:30p Choir Practice	8 7:15p AA Meets	9	10 5p Christmas Pageant
11 10a Service with Communion	12 7p Trustees	13	14 1:30p Adult Discussion Group  7:30p Choir Practice	15 7:15p AA Meets	16	17 5p Vespers Service
18	19 Martin Luther King Day [USA]	20	21 1:30p Adult Discussion Group  7:30p Choir Practice	22 7:15p AA Meets	23	24 5p Vespers Service
25 11a Missions	26 7p Council Meeting	27	28 1:30p Adult Discussion Group  7:30p Choir Practice	29 7:15p AA Meets	30	31 5p Vespers Service