



NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

THE CORNERSTONE

Ridgebury Congregational Church
605 Ridgebury Road
Ridgefield, CT 06877

Ave, Ridgeburians,

As most of you know, I'm recently back from my most recent trip down to Virginia for the fall residency for my Doctor of Ministry program, so I thought I might spend a little time this month giving you a report about how things are going.

I am currently completing my last of five required classes for my program, and have three elective classes yet to complete. Assuming I am able to complete those at the one course-per term pace I'm on right now, that means that I will be finished with my class work by the end of next calendar year. Following that will come my integrative exam and the submission of my dissertation proposal, and, once the proposal is accepted, the dissertation itself!

Of the four classes I've completed thus far, it was the class I took over the summer, "Prophetic Ministry and Redemptive Focus," that has been the most important, because as a result of taking that class, the whole focus of my intended dissertation project has changed. The central question of the class was: Given the current American cultural situation, how do we as Christians reach out to the non-Christian people around us? This is an increasingly important question, not just because the total number of church members is declining, but also because most congregations are getting older because fewer young adults (people in their 20s and 30s) are active in church.

It used to be that many young people in their late teens and early 20s left the churches in which they had been raised, but then returned to church in their later 20s or 30s when they married and had children. Over the past thirty or forty years, however, the number of people who leave church has been getting steadily larger while the number who return has been getting steadily smaller. For the first time ever in American history, we are presented with a substantial number people in their 20s and 30s who were raised with no particular religious affiliation whatsoever. The really interesting thing is, the lack of church religious affiliation among these people does not indicate a lack of religious interest. According to all the available data, the percentage of people in these age groups who identify themselves as agnostics or atheists is not much higher than it is in older age groups, and the percentage of people in these age groups who say they believe in God, in Jesus, in prayer, in heaven, and in other traditional Judeo-Christian ideas is about the same as in older age groups. So it turns out that folks in the 20s and 30s are as interested in faith as older people, they're just not as interested in church.

So why aren't these people in church?

And what can be done to encourage them to come to, or come back to, church?

These are the questions I would like to address in my dissertation research. I've done a little preliminary research in this direction, and the results are very interesting. (Hardly conclusive, but very interesting.) The bad news is that the people I spoke with in my research have a lot of ideas about what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to be part of a church, and many of those

ideas are extremely unfavorable. To a lot of people outside the church, Christianity seems like something that is outdated, repressive, and irrelevant, and Christians seem like a bunch of angry, divisive, lazy hypocrites. The good news, though, is that when one takes the time to actually engage with people about faith, and to take their views seriously, and perhaps to adapt our faith a bit to suit a changing world, then people seem genuinely interested in re-examining what they think about Christianity and the church. My preliminary conclusion, then, runs something like this: There are a lot of people out there in the world without religious affiliations who are genuinely looking for something to believe in and a religious community with which to affiliate, but who are simply not interested in traditional Christianity, or traditional Christian churches. But, if there are Christian communities that are willing to re-examine their own beliefs and practices, and really take seriously the challenge of “loving their neighbors as themselves”, then those communities may be able to stem the tide of declining religious affiliation among people in their 20s and 30s, and invigorate the whole of Christ’s church in the process!

John



Those of you who were at the Congregational Meeting in late October already know about the 2012 budget that was provisionally approved at that meeting, but for those of you who weren’t there, let me share the highlights with you. Even after Trustees and Council made significant cuts to the original budget that our treasurer prepared based on historical data and the funding requests of our various boards and committees, we face a \$3,687 budget deficit in 2012. More importantly, that deficit is projected even after assuming a three percent increase in pledges as compared to this year.

What does all that mean? Well, what it means is that if the current Stewardship Campaign does not succeed in producing at least a three percent increase in pledges, then we face an even larger budget deficit and will therefore likely need to make further expense cuts. Frankly, I don’t know where there’s room in the budget for further expense cuts, so we face a real problem if our Stewardship Campaign fails to produce at least a three percent increase in pledges.

So, what am I suggesting? Am I suggesting that everyone increase their pledge by three percent? No, I’m not suggesting that. Giving is a very personal matter, and everyone’s circumstances are different. Some of us cannot afford to increase our pledge at all, while others can afford to increase our pledge by ten percent or more. What I am suggesting is that each of us carefully and prayerfully considers the amount of our pledge in hopes that total pledges will increase by at least three percent. Ideally, the overall increase will be more than three percent, in which case some of the funding that was cut from the original budget can be restored.

Please be as generous as you can when you complete your pledge card for this year’s Stewardship Campaign.

Sincerely,

Marty Ollinger
Moderator



Hard to believe that it is almost the holiday season. OK maybe not that hard to believe after the big snowstorm that we just had, but it does seem to get here earlier every year! This year, November 27th is the first Sunday in Advent. Also in mid-November, you will start to see inserts in the bulletin with information on purchasing poinsettias or making contributions to our meetinghouse Christmas decorations.

As the holidays draw near, I'd like to remind you about our Deacon's fund. The Deacon's fund is a way for our church to provide support to people in our congregation and in our community. While Ridgebury is a small church, our modest Deacon's fund could really be a blessing for those needing a little assistance during the upcoming holiday months. Assistance is made in a strictly confidential manner; inquiries can be made by contacting Rev. Heeckt. Contributions to the Deacon's fund can be placed in the envelopes found in your bulletin on the first Sunday of every month, or can be made by speaking with Rev. Heeckt or any of the deacons.

In Christ,
Tod Dickson
Chairman of Deacons

CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH POINSETTIAS

Ridgebury Congregational Church traditionally celebrates Christmas by decorating the Meeting House with poinsettias, holiday swags, balsam wreaths, white pine roping, and plenty of red bows!

In the coming weeks, you will find an order form with details about participating in our holiday decorating tradition in your Sunday bulletins.

If you wish to order poinsettias to be placed in the chancel for the Christmas season, or you would like to make a donation for wreaths and swags, please fill out the form in your bulletin and place your envelope (marked with a Poinsettia) in the offering basket.

Please order Christmas flowers and decorations before Sunday, November 27, 2011.

Should you have any questions, or require a copy of the order form, please contact Kathy Barry or Vanessa McPherson.

From October 30 to November 20, we'll also be taking our annual Thanksgiving food drive. Please feel free to bring any non-perishable food to the church on Sunday and place it up front.

We hope you will all be able to contribute to these activities!




Ladies' 2011 Christmas Dinner

This year's dinner will be held on Wed., Dec.7 at Chuck's Steak House once again. All of our church family and friends of the female persuasion are welcome!

The dinner price is \$38.00. Orders from a selection of five entrees will be taken at the restaurant but reservations are required. Please contact Tara Kenny if you plan on attending and to make payment in advance.

If you are able to, please consider contributing additional money for our friends and family who want to come but could use a little relief on the meal expense. It's a great way to ensure inclusion of our entire church family while spreading good cheer!

Tara is usually at fellowship but can also be reached on her home phone at 203-778-5475 or email address tmkenny13@mc.com.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS		
	5 Michael Trolle 7 Linda Cochrane 14 Bob Bishop 16 Lindsley Burke	17 Naomi Emmons 18 Stephanie Trolle 22 Irene Stebbins 30 Liz Rowe

Here are some of the important dates for the month of November:

- November 7 – Deacons Meeting – 7pm
- November 13 – Missions Meeting – 11:30am
- November 21 – Council – 7 pm

Ongoing events:

- Genesis Bible Study – Tuesday afternoon at 1:00pm
- Choir – Tuesday nights at 7:00pm
- AA – Thursday nights at 7:15pm
- Adult Discussion Group at Parsonage – Saturday evening at 6pm
- Confirmation Class at Shields Hall – Sunday evening at 6pm