

# Niantic Community Church

*We are a community of Christians:  
learning God's ways;  
sharing God's love;  
extending God's peace and healing grace to all.*

## ***Reimagining Sunday Morning at NCC: A Proposal***

**Goals:** Sharing God's Word with more people; building a stronger NCC.

**Strategy:** Make both worship and Christian Education more available to more people.

**Proposal:** Create two similar Sunday morning worship services, with Sunday school available for both children and adults in between.

### **Proposed Schedule**

8:45AM Nursery care begins

**9:00AM Worship service I**  
(Pre-K to 4<sup>th</sup> graders may leave after 20 minutes for activities)

**10 - 11AM "Between Hour" Café**

**10:15AM Sunday school for all ages**

**11:15AM Worship service II**  
(Pre-K to 4<sup>th</sup> graders may leave after 20 minutes for activities)

12:30PM Nursery care ends

### **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)**

#### *Why are we considering a change?*

The church community has been talking about the need to accommodate more worshippers for several years. During luncheon conversation on January 11<sup>th</sup>, the Rev. Heidi Chamberland (District Superintendent, United Methodist Church) strongly encouraged us to give new consideration to a schedule where Sunday School for children and adults would be available to all worshippers on Sunday morning, by holding classes between the two services.

Heidi observed that our 9am service is often full; while our 11am service averages about 40 worshippers. She explained that when the sanctuary is regularly filled to beyond 75% (or so) of capacity, church studies have shown that it's most likely that the congregation's membership will level off. Conversely, when there's more room to grow, and the church is giving a consistent, warm welcome, growth happens.

After the meeting with Heidi, the conversation continued within our Prudential Board (two dozen of the church's leaders). The Prudential Board saw an opportunity to share God's Word with more people, and encourage more learning of God's ways, a core part of our church's vision. We also heard from members who described how in other churches, this kind of schedule promotes a depth of spirituality directly attributable to the opportunities for worship and study.

### *What will change?*

- We will offer two, similar worship services with the ability to welcome more people and give families with younger children the choice of either service because Sunday School will be offered between the two services. Families will have more flexibility for church attendance.
- We will offer adult learning and faith formation at a time that's convenient for many of our members and friends.
- Sunday school teachers will always be able to attend worship.
- Besides coffee and mingling, people will have the choice of Sunday School during the "Between Hour."
- Statistics show that NCC will attract more worshipers and thus, more participants in the church's mission.
- Children (starting as young as parents wish) can experience worship, an important part of Christian formation.
- There will be more opportunities for youth to lead / read in worship

### *Who will manage activities for Pre-K through 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and how?*

As the Director of Religious Education and Youth Ministries, (DRE-YM) Jess Bunger will manage volunteers and coordinate activities for the children under 5<sup>th</sup> grade during worship. Jess has been researching curriculum to complement the existing Sunday school curriculum that involves multi-age activities for younger children. Volunteers have also expressed interest in providing music to go along with a multi-age curriculum. Due to the fact that the shape of the ministry may change, the job description and responsibilities for Jess as the DRE-YM may also need to change. If we choose to grow into a new way of doing ministry, Jess is willing to reshape her duties and responsibilities as needed.

### *How will the church experience for 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> graders change?*

During the summer time many 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have been participating during the entire worship service for many years (and have maintained a reasonable level of behavior). While there will certainly be a learning curve, the 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have the capability to be engaged and participate for the duration of a worship service throughout the year. Joining the worshipping community at this age is optimal as there is still an inherent eagerness to learn. By encouraging the youth of our congregation to participate in a full worship service each week, the congregation will be providing a space to learn at an optimal time.

### *Currently our Confirmation class serves as a transition from children being "part-time" to "full-time" in worship: why change that?*

One reality in our church (like many others) is that after confirmation, most young men and women get so caught up in other activities that we see less of them around church. In addition, those who have gone through Sunday School have only occasionally participated in a whole worship service. All this means that some of our youth have had little exposure to worship, except for the beginning part of the service. One consequence is that many young people have not become familiar with the patterns of worship, and how they can be helpful in nurturing faith.

Since worship is the single most important expression of our church community — the one time that we are all together, praising God in readings, music, sermons, sacraments, and prayer — we want to find ways to make it familiar and nurturing to children, as early as possible, as well as adults. Doing so will serve families today, and also lay the groundwork for the church in the future by teaching children the way we worship.

***Will the choir sing at both services?***

The choir schedule will remain the same: singing an anthem at the second service on the first Sunday of each month, and at the first service on other Sundays. As we get used to the change in our worship and learning schedule, it's likely that musicians in the church will pursue more opportunities to use their gifts to lead us in praise.

***Can music be more varied during worship, and include more children?***

Yes! Involving more children with the music ministry is a fantastic opportunity not only for the children, but also the adults. Expanding the scope of what worship can include will only further our understanding of God's presence in our world and our relationship with one another. Please make suggestions to the Music and Worship Arts Committee and to Paul Althouse, Music Director.

***I have hearing problems, especially when children are present. Will both services accommodate me?***

Anyone who has been in a room with more than just a few children knows that with children comes spontaneous noise. However, 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade children are more than capable of maintaining a reasonable level of noise for an hour of worship each week.

NCC also encourages all families with infants and toddlers to take advantage of the free care in the nursery. The nursery will be open for both services.

NCC always uses a microphone and provides assistive listening devices for anyone to use. With more worshippers in the sanctuary, there may be more need for them — so please do take advantage of that resource.

Finally, if it is difficult to hear due to noise, it is also reasonable to request that a parent step outside of the sanctuary to direct their children in order that the entire congregation can engage in the worship service fully. While this may seem like a difficult request, having the courage to support good worship behavior through loving words will not only make it easier to hear, but it will nurture a deeper sense of community supporting growth for everyone.

***Are children welcome in Sunday School if a parent is not present?***

NCC knows of no parents who “drop” their children — but we will always welcome all children in Sunday School.

We hope that many parents will choose to participate in Sunday school, to continue to grow and stretch as a student on a lifelong journey. However, not all parents will choose to participate in the Sunday morning offering for adults; as a result the “café” space will be provided for parents waiting for their children to finish Sunday school. Our strong preference is that one parent remain at the church while children are in class.

***Will the parking lots be big enough for increased attendance?***

Some people have already volunteered to park nearby and walk. There are also possibilities for a shuttle service and carpools.

### *How will Coffee Hour change?*

Coffee Hour will still be held between the two services, in the Dining Hall. We could have pastries available (possibly for sale) and people who attend the later service could meet friends for coffee before the later service.

### *Where will classes be held?*

The church community has opportunities to use spaces including: A second room in the NCC Children's Center (currently one is used for Sunday School), the Sanctuary, the Parish Life Office, the Pastor's Study, the cozy corner near the lift in the Dining Hall or, in good weather, the south lawn or near the pond.

### *What are some of the ideas for adult Sunday School and faith formation?*

Classes will be taught by Pastor Nelson and by volunteers from the congregation with topics like:

- Christianity 101
- "Oh, God!": A Primer on Prayer
- Hidden histories of the UCC
- "Strangely Warmed": the beginnings of the UMC
- Ripped from the Headlines: Faith and Public Life
- "As you did to the least of these": Responding to Jesus' call to justice

### *How has this worked in other churches where it has been tried?*

When the Rev. Heidi Chamberland encouraged us to consider this change, she told her own experience: making the same kind of change in the congregation she served in Maine resulted in a 28% increase in church attendance. A church member who went through this process in a previous congregation said that some people disliked the new arrangement and ceased attending, while an equivalent number of new members came in.

Some congregations hold two services that use different styles of liturgy and different kinds of music (often "traditional" and "contemporary"). The current proposal is only changing the worship and education times, and not making those kinds of alterations. But it's good to remember that "liturgy" comes from the Greek word for "work of the people": in our church if the people wish for something to change, then all that's necessary is to figure out how to do something new, and then convince the rest of the congregation to give it a try!

### *When would the new schedule start? Is there a trial period?*

One likely scenario is that the Prudential Board will call a meeting of the congregation, in June. If the congregation chooses to adopt the new schedule, it would then start in September.

One other suggestion the Rev. Chamberland had for us: try any change for a period of three years. That would give us time to "iron out the wrinkles" and thoroughly test the schedule.

### *Who is the "we" in these answers?*

Using questions and responses that have come directly from the congregation (except for the comments by Heidi Chamberland), the FAQ was compiled by Pastor Nelson and Jess Bunger: they listened closely to conversations about the proposed change, took notes, and asked their own questions. Thus, the "we" in these answers is the congregation!