

# The Clerical Caller

A monthly publication of Covenant Congregational Church of West Hartford

SEPTEMBER 2019

## *“It’s Nice to be Nice to the Nice”*

Frank Burns from the TV series, “M.A.S.H.,” said a lot of funny and stupid things. But one of his more memorable lines was, “It’s nice to be nice to the nice” (for those of you who have no idea who Frank Burns is or what the show “M.A.S.H.” was all about, please catch some reruns—it’s one of the best TV series ever!). I think most of us would agree with Frank’s words. We have been taught from the earliest age to be nice. When we describe someone we will often say, “He’s a nice guy.” We want to be seen as nice people, and we want to be nice to other people. And it is easy to be nice to those who are nice. In this world where tolerance is a top priority, niceness would probably run a close second.

But the word “nice” is not really so nice when you look at it. It comes from a French root that means stupid or foolish, and its Latin root means ignorant. How did the word evolve to mean agreeable and pleasant? Could it be that in our ignorance and foolishness we simply put on an act of being pleasant?

My friend and colleague, Rev. Phil Brockett, had this to say about niceness:

*Herein is perhaps why niceness is a word that is strangely absent from the Bible. From the Bible’s point of view niceness is an undisciplined agreeableness that is born of ignorance. And if there is one thing that the God of the Bible is not, it is ignorant. The God of the Bible does not claim to be a “nice” God. The God of the Bible claims to be a dangerous God, powerful enough to create all that is, so set upon loving us that He is jealous for our affection, so determined to redeem us that He is willing to go to the ends of life itself to redeem us. Call God wonderful, call God powerful, call God fierce, awesome, loving, gracious, patient or even kind but don’t call God nice.*

Niceness has very little, if anything, to do with the Christian faith. God is not nice, and we therefore are not called to be nice. Now please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying we should be rude to other people, but we do have a higher calling than simply being pleasant and agreeable. We are called

to be the presence of God in this world. Our God may call upon us to speak the truth in love; to stand against evil wherever we find it; to confront or rebuke a friend or loved one who is doing something wrong or harmful; or perhaps to say or do things that might make others dislike us or turn against us. The Christian life is not about being popular—it is about being faithful and obedient to our Lord.

One of the most painful things for me in ministry was the realization that not everyone would like me. I always thought I was a pretty likeable person—a nice guy. Then I made my first enemy, someone who made it perfectly clear that he disliked me immensely and wanted me to go serve another church. I tried to reconcile with this man but to no avail. He seemed intent on simply making my life miserable. I have since had several enemies and have come to realize that it is impossible to please everyone and you shouldn’t try to. Our highest priority is to please God—not others.

We are sinners and try as hard as we might. We can’t truly be nice people. We can look nice and act nice, but scratch the surface and what you see is sin. We hurt the ones we love. We mess up as parents. We fail to be the friends we want to be. We try to do good but fail over and over and over again.

Jesus died on a cross not to make us nice people but new people. New people whom God uses to bring His kingdom into this world. Our calling is not to be praised by others but to be found faithful by our Lord. So let’s not worry so much about being nice. Let’s allow the spirit of God to enter our hearts and make us new.

Grace and Peace,  
Pastor Tom

**TIME CAPSULE**



The Time Capsule is back in this historic year for our church. House of Praise and Worship Covenant Church is now with us, not only to share the building but to share in ministry, as well. And, as this is being written, there is the possibility of a Brazilian group here as part of our church, too. Speaking of history, October marks our 130th year as a church and 2020 will be our 60th year in West Hartford.

This installment of the Time Capsule begins a series that chronicles our move from Hartford to West Hartford—a process that took more than 20 years. Although we concentrated on finding a building site in West Hartford, we also looked in Newington, and even purchased land there. Both towns had played a significant role in our history.

Church members lived in West Hartford as early as the 1890's, and the number continued to grow. With Swedish families living in West Hartford, the church reached out to kids there by starting Sunday Schools to teach children that could not get to the Hartford church. The first was in 1908 and lasted about a year, and the other started in 1920 lasting about five years. Many of the annual Sunday School picnics and summer outdoor evangelistic services were held at various locations in Newington during our first 30 to 40 years. Newington was easily accessible from Hartford by train and had nice places for these kinds of events.

Next month we will jump ahead to our 50th year and see that the need to move out of Hartford was on the minds of many in our church.



**Second Saturday, Breakfast and Fellowship  
Saturday, September 14th, 8 am.**

Everyone is invited to join us for this fellowship opportunity. Our brothers and sisters from the House of Praise and Worship Covenant Church will be joining us. This is now a pot-luck breakfast, so please bring a little something to share for breakfast. Someone from HOPAW will share a devotion with us. Fellowship is so important in our Christian life, so please don't miss this opportunity to make new friends and build new relationships.

**The Executive Board will meet after church  
on Sunday, September 8th.**



**September**

- 2 Ken Ko
- 9 Tom Anderson
- 13 Jonathan VanDerMeid
- 18 Sonia Alverino
- 22 Pat Gustafson
- 23 Simon Campbell
- 25 Eleanor Sundman
- 30 Ross Skelly



**Ephesians Bible Study**

Pastor Tom will lead a study of Ephesians on Tuesday nights in Fellowship Hall and all are welcome. We start at 7 pm with refreshments. Fellowship and Bible study goes from 7:30 to 8:30 pm.

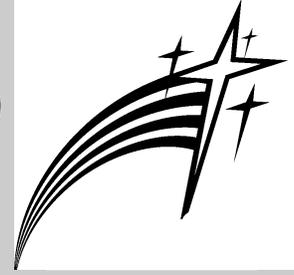


Items can be placed in the wicker basket near the back entrance or on the table in the narthex. The following are suggested for September though any donations are appreciated.

- ♥ Sun Sept 1 Cereal
- ♥ Sun Sept 1 Fruit Juice
- ♥ Sun Sept 15 Canned Fruit
- ♥ Sun Sept 22 Tea and Coffee
- ♥ Sun Sept 29 Spaghetti Sauce



# September 2019



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>1</b> Worship 9:00 HOPAW 10:30	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b> Bible Study 7:00 PM	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b> Worship 9:00 HOPAW 10:30 Exec. Bd Mtg.	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b> Bible Study 7:00 PM	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> Breakfast 8:00 AM
<b>15</b> Worship 9:00 HOPAW 10:30	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> Bible Study 7:00 PM	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>22</b> Worship 9:00 HOPAW 10:30	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b> Bible Study 7:00 PM	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>29</b> Worship 9:00 HOPAW 10:30	<b>30</b>					