

Excerpts from Sermons, Services, and Prayers Through the Years
Church of Christ, Congregational of Norfolk, CT.

- From Rev. James Potter's History of the Church of Christ in Norfolk (Source 16 in the Appendix of Archived materials below):

"The Church of Christ was gathered at Norfolk by Rev'd. Mr. Daniel Farrand, December 24th, A.D., 1760."

A COVENANT

You now in the presence of God, angels & men
solemnly choose God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
to be your God, taking Jesus Christ to be your
Redeemer & the Holy Spirit to be your Sanctifier,
and give up yourself, Soul and Body, to be the
Lord's with yours; faithfully to serve him
in the ways of his Appointment; seriously
promising by the Assistance of Divine Grace, that
denying all ungodliness and every worldly lust,
you will live soberly in this world;
And renouncing Satan and the World, to bind
yourself to walk with this Church in all the
Ordinances of the Gospel and that you will watch
over your Fellow Members in Meekness and Love,
and that you will submit yourself to the
government of Christ in this Church in the
Administrations and Censures of it so far as
you are directed by the unerring Word of God.

Names of the twenty-three charter members:

Michael Humphrey & Mary his wife
Joseph Dean & Sarah his wife
Ebenezer Burr & Hephzibah his wife
Ezra Knap
Abel Phelps & Mary his wife
Isaac Pettibone & Hephzibah his wife
John Turner & Abigail his wife
Samuel Gaylord & Thankful his wife
Jedediah Richards
Samuel Cole
Asahel Case & Dorothy his wife
Nehemiah Lawrence
William Barber & Abigail his wife
Peter Cato

- From Ammi Robbins' journal, reported in the Appendix of Ammi Robbins Funeral Sermon booklet of 1814 (Source 1):

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“Norfolk, Oct. 29, 1761. God who is infinitely patient, still spares me in his world, though so unworthy. I began to preach the 31st day of May last, after importunate cries, as I hope for direction. I have been chiefly here ever since, in these sweet retired woods: have had various exercises of soul in the course of my candidate preaching. The business appeared great, and I had many times, I think, some remarkable freedom and assistance, in the exercises of God’s house on the Sabbath. Have had almost daily, some different exercises of mind; and, at times, as I hope some delightful seasons with God in prayer. Although my business as a candidate seemed great, yet greater still must be the business of one who has the charge of souls.—Yesterday I was solemnly ordained to the work of the ministry. Oh, what a season! It seemed as if God was near, and I hope for my support. The day before, I spent mostly in the woods, in private prayer and fasting: and Oh, it seemed a very important errand that I went upon, and I trust I was enabled to plead, and to cry to God, in fervent prayer, and felt more encouraged than a great while before. Will the Lord give answers of peace. And now, by God’s Providence, I am fixed here. O Lord, dwell with me. O Lord, make me a faithful minister. O Lord, have pity on this flock, and may a poor worthless worm, be so enabled to speak, and they to hear, that, at last we may meet, and dwell with God in glory.”

“Feb. 1766. ...

“I have various exercises; —sometimes hopes and sometimes fears, and dreadful temptations. O Lord, say to thy servant, my grace is sufficient for thee. Oh, that I might live more to God—be more engaged for him—more fervent in preaching, and in the instruction of my poor people. O Lord may I not hope, some have been gathered in here? And are there not more still to be gathered? Oh, if I may be used as a humble instrument in thy hand of building up the dear cause, the languishing cause of Zion, shall not all the glory be thine?”

- From the Farewell Discourse of Ralph Emerson, November 29, 1829 (Source 3):

“This town, as you all know, was nearly the last that was settled in this state. It was not incorporated till the year 1758. The church was gathered in 1760, and the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins, their first pastor, was settled in 1761. They had however, from ‘the early times of their settlement,’ as Mr. Robbins informs us in his half century sermon, ‘set up and endeavoured to maintain the public worship of God.’ This I regard as a most important fact in the history of divine providence with this people: How intimately it is connected in the counsels of heaven, with all the real blessings that have followed, and all that may yet follow to this people, God only can tell...”

- About Joseph Battell, from the sermon at his funeral in 1841 (Source 4):

“His attachment to the institutions of religion, and his desire to maintain them, and to have them maintained are well known....His desire that the institutions of the Gospel might be sustained here permanently was evinced by his originating

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the project of establishing a fund,—of making to it the first and a liberal donation. This was a favourite scheme with him for many years, and when, on the failure of the Eagle Bank, that fund went with the rest, he himself made up the entire loss, although under no obligation so to do, and although by the same failure his personal loss was great.”

“Such friendship is real and practical. He believed that the past prosperity, welfare and happiness of this community, as well as the spiritual good of this people, had been connected with the maintenance of religious institutions among us, and promoted by the general union and harmony that had prevailed; and his large and comprehensive mind, his benevolent heart led him to look forward to coming time, to desire that his descendants, should they be here, and yours, my hearers, after he and you had been long in the grave might enjoy these same privileges, and he did what he could to perpetuate them unimpaired.”

- From Rev. Joseph Eldridge’s sermon “Does the Bible Sanction Slavery?”, February 24, 1861 (Source 8):

“FINALLY: If what I have said in regard to the Bible be true, then slavery is doomed to expire. Not merely the intelligence and the conscience of the civilized world are against it, but Christ the Redeemer is also against it. It may be bolstered up for a time, but its ultimate doom is sealed. No human foresight can now determine the when and the how of its demise; but that it will die, I regard as only a question of time. And who is not prepared with me to say, ‘O Lord, hasten the day!’”

- From Rev. Joseph Eldridge’s sermon on the last Sabbath of his pastorate, November 2, 1874 (Source 10):

“In speaking of the good feeling which I have experienced and the gratification which it has afforded me, I must refer to a particular incident that stirred my feelings very deeply at the time, and which I shall never recall without emotion. A plan had been agreed upon to make some repairs on this house. The money to meet the expense was assessed upon the members of the society, according to their tax-list, the way in which our funds for ecclesiastical purposes are raised. But in this case, no vote binding the members had been taken, but each individual was left at liberty to pay or not his quota. The business of securing the consent of individuals to pay their part devolved upon me. I went with my drawings and story to see an old man that resided some distance from the Centre. He had accumulated by the industry and frugality of a long life a handsome property. I found him in a maple-grove making maple-sugar. At that very moment, he was stirring with a pole the sap in a large potash-kettle over a blazing fire of logs. I approached him from behind, and was not noticed by him till I was by his side. He was a man of few words: he nodded a greeting; I felt embarrassed; I had my

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drawing of the proposed improvement in my hand, and I had got up in my mind my little story. He listened to what I had to say; I showed him the drawing; he took it and looked at it, handed it back, and then he looked on the ground awhile, breaking silence by saying, 'I wish to do my part toward any thing that may be for the public good. What is the amount assessed to me?' I replied, 'Forty-three dollars and fifty-six cents.' For those days, that was a large sum, and I was frightened at the sound it made. After a moment's consideration, he said, 'You may put my name down for that sum.' My heart bounded—his subscription, very important in itself, would help me to obtain others. My chin quivered a little, my eyes moistened. He looked at me a moment, said nothing, and then turning about, resumed his work of stirring the sap in the potash-kettle. That was real help. Other instances not a few, of cheering helpfulness, on the part of the society, are treasured up in my memory. I have referred to this one, as it was peculiar, and as it touched me deeply at the time."

"In my memory there is a sort of picture-gallery, in which the portraits of many such occupy conspicuous places, and as in imagination I traverse this gallery, each well-remembered face brings back precious memories of their graces, of their lives, and of their peaceful deaths. This gallery is long; I can only lead you a few steps in it, and point to two or three of the portraits suspended on its walls. The first is that of a man venerable for years and piety. His head is white with age, his eye is clear and bright, but alas! his hearing is well-nigh-gone. Among his many Christian traits—and his character was very symmetrical—his love of the house and worship of God was conspicuous. The infirmities of age and distance from the sanctuary very seldom prevented his attendance as long as it was possible for him to come. Seated in his place here, he had at hand the hymn-book and the Bible. When a hymn was given out, he would hand his hymn-book to some one near, who found the hymn and pointed it out to him. He read it over as it was sung. When the text was announced, he passed his Bible to his neighbor, who turned to the text, and showed it to him. With the Bible open in his hand, he looked at the text and then up to the preacher, alternately, without hearing a syllable. He was making his own sermon from the text—in many instances, I have no doubt, a much better one than that uttered from the pulpit. When asked why he took so much pains to come to meeting, since he could not hear, he replied, 'I love to be with the people of God when they are engaged in his worship.' I said to him on one occasion, 'You never fall asleep in church, though you can not hear.' 'No,' said he, 'and I sometimes think, when I see others asleep, that I should like to have the use of their ears while they are asleep; but I would not like to deprive them of the privilege of hearing when they are awake.' He often said, with a brightened look upward 'I shall hear by and by.' He hears there now."

"Again, the manner in which the Lord has led us in the past, should inspire us with confidence in him as our leader for the future. He has led this church and

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people, not only these forty years, but from the establishment of a church here. From time to time he has given and removed under-shepherds, but as the Chief-Shepherd has always himself watched over and led the flock; and so be assured he will continue to do in the future. When he sets aside one, he will ere long fill his place by another. Look, then, confidently to him, for one to be your pastor under him. He has led you, he will lead you. Trust in him!”

- From a sermon by Rev. John DePeu on December 1, 1895 summarizing his past ten years as pastor (Source 11):

“I believe without doubting that these ten years which we have been reviewing are to be accounted as ‘years of the right hand of the Most High.’ I believe He has been leading us as individuals, as a Church, and as a community. I find new problems confronting us, and new perils incidental to the changes in the character of the town and its new life as a popular summer resort. I should greatly fear the outcome of the demoralizing influences that are increasingly powerful among us, did I not believe in that hand of God beneath and over all.

“I have often borne testimony to one fact which it is in order to repeat here: Personally, in the conduct of my own life, I have never been left in doubt as to what I ought to do when the hour for decision arrived. When I came to Norfolk ten years ago, it was the one thing that seemed clearly open for me, and I came, nothing doubting as to that step, though not knowing what the next one would be. Through these ten years I have been treated with a generosity of affection and forbearance that has been less deserved than it has been precious. No pastor could have received more uniformly kindly treatment that I have received from you. I appreciate it, and am grateful for it. It has been due to your kindness that, through these years, I have never doubted that my place and work were here with you.

“And now, after this rapid review of the way in which the right hand of the Lord has led us together until this present hour, it is for us to set our faces forward with thanksgiving and confidence, praying God that His hand may still and ever sustain us through all joys and sorrows, until at last we join those who have gone before, and render up our accounts into the hands of the Master in that day when he shall make all things new.”

- From a sermon by Rev. William F. Stearns delivered during a service on September 15, 1901, the Sunday following the death by assassination of President William McKinley (Source 12):

“It is well that the flag should be furled and draped today, for the flesh and the heart faileth, but tomorrow it must be, thank God, it shall be unfurled, for God is the strength of our heart and our portion forever. Amen!”

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- From the sermon preached by Rev. John Barstow at the funeral of Isabella Eldridge on June 22, 1919 (Source 13):

“We all can readily understand why she loved this particular Church with such ardent devotion. She loved it first of all because she loved Jesus Christ and ever sought to be his faithful follower. She loved it too because her father and her great-grandfather spent all the years of their splendid ministry here in this church. And she loved it because she felt, down deep in her heart, that a strong church, broad in its sympathies, high in its purposes, true in its allegiance to Christ, was absolutely essential to the best life of any community.”

- From the “Charge to the People” by Rev. John Barstow during the Installation of Rev. William Brower Johnson on May 16, 1921 (Source 14):

“Let me urge you all to expect your minister—to help your minister—to catch the widest vision, to sound the clearest note in all his preaching and in all his conversation. Don’t limit him in any way to the narrower horizon of the mere sectarian or materialist or nationalist, as this latter word is being used today. Let him ever stand fast and speak forth in the liberty wherewith Jesus Christ hath made him free—and put no human shackles of any kind upon him.

“This Norfolk church has always honored her minister’s personality—and allowed him freedom of speech and of action. And I pray God she ever will.”

- From a sermon preached by Rev. James F. Potter for the Town of Norfolk’s Bicentennial celebration July 5, 1958 (Source 15):

“ On a mid-June day then in 1760 sometime between June 3 and June 24, the frame of Norfolk’s first meeting house was raised to the specified dimensions ‘forty feet wide, & fifty feet long & suitable height for galling’. (20 feet)

“That would have been a great day in Norfolk. We may be sure that everyone who could possibly be present was there—only a tiny community they were—certainly fewer than fifty families in the whole town. Ammi Robbins says that there were only about fifty families a full year later in June of ’61 when he first saw Norfolk; just a little island they were in a great sea of virgin forest. They would all have been there, coming on foot, on horseback, by oxcart over the crude roads and paths. And what a scene of activity that would have been; the ordered bustle of the men busy about the frame, the women laying out the victuals and the drink under the towering trees that rimmed the little clearing close about, the excited children playing among the trees and rocks, and the center of it all the frame of Norfolk’s first meeting house, its sections rising one by one and being secured in position. And when it was done Thomas Robbins says, ‘they sang a hymn and had a prayer and all the inhabitants of the town sat on the outward sills of the building.’”

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“We must remember that the meeting house was not used for the Sabbath worship only, but that town meetings were held in it. The same walls that echoed to the singing of the Psalms, the sermons and the prayers on the Sabbath, also echoed on other days of the week to the discussions of purely civic matters, the laying out of roads, the election of town officials, arguments about the roaming of swine and cattle, and all such practical daily concerns. The meeting house was truly a house of meeting both for civic and religious purposes. This double use of the same edifice is a kind of symbol of the intermingling of sacred and secular, civil and religious, that characterize that era. As there appeared no incongruity in holding Sabbath service in the meeting house on Sunday, and a town meeting in the same place on Monday; so there appeared no incongruity in passing in the same meeting from a vote on the location of a boundary fence or a new road, to a vote on the minister’s salary for the next twelvemonth.”

“The final service in the old house was on May 23rd, 1813. Rev. Ammi Robbins, in feeble health was present, baptized two children, and made a short address and prayer. ‘It was the last public service he performed.’ ‘The old meeting house was torn down that week’—Thus meeting house and pastor completed their life work together.”

“The construction of the new meeting house went on apace. It was dedicated in August 1814—And we can agree with Thomas Robbins verdict that it ‘is very tasty and elegant’. (Sept. 22, 1813) It represented the triumph of voluntarism in the support of religion, not a penny of tax money having gone into it.”

“We have not dwelt upon personalities, yet there are three names that ought to be given special mention, even in so hasty and incomplete a review as this. Of one of those, the first we have spoken, Rev. Ammi Robbins, first pastor of this Church. Some thirty years later, there came to Norfolk another young man, Joseph Battell, who became a prosperous merchant. In due time the merchant and the minister’s daughter were married. Again time marched on to the early 1830s and there came to Norfolk a third young man as minister of this Church, Joseph Eldridge. In due time, the minister and the merchant’s daughter were married. These three men, and their families, covering the first three generations of this town’s history created and transmitted an influence for good beyond computation and one which abides in Norfolk’s institutions—this Church, the library, the Choral Union and Music and Art Schools. I well recall on the occasion of the dedication of the Bridgman Memorial Tablet, the address of Hon. Frederic C. Walcott, himself a distinguished son of Norfolk, in which he dwelt upon this Robbins-Battell-Eldridge-Bridgman-Stoeckel line continuing from Norfolk’s very inception, and the effect of such continuing family lines in imparting continuity and stability to a community and its traditions.”

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- From a sermon given by Rev. Justin J. Hartman on July 30, 1961 summarizing his past eight years in Norfolk (Source 17):

“October 18, 1957 is a day our church will remember. The parsonage telephone rang at 7:30 that Friday evening. It was Charlie Lufkin, a bit excited, saying: ‘Well, it looks as if we’ll have to get a new pipe organ.’

“‘What on earth do you mean?’ I asked, for I couldn’t think that anything could possibly happen to a pipe organ in an empty church building. And then he told me. The cable that supported some 1400 pounds of iron weights for the tower clock had snapped. The weights had fallen twenty feet into the very heart of the pipe organ.

“Ponder this: the breaking of that cable is the only event in these eight years that seemed important enough to the outside world for a newspaper to call me up for further details. Both the *Hartford Courant* and Station WTIC telephoned. The latter even sent a television cameraman who concluded that there wasn’t much to photograph. There was some comfort in remembering the speech that Professor Geer had given in the previous August. He said that it was high time that our church should either rebuild its organ or buy a new one. Romantic organs were all right in their day, but that day is past. No one took his speech too seriously when we discovered that the cost of taking it seriously would be about \$35,000. But now we remembered his words. A committee was appointed and it consulted three experts. Fortunately for us, this was one time when musical experts all agreed. They gave us a simple prescription: buy a new Austin organ; don’t spend a penny on the old organ. The congregation unanimously agreed to do just that and the down payment was made in December—two months after the accident had happened.

“We got along as best we could through the next year with a piano. Mrs. Stoeckel kindly lent us her Hammond organ for weddings. We raised the money for the new organ the next summer, and in that same July we helped the town of Norfolk celebrate its 200th Anniversary of incorporation as a town.

“Early in 1959 a huge moving van parked in front of the church; our new Austin organ was carefully unloaded, and pipes were all over the place for a few days. What a thrill it was to hear the wonderful, new instrument for the first time on Easter Sunday! There were three recitals on it that year, and organists and congregations alike found it a marvelous instrument. It was practically paid for at the time of its installation.”

- From “Prayers Among the Norfolk Hills” by Rev. Bruce Anderson, 1996 (Source 18):

“Loving God, Breath of our breath, we give thanks for the good news of Christ at work in our Church Family and in your world. We give thanks for this our spiritual home and for those persons who help to teach us the good news Christ is.

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We seek your guidance for our lives as we affirm that your love abounds in our lives. Help us to follow Christ and to see with His loving eyes in all that we communicate and do. Show us how to broadcast love and kindness in the life of each day; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

(this prayer was written as the first prayer for the Children’s Day service on June 11, 1995)

“Mighty God, who has the power to initiate change, we give thanks that in raising Christ, You give us hope in You. In your goodness You take away the fear of dying with reason for living. You take away our fear of living with the love of your Son. We give thanks for the final triumph of your love in the midst of all that life brings. We gather here today joyfully as the earthen vessels of your love in Christ. Amen.”

“All-knowing God, Help of the helpless, help us to be open to seeing others and this world through your loving eyes. Help us to recognize what You are calling us to be and to become, to choose and to do with our life, energy, and gifts; in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

**PRAYER FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE CHAPEL-LIFT
Annual Meeting Sunday, January 1996**

“Lord of the dance and of life, Lord of old men and children, we give thanks for those who gave to us the vision of an all soul’s Church free of physical barriers. We, too, come here seeking access to the Church Fellowship in annual meeting luncheons and monthly suppers, weekday meetings and Sunday coffee hours. As members one of another in Christ we give thanks for the outstanding workmanship before our very eyes. We give thanks for the legacy of the architect and the builders to us. We give thanks for the energy and the work of all those who have made this lift a reality in our Church home.

Lord, please accept the work of our hearts and hands for the uplifting and the mobility of all your people, and all who will come after us seeking access. Bless the generosity of the givers and the vision of thankful stewards who know we are Christ’s, in whose name we do dedicate this lift with joy and undying thanks.

Let the people say ALLELUIA AMEN.” (and we did).

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Appendix: Archived Sermons, Services, and Prayers

1. A Sermon, Delivered at the Funeral of the Rev. Ammi Ruhamah Robbins by Chauncey Lee, A.M., Pastor of the Church in Colebrook (Peter B. Gleason and Co. Printers, Hartford 1814)
2. Sermon Preached at Norfolk, Connecticut, May 16, 1816 on the first Sabbath after his ordination by Ralph Emerson (George Goodwin and Sons....Printers, Hartford 1817; T. H. Pettibone signed copy)
3. Farewell Discourse to his People, Delivered at Norfolk, Conn November 29, 1829 by Ralph Emerson (Printed by P. Canfield, Hartford 1829)
4. A Sermon Delivered at Norfolk, Conn., December 3, 1841 at the Funeral of Joseph Battell, Esq., by Frederick Marsh, Pastor of a Church in Winchester (Henry Ludwig, Printer, New York 1842)
5. A Sermon Delivered at Norfolk, Conn., November 30, 1843 by Joseph Eldridge, Pastor of the Congregational Church (Printed by B. L. Hamlen, New Haven 1844)
6. A Discourse Delivered in Norfolk, Conn., at the Funeral of Benjamin Welch, M.D., December 21, 1849 by Joseph Eldridge, Pastor of the Congregational Church (Printed by Edward O. Jenkins, New York 1850)
7. Manual of the Congregational Church in Norfolk (Press of Case, Lockwood, & Co., Hartford 1858)
8. “Does the Bible Sanction Slavery? A Discourse Delivered at Norfolk, Conn., February 24, 1861 by Joseph Eldridge, D.D. (Litchfield: Enquirer Office Print, 1861)
9. A Centennial Sermon Delivered at North Canaan, CT., July 28, 1869 by Rev. Joseph Eldridge, D.D. of Norfolk, CT. (Printed by William H. Hill & Co., Lee, Mass. 1869)
10. A Sermon Preached by Rev. Joseph Eldridge, D.D. at Norfolk, Connecticut on the Last Sabbath of his Pastorate, the Second Day of November, A.D., MDCCCLXXIV (S.W. Green, Printer and Stereotyper, New York 1874)
11. 1885. 1895. A Sermon by the Rev. John DePeu, Pastor of the Church of Christ in Norfolk, Conn. December 1st, 1895 (Press of L. G. Wiley, Hartford 1896)
12. The Church of Christ (Congregational) Norfolk Connecticut, Service September 15, 1901, The Sunday following the death by assassination of William McKinley, President of the United States. Sermon by the Pastor The Rev. William F. Stearns (O.H. Pease, Canaan)

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13. The Coronation of a Life, A Sermon Preached by the Rev. John Barstow in the Church of Christ in Norfolk Sunday, June 22, 1919 for the funeral of Isabella Eldridge
14. Installation of Rev. Wm. Brower Johnson as Pastor of the Church of Christ, Norfolk, Connecticut, Monday May 16, 1921
15. A Sermon Preached by the Rev. James Potter at the Church of Christ (Congregational) at Norfolk on Sunday, July 6, 1958, On the Occasion of the Town's Celebration of the Bicentennial of Its Incorporation, 1758-1958
16. Church of Christ (Congregational) Norfolk, Connecticut, TWO HUNDRED YEARS 1760 – 1960 by James H. Potter
17. These Past Eight Years in Norfolk 1953-1961, A Sermon Given by the Rev. Justin J. Hartman at The Church of Christ, Norfolk, Connecticut July 30, 1961
18. Prayers Among the Norfolk Hills, Bruce F. Anderson, October 15, 1996