

## **Historical Moment #1 for Niantic Baptist Church**

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Entering the front door of the Niantic Baptist Church, your eyes are drawn to a beautiful mural which is behind the Pastor's pulpit and which is almost always covered by an off-white curtain. Today's story will be a short one about the woman who painted this mural, and its significance.

Mrs. David Andrade, who was called Phyllis, had moved here from Cranston, Rhode Island. She was first noted in a March 1952 newspaper as a new member of the choir, and she performed some vocal solos here and at the recently opened Pierce Home. Sometime during 1954, she was given permission to paint a mural on the wall behind the pulpit which would depict the Jordan River, where John the Baptist called out for people to repent and be baptized. This was a perfect place for the mural since a baptismal pool had been built just behind the pulpit in 1894. If you look closely, you can see some carpet-covered boards which cover a presently empty pool. When filled, with the curtain opened, those who follow John's call can be immersed in the waters of the Jordan by the Pastor.

This wasn't the only large artistic work that Phyllis did. She also created such murals in Boston, Rhode Island, and later Florida. In addition, she worked on other projects such as stained glass, furniture, and making wood look like marble.

This artist, who could spend an entire day working on a project, never forgot about her musical skills. Wherever she lived, she always asked what church had a good choir she could join and she continued to sing solos. She also sang with the Jacksonville, Florida Symphony among other groups.

However, I was surprised to learn that her name was actually not Phyllis, but Felicia. Her parents were Pietro and Maria Scalzi, who were immigrants from Petrona, Italy. Felicia was the second of three children born in Massachusetts. The other five children were born in Providence, Rhode Island. Most of the family's names were eventually Americanized, and Felicia became Phyllis. Now you know most of the rest of her story!

