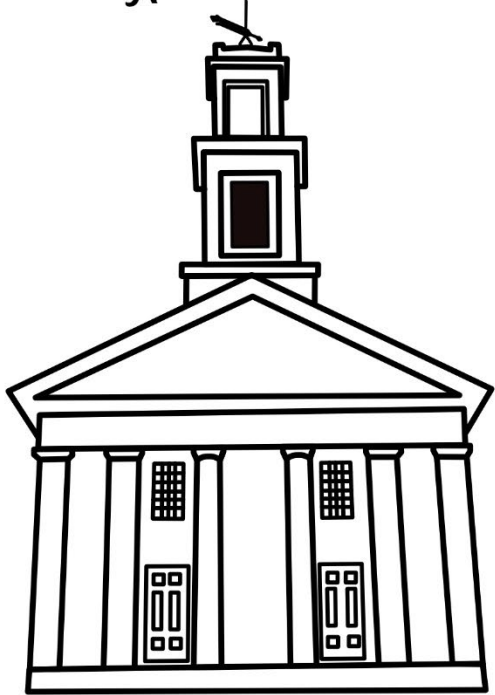


CHURCH LIFE

NOVEMBER 2024



MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG

FROM THE PASTOR

“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

In many churches like ours, fall means, the start of the stewardship pledge campaign, our annual fundraising campaign to fund the church budget for the next calendar year. I know money isn't really anyone's favorite topic to talk about, particularly with church. However, money is part of our daily lives, and scripture understandably has quite a bit to say about money as well.

A biblical attitude towards money is wrapped up in a concept traditionally called stewardship. A steward is one who is entrusted with property, etc., on behalf of someone else. A steward doesn't own what they've been given, but they hold it in trust on behalf of others. Once humans are created, God gives them care, or stewardship, over the earth. And, on a more local level, God entrusts us with the stewardship of all the things each of us have been given: our wealth, our possessions, our time, and our lives. We're charged to be wise stewards of what we've been given; we're meant to use what we have to invest in living out the gospel, loving God and loving our neighbors.

As friends and members of the Church universal and the Middlebury Congregational Church, we have been entrusted with being stewards of our local church. Our support, in all forms, is what enables our church to function, and good stewardship of our personal resources and of our church's resources enables us to ensure the work and mission of the Church continue long after we're gone. Unlike some denominations, our local church is entirely funded by all of us, so all our contributions of any size are vitally important.

So, how much should we give/pledge to the church? A traditional biblical approach is to tithe, or give 10% of our income to the church. I also know faithful people who give 10% of their income away between what they give to their church and what they give to other charitable organizations. Personally, I like giving a percentage because it gives me a target, and giving via a percentage allows giving to increase or decrease based on your income for the year.

Another option is to look at our spending in other areas of our lives and see how our financial pledge to the church compares (e.g. utility bills, discretionary spending, vacations, sports fees, etc.) If I'm spending more on things like eating at restaurants, for example, than I am donating to the church, what does that tell me about I value most. My college chaplain usually said we should give enough money to the church such that we notice it's gone. If we don't even notice the money from our pledge when we pay it, then that's a sign that we can increase our giving.

Everything that we have is a gift we hold in trust. So, our giving is an acknowledgement of that. No matter how much money we have, we all have the capacity to give a meaningful amount for our financial situations, from a few dollars to well beyond that. If you value the community, worship, and work here at MCC, I encourage you to make a pledge of an amount that is meaningful to you.

Our stewardship campaign theme this year is our church as a lighthouse that shines into our community. Jesus tells the church in the Sermon on the Mount "You are the light of the world." And, he encourages us to let our light shine so that others may be inspired by our good works. Your gifts enable us to shine here in Middlebury. What we put into the church is multiplied by the grace of God to shine brighter and further than we could imagine. In an average week, our building hosts two scout troops (60 scouts) along with four AA meetings. Over a hundred people from our community every week are able to be supported through our facilities continuing to exist. Your gifts enable all of the programming, worship, music, giving, education, and fellowship that we do, which helps shine a light in our community and in our own lives.

A Wrinkle in Time author Madeleine L'Engle wrote "We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it." And I think that is the dream of what MCC could be and sometimes is. We're working to shine a light so lovely that people can't help but search out the source of that light.

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

NEWS FROM THE LITCHFIELD SOUTH ASSOCIATION

The Litchfield South Association, our local United Church of Christ governing body, met on Tuesday evening 10/15 at the Bridgewater Congregational Church. The Association voted to give \$1000 to local flood relief through the program being run by TEAM. (Our church was able to donate \$1000 towards local flood relief back in September. So, we've had a hand in donating \$2000 total.) We also heard a presentation from a member of the Southington church on WISE, which is the UCC designation for churches that are doing intentional work around matters of mental health. The Southern New England Conference, one step up from the Association, is going to be hiring a staff person dedicated to WISE and mental health.



THE DEACONS' BENCH

I don't know about you, but lately I've felt and spoken that the world has turned "upside down".

Viewing our Politics, War Ravaged World, and Environmental Catastrophes daily can be both alarming and disheartening. Some healthy separations (daily prayer/nature!) are called for. A couple weeks back in the Hartford Courant a story appeared that generated thoughts on cultural approach to issues. Accordingly, while Americans pursue happiness the Japanese focus on "Ikigai", which isn't a feeling but more like "something worth living for". Extending this for us, points me to the purposeful Christian Life our church provides for service in our world.

Forgiving failure and imperfection in ourselves and each other is also covered by a Japanese philosophical term of "Wabi Sabi" which allows for understanding that our intentions may be good but our execution may be flawed. We may also lack the full breadth of knowledge of a subject we've acted upon; well meaning motives are then considered. Our Apostles were often forgiven by Christ for their missteps, even after having forewarned them.

This month where we celebrate the American holiday of Thanksgiving and recognize our bounties and personal survival we should stay mindful of the Christian path that awaits us. We can also ask God to forgive our blind spots and failures. Amen.

The Scripture

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. . . . O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing sould, and filleth the hungry sould with goodness.

Psalm 107:1-3, 8, 9.

Disappointment

“Disappointment – His appointment.”

Change one letter, then I see
That the thwarting of my purpose
Is God’s better choice for me.
His appointment must be blessing,
Though it may come in disguise,
For the end from the beginning
Open to his wisdom lies.

“Disappointment – His appointment.”

Whose? The Lord’s, who loves me best,
Understands and knows me fully,
Who my faith and love would test;
For, like loving earthly parent,
He rejoices when he knows
That his child accepts, unquestioned,
All that from his wisdom flows.

Author Unknown

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Deacons,
Michael J. Granja

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

This month’s food for GWIM Soup Kitchen is Dutch Noodles and Elbows, and December is instant potatoes.

Our next mission project will be making 150 sandwiches for GWIM to be delivered on November 11. Anyone who wants to help make sandwiches after Church on November 10th is welcomed to help. We will have the lunch bags at coffee hour if anyone wants to help draw and decorate them for the soup kitchen recipients.

Again this Thanksgiving we are helping feed two Middlebury families for the holiday. Please check the sign up sheets of items needed to make their holiday a special day. They will be placed on the bulletin board by the kitchen.

The mission board also sent a \$500 check to Church World Services to help the victims of the recent storm damage to Florida and the southern states that were affected by Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.

Thank you again for your generosity, as we would not be able to help our mission partners without you.

Bless you all.
Carol Rollins
Mission Board

MUSIC NOTES

“Musicians want to be the loud voice for so many quiet hearts.”
– Billy Joel

If November could be described in one word, that word might be “gratitude”. Our worship times in November certainly center on expressions of gratitude.

We begin the month celebrating “All Saints” Sunday, a day when we give thanks to God for all those souls who are now safely in heaven. The following week, there is the civic holiday of “Veteran’s Day”. Although it’s not a specific church holiday, we at MCC use this as an opportunity to be grateful to our veterans, and, by extension, all who protect “the least of these”.

Then, we turn our attention to the one holiday specifically dedicated to gratitude, Thanksgiving. At MCC, we will observe Thanksgiving with both our own church family, on Sunday, November 24th and at an evening service with combined churches on Tuesday, November 26th at 7:00.

While looking at possible hymns for those two Services, there is no shortage of appropriate music. The expressions of gratitude found in our hymnals is... well... gratifying!

We hope that, as you think of your many reasons for gratitude, you can express them well and with a “loud voice”.

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

MIDDLEBURY COMMUNITY
THANKSGIVING SERVICE
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH, 7PM
MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
1242 WHITTEMORE RD

SPONSORED BY
ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL & MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL

OFFERING DONATED TO MIDDLEBURY FOOD BANK
& LOCAL FLOOD RELIEF



St. George's Episcopal Church and MCC are joining together to provide a Thanksgiving service for the community on Tuesday 11/26 at 7pm here at MCC. The Rev. Sherry Hardwick Thomas from St. George's is preaching. The offering will be split between Middlebury Food Bank and TEAM (local flood relief).

YOGA AT MCC!

What: Vinyasa Yoga for all fitness levels

Where: Our Social Hall

When: Mondays @ 5:30 p.m.

Why: Join us and RELAX!

How: Bring a mat and blocks. Bolster, water bottle, strap and blanket are optional. Please dress to move.

CHURCH CENSUS

We are finalizing and documenting all information from the surveys that were sent out earlier this year. Edits to membership information and requests for contact will be included in our update. If you haven't returned your form please take this opportunity to do so now. We look forward to hearing from you!

FAITH FORMATION

The Sunday school program is well under way this autumn season! The children have been wonderfully engaged in their lessons, bringing energy and curiosity to each learning activity. We're blessed with an outstanding group of teaching volunteers, and we'd like to extend special thanks to our October teachers: Erin, Liz, Robbie, Norma, Kelly, and Charis for their dedicated work with our children.

We're delighted to announce the launch of our new MCC Youth group for students in grades 6-12. Their inaugural gathering was a great success, combining community service with fellowship. The group worked on a meaningful mission project for "Carolyn's Place," enjoyed delicious homemade fried dough (thank you, Ellen and Erika!), and capped off the evening at the all-church campfire night with s'mores and conversation.

Our family movie night featuring "Coco" was a wonderful evening! Children and adults alike embraced the spirit of the evening in costume, while munching on popcorn and sipping hot chocolate. We're truly grateful for the generous donations received, which will help our youth programs continue to grow. Many thanks to all who joined us and to those who helped make it a success – we can't wait for our next one!

As we welcome November, we'll explore themes of gratitude and thankfulness, while continuing to discover meaningful ways to serve our neighbors and strengthen our community.

As always, if you're interested in teaching Sunday School, please email me at shubbard@middleburyucc.org.

Thank you!
Sara Hubbard
Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

COFFEE HOUR

For the month of November, coffee hour will be hosted by the Stewardship.

STEWARDSHIP STEALS THE SPOTLIGHT IN NOVEMBER

November is a big month for the Board of Stewardship. By now, everyone should have received our mailing with the cover letter, illustrated trifold brochure, and pledge card.

Many thanks to the Kwashnak clan – ShawnaLee, Drew, and Sarah – for shepherding these packages through production and mailing. If you don't have yours yet, contact Sarah at the church office or see any of us during coffee hour.

Yes, the Board of Stewardship will be serving refreshments after worship this month, with some special seaworthy treats. Get yours before the gulls do! We'll also have fun and games and some lighthouse photos from our members on display in the social room.

November is also the month for weekly Stewardship moments during the announcements. That's also when we'll give reports on our progress to date. It all wraps up on Consecration Sunday, November 24, when MCC will also be celebrating Thanksgiving.

As of this writing on October 25, we already have ten pledges for a total of \$25,310. Many thanks to these Stewardship Harbor Pilots and to all those who have come together to make this a success. Your support at

any time is priceless, but knowing your plans during this fall campaign helps us prepare our budget for the annual meeting in January.

Many thanks to everyone for all you do!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Greetings from the MCC Nominating Committee!

We are reaching out to all members of the congregation to share a little bit about what our committee does this time of year, and how it relates to you.

Each Fall, the Nominating Committee reviews the status of MCC board and committees to ensure that for the following year, each board and committee has ample membership to carry out its good work on behalf of the congregation. Church by-laws outline the minimum amount of members for each board and committee, and the membership term is typically three years. The first step in our process is to determine for each board/committee, which members are renewing their terms, coming off for any other reason, or possibly switching boards/committees. Once we have this information, it is our role to assist boards/committees in filling vacancies, and then present a proposed slate of membership for vote at the annual church meeting in January.

Currently, several of our boards/committees are operating without full membership. If you are not currently serving on a board or committee, we ask that you prayerfully consider the idea of doing so, and we would love to share with you any information about what the boards/committees do if you would like to know more.

In the next month, the Nominating Committee will be assessing the current status of board/committee board membership, and approaching MCC members to inquire about joining. In this process, we respectfully ask:

- If you are *currently serving on a board or committee and your term is ending*, please know that you are welcome to serve another term! If you intend to do so, or not, please let the chair of

your board/committee know directly first, and one of us. Please also note that if you do not intend to serve another term on the current board you are on, you might consider serving on another board.

- If you are *a member and not currently serving on a board or committee*, we ask that you consider giving of your time and talents! If you have questions about what the different boards/committee do, do not hesitate to contact a member of the nominating committee below, and/or ask other members serving on boards of interest what they do! It's a great way to get to know your fellow members, and to serve.

Once we have a better sense of what boards/committee may need more members, we will be reaching out to folks to see about interest. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Nominating Committee

Michele Rowell Finn michfinn@comcast.net

Debbie Barlow dhbarlow23@gmail.com

Kent Sullivan-Wiley kswiley@sbcglobal.net

IMPORTANT NOVEMBER DATES

11/1: 5-7pm Fall Dinner, Social Hall

11/3: 10am All Saints Sunday

11/10: Sandwich making for GWIM after worship in the Social Hall

11/17: 10am Guest Preacher, the Rev. Matthew McCaffrey

11/24: 10am Thanksgiving Sunday and Consecration Sunday

11/26: 7pm Middlebury Community Thanksgiving Service @ MCC, the Rev. Sherry Hardwick Thomas preaching

12/1: 10am First Sunday in Advent – Children will help light the Advent Wreath

Hanging of the Greens, after worship

**Middlebury Congregational Church
1242 Whittemore Rd.
Middlebury CT 06762**

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