

# CHURCH LIFE

JANUARY 2025



**MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

## **CALL TO THE ANNUAL MEETING**

The Annual Meeting of the Middlebury Congregational Church will be held on Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025 in the sanctuary following worship. The purpose of the meeting is to amend the Constitution & Bylaws, receive the 2024 reports, approve a budget for 2025, and elect board members and officers.

Erika Carrington, Clerk

### **CONSTITUTION & BYLAW REVISIONS TO BE PRESENTED FOR VOTE AT ANNUAL MEETING**

Dear MCC friends and members,

Over the past number of years, church leadership has been noticing aspects of our Constitution & Bylaws that need to be updated for various reasons. Throughout the fall, Church Council has been going through these governing documents, and we are presenting a number of updates to be voted upon at Annual Meeting on 1/26. A summary of the changes is in this letter. A document showing all the changes will be emailed out to everyone on our email list. If you would like a hard copy, please contact the Church Office, and we will print one for you.

#### **General Stylistic & Grammatical Updates**

Both the Constitution and Bylaws had sections where only male pronouns were used in reference to church leaders and clergy. All those sections have been updated to gender neutral terms or terms to indicate women serve in those positions. Additionally, there were some typos that have also been fixed.

#### **Constitution Updates**

Our Constitution includes a section on the Faith and Covenant of the church. Currently, that section only includes the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, but oddly our church covenant isn't there. (Possibly, it never got put back in after edits were made to the covenant in the 1990s.)

- The proposed change to the Constitution would add the church covenant into that section so the Faith and Covenant section includes both our covenant and a statement of faith.

## **Bylaw Updates**

### **• Membership: Friend of the Church**

- This change originates from the Board of Deacons. There is a desire to add an additional category of affiliation for the church to enable more people to officially participate in the life of the church. Currently, church membership is only open to baptized Christians who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Church leadership did not want to remove those requirements, but also wanted to provide an option for affiliation for people who are not ready or who aren't going to make such a profession (e.g. spouse who is a member of a different church, spouse who attends but is a different faith, spouse who grew up un-churched, or people who are coming to church regularly for the first time, etc.) Mixed marriages (marriages between people of different faiths or a person of faith and a person with no faith tradition) are on the rise, and church leadership felt this change enables us to include more people in our mission while keeping faithful to our Christian commitments. The full text of this amendment is below:

- “Persons may elect to become a designated Friend of the Middlebury Congregational Church if they feel unable to become a member at this time but wish to support the goals and organized work of the church.

Friends of the Church may include persons who: have moved outside the church's geographic area; wish a period of discernment while considering becoming a full member; are long-term visitors but are members of a different church; may not be Christian but have a strong relationship to this congregation or a family member who is a member of this congregation.

Limitations of this status:

A Friend of the Church, who is not a member of the church:

1. May only serve in the following positions: Board of Mission, Board of Stewardship, Personnel Committee, Preschool On the Green Committee, Church Historian, or other committees as designated by Church Council
2. Shall have voice but not vote at Annual Meetings
3. Shall not be an Officer of the church or Chair of a Board

The list of Friends of the Church will be maintained by the church clerk or delegated, but will not be considered in determining the number of lay delegates or for establishing the number of members for any other purpose.”

- **Preschool on the Green**

- The current version of the bylaws places our preschool vaguely under the jurisdiction of the Board of the Faith Formation. This arrangement has never been fully implemented and has caused a great deal of confusion over the years.
  - The proposed change to the bylaws moves the Preschool on the Green Committee to being its own committee that reports to Church Council. This would be a return to a similar structure we had before a comprehensive bylaw revision in 2000.

- **Number of People on Boards and Committees**

- In 2018 we moved from requiring a set number of people on each Board or Committee to permitting a range (e.g. no fewer than 6 but no more than 9). However, some of the lower limits we set have turned out to be too high for the current size of the church.
  - Proposed changes reduce the minimum number of people on almost every Board and Committee so we can be in compliance with our governance documents.

- **Auditor**

- Our current bylaws require us to have a volunteer auditor to audit the church books. For the past decade or more, we have

not had any members in our church with the financial skills able to fulfill this role who were not already serving in the positions that would need to have their work checked by the auditor. Instead, we have been conducting internal financial reviews of the church accounts.

- The proposed change eliminates the position of auditor and places responsibility on the Board of Trustees to review church accounts and from time to time to obtain a professional external audit of our books. This change would enable us to be in compliance with our governing documents and reflects the current resources we have.

- **Treasurer & Assistant Treasurer**

- Current bylaws stipulate that the people holding these positions must be bonded. However, our insurance coverage renders this requirement unnecessary.
  - The proposed change removes the bonding requirement but adds a requirement that people serving in these roles must undergo a criminal background check. This change was suggested by our insurance company.

- **Historian**

- Proposed change is that Historian is changed from being a mandatory elected officer position of the church to an optional position that may be filled by a member or friend of the church.

- **Minister & Associate Minister**

- United Church of Christ Standing
  - Current bylaws do not require clergy to have authorization or standing in the United Church of Christ or any denomination. Technically, the church could call any breathing human being according to the document.
    - Proposed change requires clergy to have UCC standing or obtain UCC standing as a condition of employment.
- Termination process
  - Current bylaws only permit a minister's call/employment to be terminated by calling a congregational meeting or by the minister resigning.

- Proposed change harmonizes church bylaws with current minister's call agreement/contract to permit Church Council to fire the minister should the minister's United Church of Christ standing/authorization be terminated.
  
- **Removal of Officers, Board & Committee Members**
  - Current bylaws only permit elected leaders to be removed by calling a congregational meeting. Church leadership felt this was unworkable.
    - Proposed change has Boards/Committees take a vote to remove a member and then Church Council would have to vote to approve the removal. The person removed would then be notified in writing of their removal.
  
- **Updating Board Responsibilities**
  - There were a number of responsibilities listed in our bylaws for events that our church no longer conducts (e.g. Auction, Arts & Crafts Fair, etc.).
    - Proposed change removes these events from the list of responsibilities for various Boards.
  - There were some miscellaneous functions that our Boards or committees haven't done in recent memory. (e.g. Faith Formation is listed as being responsible for the Historian and maintaining church history records, Mission manages Women's Fellowship and Church Life, etc..)
    - Proposed change removes functions Boards and Committees are not carrying out/were unnecessary.

If you have any questions about the proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws please contact Pastor Katrina ([kmanzi@middleburyucc.org](mailto:kmanzi@middleburyucc.org)) or the Church Office ([office@middleburyucc.org](mailto:office@middleburyucc.org).)

On behalf of Church Council,  
 Ellen Aronheim, Chair of Church Council  
 The Rev. Katrina Manzi, Minister

## FROM THE PASTOR

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you!

I want to thank all our staff, volunteers, musicians, actors, and ushers who enabled us to have wonderful Advent, Christmas Pageant, and Christmas Eve services and events. It takes a lot of people to make everything happen, so thank you to everyone who gave their time and energy in the busy Advent and Christmas seasons.

During Advent, I read a book of Advent, Christmas, New Year's, and Epiphany sermons by St. Augustine of Hippo. Augustine was a bishop in North Africa from 395 until his death in 430. Before his conversion to Christianity in his 30s, Augustine was a student and then instructor of rhetoric. And after his conversion, he turned his rhetoric skills to preaching. He's one of the most influential Christian thinkers. Some scholars say the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was really just one big argument about what Augustine meant.

Now, Augustine actually preached without notes and without a manuscript, but we have over a hundred sermons scholars are sure are authentic to Augustine and many more with more questionable provenance. And it turns out, that there was basically what we would term today as a cathedral stenographer who copied down all of Augustine's sermons in Latin shorthand in real time. And those were then passed on to scribes who converted the short hand to long hand and produced sermon copies for people to buy.

We read a fair amount of Augustine in seminary, but this sermon collection I just read is a newer translation by William Griffin that's got a much more casual, thought for thought style to try to capture how it would have been to hear Augustine in his time. I do think at points the translator might stray a bit too colloquial, but it's all extremely readable.

One of the things I noticed is that some things about church just haven't changed. There's an Advent sermon where Augustine laments that the church is half empty because it's the peak of gladiator season and everyone is at the games. His sermons for New Year's tell people

not to party too hard and to be careful not to get drunk and make mistakes they'd regret.

The sermon that struck me the most though was a Christmas sermon where Augustine says of Christ "He was born in order that we might be reborn [...] Don't we have a desperate need to be reborn?"

As we look to the New Year and lots of people are talking about resolutions, I've just been thinking Augustine is right: don't we have a desperate need to be reborn? We often want transformation, to be different, to be better, to be made new, to be reborn.

Jesus was born so that we might be reborn, to give us hope of transformation. But, it's not necessarily the transformation many New Year's resolutions are looking for. God doesn't make any promises about our dieting, weight loss, or exercise goals. But, what God does make promises about is that with the help of God we all have the capacity to grow closer to who God would have us be. It's our capacity to grow as people, to have bigger hearts, kinder souls, and to know that in God's eyes there is hope for us beyond the worst things we've done.

God became human in Christ so that we might become more like God. Humans and God have been knit together in Christ. And since Christ is made of the same stuff as all of us, we all have the capacity to follow where he led and to rise to new heights with him.

Peace,  
Katrina Manzi  
Minister

## **WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?: DISCUSSION GROUP JANUARY 12<sup>TH</sup> @ 11:30AM IN THE PARLOR**

January 12<sup>th</sup> in the church calendar this year is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the day we remember Jesus' baptism. So, let's take a look at baptism, communion, and talk about what a sacrament is. The number of sacraments and the definition of a sacrament are some of the major differences between Protestants and Catholics and



often different groups of Protestants. We'll be looking at some scripture lessons and some common definitions to get a better idea of the scope of what Christians believe about sacraments and what's distinctive about our branch of Reformed Protestantism.



## THE DEACONS' BENCH

The New Year is upon us, and with its arrival comes various feelings. For some, there is the excitement of anticipated events like the birth of a child, a

wedding, travel, and/or the resolve to make good New Year's resolutions. For others, 2025 has arrived with heaviness, because "that thing" that is most desired can never be found under a Christmas tree, nor guaranteed by resolution. If you feel this way, you are not alone. We are human. A quick search for the top three 2025 New Year's resolutions listed saving money, exercising more, and eating healthier. For those needing more ideas, one magazine article listed sixty-five "achievable" resolutions to build a "healthy and happy life." There is a clear sense of productivity and outcome to each of these endeavors, and it can feel like a massive "to-do list" on how to be well.

I am not suggesting that these resolutions are not valuable. They are in many respects! Yet, I deeply sense that there is only one resolution that God is calling for me to make this year - and that resolution is not "to-do" but to REST in God's promises. This calling to REST is the most active resolution I have ever sought to begin, for to REST in God's promises is a resolution to seek, know, and try to understand them in my life. It requires consistent effort in scripture study and prayer. It is a workout for the heart and mind because resting in God's promises ultimately means trusting Him with everything 2025 will bring, even His will regarding "that thing." It is a profound REST where perhaps the biggest outcome is a deeper relationship with God.

So as we begin 2025, may God bless you and keep you. If you are struggling to find a footing in the New Year, and even if not, consider making this concept of REST a resolution. To help you begin, here are a few of God's promises to hold in your heart.

- I lift my eyes to the hills - From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. ~ Psalm 121
- From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. ~ Deuteronomy 4:29
- And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. ~ Matthew 28:20
- I will not fail you or forsake you. ~ Joshua 1:5
- My grace is made sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. ~ 2 Corinthians 12:9
- The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ~ Lamentations 3:22-23
- And of course, Psalm 23 and John 3:16.

Wishing for you the most splendid REST this year, and always.

On behalf of The Board of Deacons,  
Michele Rowell Finn

## **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.

## **TROOP 5 & 6 BOTTLE DRIVE**

Troop 5 & Troop 6 will be holding its first bottle and can drive of the year on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

**When:** Saturday, January 4, 2025

9am – 4pm

**Where:** At the Village Square Plaza parking lot  
530 Middlebury Road, Middlebury

## FROM THE MISSION BOARD

This month's food collection for the GWIM soup kitchen is Jarred Spaghetti Sauces.

The Christmas Baskets were warmly received, and the participants were so grateful for the wonderful goodies and food items provided. Together, we made a meaningful difference for two Middlebury families this holiday season.

Wellmore picked up the gifts for 63 Star Tree children and was truly overwhelmed by our generosity. This year, we supported even more children, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you for your kindness and giving spirit. You are a true blessing to these children, helping to make their holiday a special one.

Our mitten line is now set up in the social room, ready for anyone to hang new or gently used mittens, gloves, hats, or scarves for the homeless.

Looking ahead, our February Blood Drive will be held on February 15th in the social room. If you'd like to bake an item for that day, it would be greatly appreciated. Last year, the baked goods received wonderful compliments from the patients who enjoyed them. We are truly fortunate to have the most generous and supportive congregation a church could ask for. Thank you for all that you do!

Bless you all  
Carol Rollins  
Mission Board



*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.- Colossians 3:15*

It's pretty common for people to start the New Year with some new behaviors such as a resolution, cultivating a new habit, or beginning some other new practice. One of the practices I've been reading about

is to cultivate a habit of gratitude. I've seen a number of different suggestions: keeping a gratitude "journal", going out of your way to thank someone each day, naming three "blessings" every night, etc.

This all sounds like a good idea. So, I thought it would be a good idea to start off the year with some gratitude messages to the MCC community.

First, a thanks to Pastor Katrina for her collaborative leadership and friendship. And thanks to the lay leadership of MCC who have been so supportive and kind.

Then, to all the wonderful members of the music ministry who week after week make such wonderful offerings to God on behalf of the congregation. These folks not only produce music for worship but do it with such good humor and collegiality.

Finally, the members of the congregation at large. Even though we are technically "staff", you treat us as friends.

And we're very grateful!

Happy New Year,  
Donna Obarowski

## **FAITH FORMATION**

A joyful thank you to our wonderful volunteers who have made this year so special for our youth program! From teaching Sunday School and assisting with projects, to providing treats and helping with setup - your dedication has helped our program thrive and grow. I'm especially grateful to our teen volunteers who consistently step up to help with Sunday School and fundraising events.

I'm delighted to share that our holiday fundraiser was a tremendous success! The handmade candles and "Friendship Soup" kits were a hit, and your generous support will help fund our Faith Formation programming for 2025. A special thanks to Jillian & Raeghan O'Connor and Robbie Kamide who put in extra time and care making the beautiful candles.

The Christmas Pageant was another highlight, with our children and teens putting on a wonderful performance. Thank you to everyone who helped coordinate and make it such a memorable event.

If you purchased a candle or soup kit, we'd love to hear your thoughts to help us plan future fundraisers. Please share your feedback at [sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com](mailto:sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com).

We look forward to another year of family movie nights, youth group gatherings, and learning and growth in Sunday School.

Wishing everyone a blessed and Happy New Year!

*As always, if you're interested in teaching Sunday School, please email me at [sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com](mailto:sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com)*

Thank you!

Sara Hubbard

Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

## **OPEN AND AFFIRMING COMMITTEE**

In 2022, Church Council requested and approved the formation of a committee to guide Middlebury Congregational Church through the process to discern about adopting an Open and Affirming covenant. Throughout the last two years, we have worked diligently to provide church members with education and resources. We held a viewing of the movie “Pray Away”, followed by a thoughtful discussion. We also held a book study, reading “Unclobber” by Colby Martin. Guest ministers have come to preach about both their church and their personal experiences with ONA. We had a panel discussion after church with leaders from local churches who have recently been through the ONA process. We have met with many members of our congregation, both one on one and in groups, to hear comments, answer questions, and listen to concerns.

At this time, we are pleased to inform the church that we feel we are ready to vote to adopt our Open and Affirming covenant. Church Council has approved a special meeting to be held on Sunday,

February 23, 2025. We will be voting on the covenant below. We are looking forward to your support in attendance that day. If you are unable to attend in person and would like to join via Zoom, please contact Pastor Katrina for a link.

*The Middlebury Congregational Church welcomes all who choose to seek to share the Good News of God's love for us, and we proclaim ourselves to be an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ. We welcome all persons of all sexual orientations, gender expressions, socioeconomic status, family configurations, ages, national origins, races, physical, cognitive, and medical ability, and religious background. We celebrate God's inclusive welcome, where all are encouraged to work together, in mission and in service, to participate fully in the ministry, worship, leadership, fellowship, sacraments, responsibilities, joys, and blessings in our church. We embrace all people at any point in their faith journey and affirm each person's freedom to pursue God's unique calling. As Christians, we commit ourselves to the ongoing work of being an Open and Affirming congregation, continuing to strive for love, justice, and peace. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome at Middlebury Congregational Church.*

Valerie Beard, on behalf of the Committee  
Debbie Barlow, Len Beard, Kelly Ecsedy, and Sal Sena

## **RINGING OUT THE OLD YEAR**

January is traditionally the time for looking back and looking ahead.

Looking back, our members and friends were once again very generous in our pledge campaign for 2025. Thank you all!

As of Christmas Eve, we had received 54 pledges totaling \$114,194. In comparison, every year since 2020 we received more than 60 pledges totaling more than \$120,000. Last year, it was \$124,626 from 67 pledges. That's a decrease of 19% in pledges and 8% in dollars.

The decline in pledges – and the resulting decline in the total – is not from the death of members alone, although our aging membership is a

concern. Of the 13 who pledged and whose ages we know, the ages range from 32 to 91. The median (half older, half younger) is 69.

Two regular pledging families went inactive and did not pledge for 2025.

Four others pledged but asked that their donations be directed to the Third Century Fund. We cannot make deposits to that investment account, but their money will be directed to the budget line item for capital projects to forestall future drawdowns. Two other members increased their giving but shared the same concerns about spending down the endowment funds.

One surviving spouse wrote saying the family was returning to their Catholic church because of the Open and Affirming discussion. The budget, the endowment, and O&A will all be considered in congregational meetings this winter. If you have thoughts or concerns about any of these, please share them at the meetings or to me and I'll pass them on anonymously.

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

- 1/4:** 9am Troop 5&6 Bottle Drive
- 1/5:** 10am Epiphany of the Lord
- 1/12:** 10am Baptism of the Lord  
11:30am What is a Sacrament?
- 1/19:** 10am Second Sunday after the Epiphany  
11am Informational Meeting about 2025 Budget
- 1/26:** 10am Third Sunday after the Epiphany  
11pm Annual Meeting  
12pm Potluck in Social Hall

**Middlebury Congregational Church  
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