

# CHURCH LIFE

FEBRUARY 2025

**SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**  
**SUNDAY 2/23**  
**TO VOTE ON OPEN AND AFFIRMING**  
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**MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

# CALL TO A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

A Special Meeting of the Congregation is called for February 23, 2025 in the sanctuary following worship. The purpose of this meeting is to vote on the proposal brought by Church Council for the Middlebury Congregational Church to adopt an Open and Affirming covenant. To participate in the meeting remotely, please email Pastor Katrina for the meeting link ([kmanzi@middleburyucc.org](mailto:kmanzi@middleburyucc.org))  
Erika Carrington, Clerk

## SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING INFO

The motion being voted on at the congregational meeting will be to adopt the Open and Affirming covenant printed below into our church constitution. It would go into the “Faith and Covenant” section of the document and be alongside the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith and the Church Covenant already in that document. Adoption of an Open and Affirming covenant would make MCC an Open and Affirming church in the United Church of Christ.

### Proposed Open and Affirming Covenant

*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.*

## FROM THE PASTOR

Happy last month of winter! As a heads up, I will be on vacation from 1/31-2/5. The Office, Church Council, and the Deacons have the contact info for the pastor providing emergency pastoral coverage.

In terms of worship this February, I want to highlight February 9<sup>th</sup>, which is Scout Sunday. We will be joined by scouts from the two BSA scout troops MCC charters along with MCC scouts in other troops. After worship, we will head downstairs to the Ark/Activities Room, which has been renovated by Stephen Guerin as his Eagle Scout project. We will dedicate the room and thank Stephen and our scouts. Additionally, after worship is our Souper Bowl Sunday soup sale organized by our Mission Board! So, don't forget to get your homemade soup!

The other thing happening this February that I want to highlight is the Open and Affirming vote on Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I am in favor of MCC becoming an Open and Affirming church. As we look ahead to the vote on 2/23, I want to offer my testimony for why I believe this is so important.

I grew up in a more conservative family and in a fairly conservative UCC/Congregational church. I long believed Open and Affirming to be something akin to progressive/liberal virtue signaling and unnecessarily divisive. I also really wasn't sure if Christianity and LGBTQ people were really even compatible.

Throughout college and seminary, I had a lot of my long held assumptions tested. Many of my classmates were both just as Christian as me and queer. Figuring out what to make of those two seemingly mutually exclusive things was the topic of years of late night conversations with peers who were asking the same questions I was. What did the Bible say about being gay? What does it mean to be a faithful church? What does it mean to love my neighbor?

What had the biggest impact on me though was hearing stories from people. I adored my experience growing up in my church. I felt very loved and supported. It broke my heart to hear the experiences of my queer friends and classmates who weren't able to have that same

experience with church once they came out as queer. The people, the churches, who had loved and supported them before no longer would.

As pastor of this church, I have had conversations with queer young people who grew up in this church, and my heart was broken all over again. Those kids thought the church and God couldn't possibly love them for who they were. These weren't kids from some super fundamentalist church. These were kids who grew up right here at MCC. Because our church had been silent, the kids assumed what they saw on the news or from evangelical churches in the area was how our church must feel about them.

There are a lot of things in the world that we can't control. But, we can control what message we as a church send to our kids. The first time a young person at MCC hears God loves them for exactly who they are shouldn't be in a tearful conversation with their minister where they're scared of what the church will do. I believe our church voting to become Open and Affirming is about helping our kids grow up knowing that they are loved by God and the church.

One of the things I really appreciate about serving MCC is that we actually are a politically diverse church in a time where Americans are becoming increasingly siloed and sorted into echo chambers. I value that I'm not just preaching to the choir, so to speak. I believe loving our neighbor means being in community with people who believe and vote differently than we do. I believe being an Open and Affirming church is about what we're already doing together as a church. It's about ensuring more people hear the good news that the love of God and the kingdom of God are truly for everyone.

I've been thinking a lot about what Jesus says to his disciples on Maundy Thursday in John. During that conversation, Jesus gives them a new commandment, that they love one another as he loved them. And then a bit later he tells them "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

Peace,  
Katrina Manzi  
Minister

## FROM THE MISSION BOARD

Mitten Line is hung in the Social Room for any new/gently used mittens, gloves, scarves to be donated to GWIM. Our monthly food contribution is Canned Chicken.

Blood Drive: February 15th  
8am -1pm. We are holding a blood drive in the social room. We are looking for volunteers to man the snack table and also to bake some goodies to hand out. Sign up sheets are on bulletin board if you want to give us an hour or two and also if you want to sign up for just a baked good it would be greatly appreciated.

Super Bowl Sunday - February 9th Soup will be on sale for \$5.00 for a 16 oz container.

Anyone who wants to try their culinary skills and provide a soup for our fundraiser would be wonderful. Sign up sheets for soups will also be on the bulletin board.

Thank you all for your generosity in supporting our missions

Carol Rollins  
Mission Board



### THE DEACONS' BENCH

A lot of our time in life is spent on decision making. Our free societies grace is the ability, and I would argue, our duty is to discern the right path, ie. decision to make. At the same time, we are all mentors to those around us. Through my career paths I took in life, I credit a DMV Inspector, John Hall-RIP, as my most influential career mentor. His technique for training me was quite simple because he always wanted me to think things out... Instead of telling me an answer to a question he'd return by saying "what do you think?" In this way he'd engage in discussion and

#### GWIM Monthly Food Donations

**January** – Jarred Spaghetti sauce

**February** – Canned Chicken

**March** – Chicken Gravy

**April** – Dutch Egg Noodles and Elbows

**May** – Instant Potatoes

**June** – Cereal

**July** – Jelly

**August** – Peanut Butter

**September** – Jarred Spaghetti sauce

**October** – Dutch Egg Noodles and Elbows

**November** – Canned Chicken

**December** – Instant Potatoes

put the onus on me to solve an issue before interjecting a view, policy, or procedure I'd overlooked.

I'd like to believe our Lord and Savior wants us to prayerfully/faithfully to confront our world in the same manner. Biblically, evidence suggests he thought for himself; challenging the norms of his day. He followed no conformity of his time that wasn't based on his love for God and mankind. Our worldly challenges demand the same from us.

On behalf of The Board of Deacons,  
Michael J. Granja

### **The Scripture**

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

*1 John 3:16-18*

### **Face to Face**

I had walked life's way with an easy tread,  
Had followed where comforts and pleasures led,  
Until one day, in a quiet place,  
I met the Master face to face.

With station and rank and wealth for my goal,  
Much thought for my body, but none for my soul,  
I had entered to win in life's mad race,  
When I met the Master face to face.

I met him, and knew him, and blushed to see  
That his eyes, full of sorrow, were fixed on me;  
And I faltered and fell at his feet that day,  
While my castles melted and vanished away.

Melted and vanished, and in their place  
Naught else did I see but the Master's face,  
And I cried aloud: "Oh, make me meet  
To follow the steps of thy wounded feet."

My thought is now for the souls of men;  
I have lost my life to find it again,  
E'er since one day, in a quiet place,  
I met my Master face to face.

*Author Unknown*

## MUSIC NOTES

We have a wonderful selection of African-American spirituals included in our two hymnals as well as some wonderful choral arrangements of spirituals in our choir library. One of my favorites is an arrangement of "Go Down, Moses" that the choir will be singing during February in honor of Black History Month.

Like all music that is classified as "folk music" (that is, doesn't have any specific composer and spreads through a community from person to person), the origin of "Go Down, Moses" is rather murky. It was first published in Virginia in the 1850s and was a common song among the enslaved people there. Its text, about Moses and the enslaved Hebrew people, was a frequent theme of African-American spirituals as the singers of these songs strongly identified with the Hebrew population in bondage.

There has been some speculation that the song was actually written by Harriet Tubman and its first publication overlaps with her time working on the Underground Railroad.

Although the song's origin almost certainly pre-dates this, it is quite certain that Harriet Tubman used "Go Down, Moses" as one of her two "coded" songs that she sang to alert runaway slaves that she was in the area, based on the stories she told her authorized biographer, Sarah Bradford, and included in *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869):

When Israel was in Egypt's land  
Let my people go  
Oppress'd so hard they could not stand  
Let my people go

Go down, Moses  
Way down in Egypt's land  
Tell old Pharaoh  
Let my people go

Blessings,  
Donna Obarowski

## **FAITH FORMATION**

The Sunday school students have been learning about the birth of Jesus and what life looked like following His birth. They explored the story from the perspective of the shepherds, who were the first to receive the good news from an Angel of the Lord. The older students studied this by writing news articles about the event. During social hour, our little ones delighted everyone by showing off their adorable camels after learning about the search for Jesus.

We kicked off 2025 with our first youth group meeting, where students created vision boards by cutting out pictures and words from magazines. They had great discussions about their goals and aspirations for the year ahead - all while enjoying pizza and snacks!

Looking ahead to February, we're excited to host our "Parent's Night Out" Valentine's Day movie night. Parents can drop off their kids for a fun evening filled with crafts, pizza, and a showing of "Inside Out 2". If you're interested in registering your children or volunteering for this event, please contact me at [sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com](mailto:sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com).

*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**

The Open and Affirming Committee is excited to announce that Church Council has approved a special meeting to be held on Sunday, February 23, 2025, where the congregation will be voting on the following covenant to add to our church constitution.

We are looking forward to your enthusiastic support in this important initiative at MCC.

Debbie Barlow, Len Beard, Valerie Beard, Kelly Ecsedy, Sal Sena



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## **STEWARDSHIP**

*Captain Renault: What in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?*

*Rick: My health. I came to Casablanca for the waters.*

*Captain Renault: The waters? What waters? We're in the desert.*

*Rick: I was misinformed.*

Like Rick in *Casablanca*, you were misinformed. I owe you an explanation of last month's Church Life report.

As of the end of the year, just before Christmas, when all the pledge cards were counted and the pledged amounts added up, we were down by 19% in participants and 8% in dollars from the previous year. That was disappointing, and I offered a few concerns some people had raised.

Shortly after the article came out, we realized that several members who give regularly online through Breeze did not appear on the list of pledges, although they were in previous years' lists. When we factored them back in, we had the same number of givers (67) as in the past few years, and a record amount pledged: nearly \$127,000. (We will provide details at the annual meeting.)

So, a big THANK YOU to all who pledged and who give of their time and talent as well as treasure to make our faith community a success!

You were misinformed, too, by my statement last month that we could not make donations directly to our Third Century Fund account. We recently changed over to another UCC investment fund that allows us to do this.

For accounting purposes, it's still best to keep pledges separate from other gifts. Pledges go toward the general budget for operating expenses. Donations toward the Third Century Fund will be directed to that restricted fund and used only for specific capital improvements with the approval of the Trustees.

This is an exciting new opportunity to make a lasting gift to the church. We still need your regular giving to prepare and meet our monthly budget. But if you've ever been concerned about covering major expenses as they arise, memorial gifts or estate bequests directly to the Third Century Fund are one possible solution.

The Book of Remembrance is still used for most memorial contributions. It is less restricted and is maintained as part of our general fund rather than the endowments. It is used as a reserve account for occasional major purchases such as a new set of chairs for the social hall, new video equipment and network upgrades during the pandemic, and the like. Again, such expenditures require a vote of Trustees.

However you feel moved to give to your church, you are helping to keep MCC strong today and into the future. Many thanks for all you do!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

## **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 RECORDS**

**Deaths:** Mickey Shea on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
(Memorial Service: April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

**1/31-2/5:** Pastor Katrina is on vacation

**2/2:** Guest Preacher: The Rev. Matt McCaffrey

**2/9:** Scout Sunday

Ark/Activities Room Dedication

Souper Bowl Sunday

**2/14:** 6pm-8:30pm MCC Parents Night Out

**2/15:** 8am-1:30pm American Red Cross Blood Drive, Social Hall

**2/23:** Special Congregational Meeting after worship to vote on adopting  
an Open and Affirming covenant

**Middlebury Congregational Church  
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Middlebury CT 06762**

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