

# CHURCH LIFE

MARCH 2025



**MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**  
**AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATION**  
**OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

## FROM THE PASTOR

Happy almost Spring! Lent this year begins March 5<sup>th</sup>, so we have a number of things going on at MCC.

Before I get to what's going on in March, as many of you know, a special congregational meeting was called for 2/23 to vote on whether MCC would be an Open and Affirming church. The vote passed 42 yes votes to 5 no votes. We have sent in a copy of our covenant and a record of the meeting to the national office of the Open and Affirming Collation of the United Church of Christ, and in the coming weeks, we will receive our certificate and be listed in the national database.

For things going on in March, we have our Jambalaya Dinner on March 4<sup>th</sup> from 5-6:30 in the Social Hall. Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> at 7pm is our joint Ash Wednesday service with the First Congregational Church of Watertown. That service will be here at MCC, and Chris Cole, who served as our student sabbatical pastor, will preach that evening. As many of you will remember, Chris is a member of the Watertown church and is in the UCC ordination process. On Sunday March 16<sup>th</sup>, we will be selling corned beef sandwiches to go from 11-12:30pm.

Lent is the 40 day penitential and preparatory season leading up to Easter. Traditionally, Christians have observed Lent both by fasting (e.g. giving something up) and by spending more time engaged in spiritual practices like prayer, worship, and reading scripture. This year we're offering two Lent studies at the church. One will be after worship on the I AM statements in the gospel according to John. This will be led by Michele R. Finn, one of our deacons, and there's more information about it in the Deacons' Bench article. The other study is on the Apostles' Creed and will be led by me on Wednesday evenings in the Social Hall. The deacons and I have realized that people are available at different times, and our hope in offering two study options is to give the most people in our church the opportunity to engage more in scripture and prayer together during Lent.

In our society today, there's a fair amount of talk about things like Christian values in regards to government policy, and often Christian

values get reduced down to just a few social issues like abortion or LGBTQ rights. Often those issues are used at litmus tests to determine whether one is sufficiently Christian. However, these debates and topics are modern ones, and they certainly weren't the benchmarks used during the early centuries of the church.

So, on Wednesdays during Lent (soup supper at 6:30, discussion starting at 7pm), we will be looking at the Apostles' Creed, one of the oldest creedal formulations of the Christian faith. The Apostles' Creed has its roots as being a tool for baptismal preparation and as part of the baptismal rite itself. Many denominations continue to use the Apostles' Creed for baptisms today. The Apostles' Creed is also unique among many church documents in that it's not the result of a council or conflict. It evolved gradually through church practice, and the earliest form scholars are aware of dates to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. So, come on Wednesdays as we get back to the basics of the Christian faith and explore the core ideas that the early church thought were most important.

As we begin Lent, here is a prayer for the season from the Church of Scotland: "God of all seasons, in your pattern of things, there is a time for keeping and a time for losing, a time for building up and a time for pulling down. In this holy season of Lent, as we journey with our Lord to the cross, help us to discern in our lives what we must lay down and what we must take up; what must end and what we must begin. Give us grace to lead a disciplined life, in glad obedience and with the joy which comes from a closer walk with Christ. Amen."

Peace,  
Katrina Manzi  
Minister

# BACK TO BASICS: A LENTEN DISCUSSION ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

*Social Hall, Wednesdays during Lent: 6:30 Soup Supper, 7pm  
Discussion*

3/12: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth"

- Scripture: Genesis 1-2, John 1, Psalm 146

3/19: "and in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary"

- John 1, John 3: 11-21, Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25

3/26: "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."

- Mark 15

4/2: "He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father"

- 1 Peter 3: 8-22, Ephesians 4:7-10, John 20: 1-18, Acts 1: 6-11

4/9: "and he will come again to judge the living and the dead."

- Mark 13:24-27, Matthew 25: 31-46, Revelation 20:11-21:8

4/16: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

- Holy Spirit: Acts 2:1-13, John 14: 15-31
- Church: 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:4-6, John 1: 17-26, Hebrews 10:24-25
- Communion of saints, resurrection of the body, life everlasting: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

For further reading:

*The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* by Ben Myers  
(Lexham Press, 2018)

# Ash Wednesday

March 5, 2025, 7pm  
@Middlebury Congregational Church



Sponsored by  
**First Congregational Church of Watertown  
& Middlebury Congregational Church**

We are having a combined Ash Wednesday worship service with the First Congregational Church of Watertown. We are hosting this year, and Chris Cole from the Watertown church will be preaching. The Rev. Cindy Carr from Watertown and the Rev. Katrina Manzi will co-lead the rest of the service together.



## **THE DEACONS' BENCH**

The Deacons are pleased to host a series of discussions on the seven "I AM" statements of Jesus featured in the Gospel of John. These discussions

will be held after services on **March 9, 16, and 23** in the parlor.

No preparation is necessary on your part to attend these discussions! A guided handout with scripture references will be provided. For each statement, we will review the setting/context in which the statement was made, to whom it was made, what the metaphor implies, its significance, and some tie-ins to other scriptures. Most importantly, we will explore what these statements mean in our continuing relationship with Jesus.

To pique your interest, consider the questions below:

- In Jesus' time, shepherding may have looked different than we assume. For one thing, sheepfolds were often circular structures made of stone with a narrow opening. Sheep were gathered into the fold at night for protection from predators, while the shepherd laid across the opening. Sometimes shepherds shared a fold, which meant that in the morning, each shepherd would call his own sheep (who knew his voice) to his pasture area. How does an understanding of this practice in Jesus' time help us more fully comprehend what Jesus was revealing to us as "Gate" and "Good Shepherd"?
- Did you know that Bethlehem is a Hebrew phrase that means "House of Bread"? What significance might this have given Jesus' place of birth and his "I Am the Bread of Life" statement?
- Can you name which "I Am" statement was made directly and only to a woman? Hint: This woman was gently scolded by Jesus for being impatient when her sister chose to listen to Jesus' teaching rather than help with hosting duties at their home. Yet what does it reveal that Jesus entrusts her with such a profound statement of who he is at such a seemingly devastating moment for her, and her amazing response?

We hope that you will join us for discussion and fellowship!

On behalf of The Board of Deacons,  
Michele Rowell Finn

# FROM THE MISSION BOARD

## Souper Bowl Sunday

This was such a big success even though we had to move our soup sale to the Saturday before due to inclement weather. We had 11 different types of soups for sale and sold out. Our profit was \$405.00 for our mission projects. Thank you to all those who used their culinary skills to provide us with the most delicious flavorful soups. And thank you to those who purchased those soups, helping sell our soups and coming out on a Saturday to do so.

## Blood Drive:

Our annual Blood Drive was a success as well. We exceeded our goal. There were 36 donors with 32 able to donate blood. We were instrumental in helping the Red Cross to gather the needed life saving blood for our community and the surrounding communities. Thank you to all who helped with donating the delicious homemade snacks, those helping to serve our snacks to the patients and chat with them as well as those who helped checking the donors into the computer system. This is such a worthwhile event since we are the only one now that has a blood drive in Middlebury.

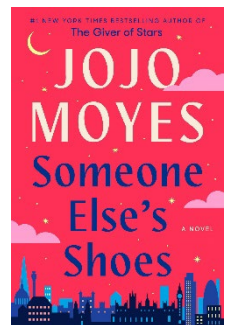
Thank you all for your generosity in supporting our missions

Carol Rollins  
Mission Board

## MCC BOOK CLUB

Please join us for our MCC Book Club on Wednesday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at 6:00p.m. in the Parlor. In March, we will be discussing *Someone Else's Shoes* by Jojo Moyes.

Middlebury Public Library has copies you can pick up. We hope to see you there!



# FAITH FORMATION & YOUTH GROUP

Despite February's challenges with two snow cancellations and the month's brevity, we still got to sneak in one Sunday School lesson!

We're delighted to report the success of our Valentine's Day "Parents' Night Out" babysitting event. The children enjoyed making valentines for each other to place in their hand-decorated bags. The evening was filled with pizza, treats, a movie, games, and plenty of festive balloons to play keepy-uppy ;).

Looking ahead to March (and hopefully warmer weather), Youth Group will host a special movie night featuring "Wicked" on March 29th at 5 pm in the social hall. The evening will include a lasagna dinner specially prepared by Ellen and Katie.

**Note:** We would love and welcome new Sunday School teaching volunteers! No experience necessary. We will provide you with a lesson plan and have lots of materials on hand. If you are interested and would like an overview of how it works, please contact me at [sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com](mailto:sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com).

Thank you!  
Sara Hubbard  
Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator



## DON'T GIVE UP MUSIC FOR LENT

I don't know about you, but I've already gotten numerous emails and flyers from publishers and other sources with printed and recorded recommendations for Lent.

It's obvious that there are many, many great choices for choosing a Lent Devotional. There are general ones and ones specific for your life situation (like moms, seniors, health care workers, those grieving, etc.) There are classic devotionals and newer publications. It would be hard to pick just one!



If you are thinking of a Lenten discipline, just Google the topic and you'll find an inspiring plethora of articles and lists: Give up junk food! Give up coffee! Give up alcohol! Or how about: Give up worrying! Give up complaining!

Then there are many series of Lent themes talks available online. You'll quickly find plenty of churches, authors and bloggers with recorded talks and discussions for you to follow each day or week through Lent.

What I haven't seen promoted as much is Lenten music!

But there are so many playlists of Lent-themed music available at YouTube, on Spotify and on Pandora. And you can choose what speaks to you- contemporary, traditional or blended.

Just a suggestion, but have you considered adding some Lent music to your season? I've already bookmarked a few playlists ("Classic Lent Playlist 2024" from Christ Church US on YouTube and "Lent to Easter Playlist" on Pandora and "Return to the Father" on Spotify) that I hope will keep me company sometimes during this coming Lenten season.

I hope you hear some meaningful music, whether at church or elsewhere this Lent.

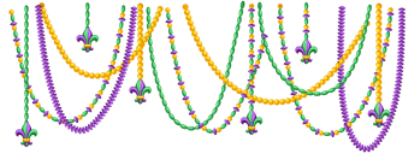
Blessings,  
Donna Obarowski



# JUMPIN' JAMBALAYA IS READY TO ROLL!!



MCC Social Hall  
Dine in or pick up  
10\$ per bowl



Fat Tuesday  
March 4, 2025  
5:00 to 6:30 pm

Our menu is straight from Bourbon Street: a steaming bowl of delicious jambalaya on a bed of rice! Enjoy the New Orleans cuisine and then dance the night away to traditional zydeco music!

## Advanced orders recommended!

We will prepare extras but don't get left out in the cold. Please contact the church office to leave a message with your preorders at [office@middleburyucc.org](mailto:office@middleburyucc.org) 203-758-2671

Or email Ellen at [spirit2000@aol.com](mailto:spirit2000@aol.com)



## OPEN AND AFFIRMING COMMITTEE

On Sunday, February 23rd, we held a special meeting of the congregation to vote to adopt an ONA covenant to be added to our church constitution. At the meeting, many members spoke and gave their testaments to what the approval of such a statement would mean to them. One member spoke about her granddaughter, who is trans, and how she knows that by outwardly expressing our inclusiveness, her granddaughter would know she is welcome and accepted in our congregation.

One member said, “I believe that becoming an open and affirming church is vital because there are limited religious safe spaces for queer people and people of color. I believe that being an open and affirming church would help us strengthen our community greatly.”

Another member wrote, “As Christians, we have been entrusted with the responsibility to emulate Christ's love and compassion for all human beings, irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation. The Bible teaches us, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), a commandment that underscores the importance of extending love and acceptance to all members of our community. By opening our doors and hearts to the LGBTQ+ community, we would not only honor this sacred trust but also underscore the importance of unity and empathy as a bedrock of our faith.”

On behalf of the Open and Affirming Committee, I want to thank all members of the congregation for their words of support and encouragement, for their questions and conversations. The approval of an ONA statement is a step in the process of extravagant welcome and inclusivity. I feel as though the words we offer as a welcome during a baptism are very fitting for this time in our congregation as well. *“This is not the end but the beginning of a journey of discovering how much God loves you. This is our blessing to you: “Grow in grace and wisdom and do not fear, for the Lord is with you. Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”*

Valerie Beard, on behalf of the ONA Committee

Please join us to celebrate

# St. Patrick's Day

# MILE HIGH CORNED BEEF ON RYE

Served with coleslaw, chips, and a pickle

MARCH 16TH



\$9



Middlebury  
Congregational Church  
11:00 am - 12:30

PICK UP ONLY

## TWO TAX TIPS

It's tax season, and you may be looking for ways to render unto Uncle Sam what is Sam's and render unto God what is God's.

The 2017 Tax and Jobs Act greatly increased the standard deduction and simplified tax preparation. But this had an unexpected consequence: People give less now to charities, including churches. About 90 percent of taxpayers today no longer itemize their deductions. This makes filing simpler, but charitable donations become less attractive. The 2017 tax law is due to expire at the end of this year and is likely to become a major controversy in Congress.

Meanwhile, though, people who do itemize have an incentive to give generously to charities. One way to maximize their charitable contributions is to give through a Donor-Advised Fund, or DAF. Several MCC families give to the church through a DAF. Donors receive an immediate tax deduction for cash or appreciated assets donated to their fund, which is run by a nonprofit. The fund then distributes grants to other charities at the donor's direction. If you give to other charities as well as the church, this might be one way to simplify your giving. DAFs are often offered through investment houses, universities, and hospitals. Ask your tax adviser.

Another way to give to your church is through a distribution from retirement accounts. After age 73 in most cases, you must begin making Required Minimum Distributions, or RMDs, from your traditional IRA, 401(k), or other retirement plan. Because the money you put into those accounts was tax-free when you earned it, it becomes taxable income when you withdraw it – unless you give it directly to a charity. Then it becomes a Qualified Charitable Distribution, or QCD. The rules are complex. Again, ask your tax adviser.

Roth IRAs are not subject to the RMD rules unless they are inherited by a non-spouse beneficiary, who then must begin making the withdrawals. At least one family in our church has done this, and their extra generosity was very welcome!

These are a few of the strategies you may want to think about when filing this year – or talk over with your tax adviser for next year’s giving.

As ever, many thanks!

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

- 3/2:** Scout Sunday & Communion Sunday *pg. 15*
- 3/4:** 5-6:30pm Jambalaya dinner (Social Hall) *pg. 10*
- 3/5:** 7pm Ash Wednesday worship service (MCC) *pg. 5*
- 3/9:** First Sunday in Lent  
11am First Lent Bible Discussion *pg. 5-6*
- 3/12:** 6:30pm First Soup & Scripture Lent discussion *pg. 4*
- 3/16:** Second Sunday in Lent  
11-12:30am Corned Beef Sandwiches Pick-up *pg. 12*
- 3/19:** 6:30pm Soup & Scripture Lent discussion *pg. 4*
- 3/23:** Third Sunday in Lent
- 3/26:** 6pm MCC Book Club meeting (Parlor) *pg. 7*  
6:30pm Soup & Scripture Lent discussion *pg. 4*
- 3/29:** 5-8:30pm Dinner & a Movie (Social Hall) *pg. 15*

### **Scout Sunday (March 2<sup>nd</sup>)**

We will be joined in worship by MCC Scouts and scouts from Troops 5 & 6. We will also rededicate the Ark/Activities Room since Scott G. renovated the room for his Eagle project.

### **Dinner and a Movie (March 29<sup>th</sup>)**

Join us for lasagna dinner and a showing of the recent film *Wicked!*

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

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

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