

CHURCH LIFE

FEBRUARY 2026



FROM THE PASTOR

We have a lot going on this February. We have Red Cross Blood Drive on 2/7, the Souper Bowl Sunday Soup Sale on 2/8. Scout Sunday on 2/15, Jambalaya Dinner on 2/17, and Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 2/18. We will again be doing a joint Ash Wednesday service with the First Congregational Church of Watertown. This year, the Watertown church is hosting, and worship will be at 7pm.

For 2026, I've started a new daily devotional called *A Year with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. As the title would imply, it's 365 days of excerpts from the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a theologian and pastor in Nazi Germany, and he was one of the major leaders in the Confessing Church, which was the segment of the German Church that resisted Nazi state control. There was a whole fight over regulating the German churches and aligning them with the aims of the state called the Kirchenkampf which simply means "church struggle." Bonhoeffer eventually becomes involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler and is imprisoned and executed.

As I've been reading a little by Bonhoeffer each day, this section really caught my attention:

"Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them [...] But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either [...] Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and for their own words and plans."

The month of January involved a number of disturbing and deeply concerning events in the life of our nation. And as both an American and a Christian, I am alarmed by the ever increasing divisiveness and rabid partisanship that seems to infect every part of our national life.

As I've been trying to make sense of the present state of our nation, I think Bonhoeffer might be right about listening, love, and hearing God. I keep thinking about that line "Christians who can no longer

listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either.” I certainly don’t think we as a nation are doing much listening to one another. In the aftermath of Charlie Kirk’s assassination and in the days following Renee Good being killed by an ICE agent, much of the discourse was about reinforcing the Left/Right divide and demonizing the people who viewed the world differently. We aren’t talking to each other; we’re talking at each other. Jesus says everyone will know we are his disciples by our love for one another, and I don’t see much love or listening in our nation as a whole.

Lent is the penitential 40 day season leading up to Easter, and it’s a season for Christians to take stock of ourselves and our relationship with God. What should we take up and what should we put down? I wonder if perhaps what many of us need to take up is making an effort to listen to our neighbors. If we can’t listen to our neighbors, how are we ever going to love them?

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

LENT STUDY
THE LAST THINGS: A LOOK AT DEATH, THE
SECOND COMING, JUDGMENT, THE
AFTERLIFE, AND THE END OF THE WORLD
Wednesdays during Lent in the Social Hall 6:30pm Supper, 7pm
Discussion

“The Four Last Things” in Christian theology are Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. These are topics people often have a lot of questions about, and often Mainline Protestants like us tend to talk about them much less than other denominations. So, this Lent we’re going to take a look about what the Bible says about the last things and some of the common views from throughout the history of Church. Bring your questions and curiosity!

2/25: Sin: What is sin? What does the Bible say about sin? Are we born sinful? We'll look at different ways the Bible talks about sin and some of the main ways the Church has talked about sin.

3/4: Death: What happens when we die? Do we go right to heaven or hell? Do we simply fall asleep? Do our souls stay with our bodies or do they separate? We'll explore some of the ways the Bible talks about death and go over some of the ways the Church has understood what happens when we die.

3/11: The Second Coming: Some of you are likely familiar with a line that's often in communion liturgy: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." What does it mean for the Church to proclaim Christ is coming again? When does Christ return? What happens when he does return? We'll look at various answers the Church has posed to those questions and key Bible passages about Christ's return.

3/18: The Final Judgment: What does the Bible actually say about the last judgment? Who does the judging? What are we actually judged on? We'll look at the main scenes of the last judgment in the Bible and some of the ways the Church has understood them.

3/25: Hell: A number of people have asked over the years what to think about hell since we don't talk about it much in worship. So, we will look at some of the main biblical passages about hell and explore some of the traditional and more modern ways the Church has tried to make sense of the question of what happens to evil people and nonbelievers when they die.

4/1: Heaven: What does heaven look like? Who goes to heaven? Do we have bodies in heaven? What is eternal life? We'll look at Bible passages describing heaven and heaven on earth and explore some of the views in the Church on heaven and resurrection.

READ THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE WITH THE CONFIRMATION CLASS

As part of Confirmation Class, our confirmands will be reading the gospel according to Luke throughout the program year. Everyone is welcome to read Luke at home along with the class.

February: chapters 11-14

March: chapters 15-18

April: chapters 19-22

May: chapters 23-24

We also need adult volunteers to be the second adult for confirmation classes offered after church from 11:30-12:30. All you have to do is attend the class. It's a great way to learn some new things and a chance to get to know some of the kids in our church better! If you're interested in volunteering, contact Pastor Katrina (kmanzi@Middleburyucc.org.)



THE DEACONS' BENCH

Can you believe we are already one month into 2026? Last year, I decided to set aside the usual New Year's resolutions in favor of something quieter and more intentional: the practice of resting in God's promises. For me, rest wasn't about taking a break from activity but about making a deliberate choice to spend more time in scripture and prayer, hoping to deepen my relationship with God.

I truly tried, and in the process, I learned even more about God's greatness. I also learned something about myself: this kind of rest doesn't come naturally to me. I don't mean the kind of rest that comes from entertainment, a brief getaway, or other ways we might "take a break," but a deeper rest—the rest of the heart, a peace that remains even when life feels heavy. This kind of rest comes from deliberately pursuing a relationship with God and creating intentional space in our busy lives to cultivate it.

Allowing for this space can be hard, for so many of our responsibilities are unavoidable. At the same time, our culture often

equates busyness with worth—and sometimes even in a faith context—it's easy to feel we should do more and more, even when our hearts and schedules are already full. Since we are human, this can backfire, leaving us feeling more frustrated than faithful. I know I've fallen into this trap myself. Have you ever felt that way?

Jesus addresses this struggle in Luke 10:38–42, the familiar story of sisters Mary and Martha. While Martha is busy hosting Jesus, Mary sits at his feet, listening to his teaching. Frustrated that her sister is not helping, Martha asks Jesus to intervene. His response is gentle but clear: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing.”

Martha is sometimes defined by this moment of worry and distraction, but scripture reveals her growth beyond it. In the story of Lazarus's resurrection (John 11), Martha speaks one of the clearest confessions of faith in the gospels, and in John 12, we see her serving again—this time without complaint. Jesus values both her service and her attentiveness, reminding us that faith matures as we learn to balance action with devotion. Her story encourages us to balance diligence in our responsibilities with depth in our relationship with God.

Resting in God draws us closer to Him. It anchors our work, clarifies our priorities, and nurtures a peace that lasts even amidst life's chaos. If Jesus called Martha to choose the better part, perhaps he calls us as well—not away from our responsibilities, but toward a deeper relationship that gives meaning to all we do.

With this invitation in mind, on Sunday, February 8, following worship, the Deacons will offer a one-hour study on balance—service and rest, doing and dwelling, diligence and devotion. Together, we will reflect on the stories of Mary and Martha and consider how Jesus may be gently inviting each of us to sit at his feet—and what that might mean for our relationship with Him.

*Respectfully submitted for the Board of Deacons,
Michele Rowell Finn*

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 7th 8am -1pm. We are holding a blood drive in the social room. Please signup online at Redcross or feel free to drop by.

Souper Bowl Sunday - February 8th 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 by the kitchen.

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” - Aesop

Thank you all for your generosity in supporting our missions.

Mission Board
Carol Rollins



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT- SOME USEFUL INFORMATION IN OUR HYMNALS

Picture this: It's Sunday morning at Service. You hear the organ begin the introduction to the next hymn. So, you stand, grab your hymnal from the rack, open to the correct number and start singing!

It's wonderful that you are here in church and actively participating in worship with the people of God. But here's a little idea for you- spend a minute or two to check for some information that may enhance your appreciation and understanding of the hymns that you're singing.

Specifically, take a look at the small print at the top corners of each hymn. It's a thing you can easily overlook.

In our Pilgrim Hymnal at the top left corner of each hymn, you'll see the source of the hymn lyrics, along with the dates of the hymn writer (or the date that the particular hymn was written). It can really give you some context for the words you sing to know if you are singing a text from the Victorian era or a translated text from the 1500's. (For example, Pilgrim Hymnal #436 was written by the author and Christian apologist, G. K. Chesterton. PH #187 is a translation of a Latin hymn from the 14th century. PH #353's source is a Black spiritual. And PH #363 was written by the towering figure of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther.)

The New Century Hymnal gives you even more information. If the hymn text quotes or paraphrases any scripture, that too is noted at the top corner of the hymn. (New Century Hymnal #165 was inspired by Matthew 2:1-11 and Luke 2:8-18. NC #455 quotes Psalm 119:94. And NC #254 is based on John 20:19-31.)

Happy singing,
Donna Obarowski

MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

Our church grew from the members' desire to worship regularly without the need to ford the Naugatuck River and to undertake difficult winter travel to Waterbury, where Middlebury settlers initially worshipped. They petitioned the "mother church," First Congregational Church of Waterbury, to permit them to establish a Middlebury church, before the town was chartered in 1807.

Since those early days, our church has grown to serve a membership of over 200 families and many friends. We've supported childcare programs for mothers who worked, youth fellowship programs, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, Red Cross blood drives, and community events.

We can take inspiration from the hard work those early members undertook to provide a faithful community with weekly worship and

support for our values. To be inspired by those church leaders and to honor their work, I will endeavor to gather the stories of our church and its members, and to learn from and be inspired by those church leaders their work.

Please share the events, records, photographs, and members' stories that you have to help us preserve and be inspired by the story of Middlebury Congregational Church. If we haven't met yet, I'm the short redhead in the choir.

Barbara Hampton, Church Historian

THE FOUR TS OF STEWARDSHIP

During the six years, the Board of Stewardship has often reminded us of the three Ts—Time, Talent, and Treasure. These are gifts that God has given each of us, and we are expected to use them to further our mission in the world.

We receive these gifts in different proportions. I've come to realize over the years that the first is the most valuable. Time is precious, the one thing we can't get more of. The time we spend with others—our family, our community, and our church, is rewarding beyond measure and extends well beyond ourselves. In our church mission statement, when we talk about Worship, Spiritual Growth, Service, and Fellowship, we are talking about time well spent.

Talent is underrated and often overlooked. Whether it's teaching, preaching, entertaining, creating, baking, cooking, bookkeeping, maintenance and repairs, or making things run smoothly behind the scenes, our church benefits from our shared talents. We couldn't survive without them.

In Biblical times, the talent was also a monetary unit of measure. Treasure is perhaps the easiest of these resources to measure, and easiest to exchange for time (in the form of wages) or talent (people pay for creative work).

Time, Talent, and Treasure are the most memorable of the gifts we give to others, but a fourth T is equally important: Thanks. Without gratitude, we would not be much of a church.

Thank you all for giving the money we need to operate as a church, and the time and talent to use it wisely. In particular, thanks to the Kwashnak family for their dedication to the Board of Stewardship over the past five years, and to Michele Rowell Finn for her willingness to join the board this year as the Fielding family retires. All have been more than generous in their gifts of time and talent to MCC in other roles. I hope we can be equally generous in our gratitude.

Thank you for your support over the years. Many blessings to all!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

Valentine's Day Dinner & Craft

Led by: the multi-talented Donna Obarowski

Wed, Feb. 4th @ 6pm in the Social Hall



Menu



**GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH W/
VEGETARIAN TOMATO &
ROASTED RED PEPPER SOUP**

\$5 per person



RSVP to Janine: kswiley@sbcglobal.net
(For quantity)

HONORING THE LEGACY OF EDITH L. BAEDER

In the coming weeks, a plaque will be installed in our church to honor the life and legacy of Edith L. Baeder. It serves as a lasting reminder of a woman whose faithfulness and generosity continue to shape our church in profound and enduring ways.

In March of 2003, our church received an extraordinary gift from a woman whose life was lived quietly, faithfully, and almost entirely out of view. Edith L. Baeder, born March 2, 1915, to George and Marion Baeder spent her entire life in the town of Middlebury. Her family helped shape the town, with her father serving as the community's last village blacksmith.

Edith embodied simplicity, reliability, and discretion. Extremely private, she was known to few, and even fewer truly knew her. She spent her working life in the seamstress department at Waterbury Hospital, serving with steadfast dedication. For nearly 50 years, she also acted as the church's unofficial "assistant treasurer." Each Sunday, the collection plates arrived at her North Street home. She would open the door just enough to receive them, then count and prepare the offerings for deposit the next day-a quiet ministry of trust and faithfulness.

Around town, Edith could sometimes be seen on her daily walks, though she rarely stopped to speak. A polite nod in response to a greeting was usually all one could hope for. She could tailor clothing, draperies, upholstery, or just about anything else, though it was always strictly business. Conversations were kept short; too much chatter might earn a playful roll of the eyes and her classic, "*here's your hat—what's your hurry?*" a brisk little nudge that somehow felt less like impatience and more like affection.

Unassuming in every way, she lived simply in her little house on North Street. Yet no one could have imagined the treasures it held. Not so much for Edith herself, but for the Middlebury Congregational Church. Shortly after her death, our pastor at the time, Rev. Dennis Calhoun, received a call from the attorney handling her estate: "Better sit down for a minute!" he advised. What Dennis learned over the phone that day was that Edith Baeder's entire estate: her life savings, belongings, and property was left to the church. The sale of her home and assets helped fund renovations and accessibility upgrades, and today, our endowment exists largely thanks to her generosity. Her foresight and planning continues to bless our ministries in ways we could never have imagined.

As we remember Edith Baeder, we honor not only her astonishing generosity but also the gentle, steady, and faithful spirit with which she lived. Truly she reflected "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4). May her legacy inspire us to

notice the quiet saints among us and to serve with the same unassuming grace.

Ellen Aronheim
MCC Council Chair

AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE

Saturday, February 7, 2026 from 8:30am-4:30pm

MCC Social Hall

Register: <https://www.redcrossblood.org>



FAITH FORMATION

Happy New Year! We were happy to return to Sunday School on the last Sunday of January after Family Sunday, Baptismal Renewal Sunday, and even a snowy Sunday.

At the time of writing this, we are looking forward to a very special Sunday School lesson with Norma Solberg and Janine Sullivan-Wiley. Children will be learning about the story of Noah's Ark and enjoying the song "Arky Arky" as they learn about God's promises.. Looking forward to all to come in February, including Valentine's day.

We'd love your help! Sunday School runs on curiosity, kindness, creativity, and awesome volunteers! We'd love to have you join us. Contact Sara at sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com.

Sara Hubbard, *Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator*

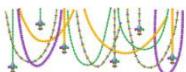


MCC Social Hall
Dine in or pick up
10\$ per bowl



Fat Tuesday
February 17, 2026
5:00 to 6:30 pm

JUMPIN' JAMBALAYA IS READY TO ROLL!!



Our menu is straight from Bourbon Street: a steaming bowl of delicious jambalaya with a saffron rice topper. Enjoy the New Orleans cuisine, friends, fun and traditional zydeco music!

Advanced orders recommended!

We will prepare extras but don't get left out in the cold. Come with the family, we'll have a children's menu option!

Please contact the church office to leave a message with your preorders at
office@middleburyucc.org 203-758-2671
Or email Ellen at spirit2000@aol.com



CHURCH RECORDS

Deaths

Wendy Cooper on December 12, 2025

IMPORTANT DATES

2/1: 10am Worship
11am Annual Meeting followed by potluck

2/4: 6pm Valentine Craft (Social Hall)

2/7: 8:30-1:30 Red Cross Blood Drive (Social Hall)

2/8: 10am Worship
11am Souper Bowl Sunday Sale after worship (Social Hall)
11:30am Confirmation Class (Conference Room)
11:30am Bible Study & Discussion (Parlor)

2/15: 10am Scout Sunday Worship

2/17: 5-6:30pm Jambalaya Dinner (Social Hall)

2/18: 7pm Ash Wednesday Worship @ First Congregational Church of Watertown

2/22: 10am Worship, First Sunday in Lent
11:30am Confirmation Class (Conference Room)

2/25: 6:30pm Lent Study & Discussion
7pm Discussion (Social Hall)

3/1: 10am Worship, Open & Affirming Anniversary Service
Guest Preacher: The Rev. Margret Hofmeister, Area Conference Minister, Southern New England Conference
11am Potluck following worship (Social Hall)

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED