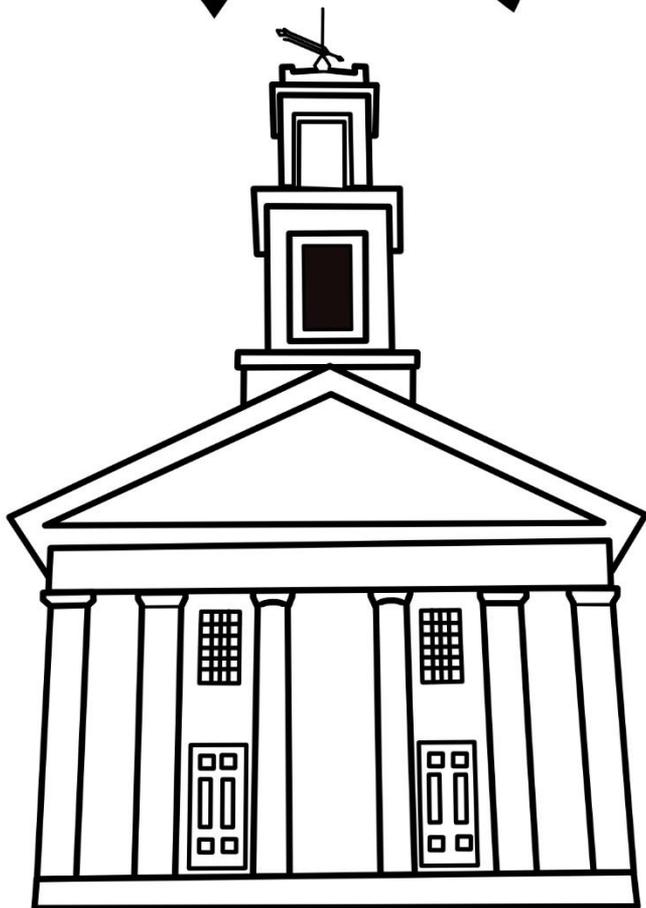


CHURCH LIFE

MARCH 2026



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

FROM THE PASTOR

It's March, and we in the season of Lent. Lent is the forty day season leading up to Easter that commemorates Jesus' forty days of fasting in the wilderness. It provides us as Christians time to take spiritual stock of ourselves and recommit to our faith in the lead up to celebrating Christ's resurrection on Easter.

Lots of people like to make New Year's resolutions, but I've found Lent to also be a great time to commit to certain practices whether it's spending more time in prayer/reading scripture or resolving to change certain aspects of my behavior I'm not happy with. Sometimes I need the motivation of a set period of time to help me actually working on changing things I would like to change.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, and one of the things I really like about Ash Wednesday is that it's such a direct reminder of our mortality: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." (The only other time those words are part of worship are for the committal/graveside part of a funeral/memorial service.) And, I think reminders like that are extremely important, especially given that our society so prizes avoiding death and even aging at all costs. It's important to remember that our lives on this earth are temporary because that can help us focus on things that really matter: loving others, loving the world, and loving God. How much money we made, how important we were, how much stuff we accumulated, none of that matters in the end.

In my time here as your pastor, I've done around two dozen funerals/memorial services, and one of the things I've noticed is that a large number of people have never told their loved ones what they actually want for their end of life care or for their funeral/memorial service. This makes it difficult to know what people would want and puts loved ones in sometimes difficult positions. (It can also put me in a difficult position if I know someone wanted X, but the family wants Y and I have nothing about X written down.)

So, this Lent, I would like us as a church to think just a little bit about death. And one way you can do this is by filling out the "Funeral/Memorial Service Worksheet" I'm including in this month's

newsletter. You should keep a copy and the church should also have a copy. This way, everyone can be on the same page about what you want, and it takes a lot of pressure off of loved ones who need to plan your service.

If you want to go one step further, it's really never too early to talk with your loved ones about what you want in terms of end of life medical care. Much of the time, people do not have these sorts of conversations, and the reality is sometimes we lose our mental faculties well before we die and aren't able to be active participants in end of life decisions, leaving our loved ones in the difficult position of needing to make very important decisions without any input from us.

Until the advent of modern medicine, talking about death and dealing with death used to be very common. There even used to be a whole genre of Christian literature about "the art of death" to help people prepare to have a good death. And there is great wisdom in preparing for death because none of us are getting out of this alive. Death is one of a few certainties of life.

Psalm 90:12 says "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Living faithfully as a Christian means acknowledging that life on this earth is a great gift, but a temporary one, and we need to make our days count.

So, for this month, I will leave you with this prayer that's usually said at the graveside:

O Lord, support us all the day long until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and a peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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.

For Further Reading

- *Second Thoughts about the Second Coming: Understanding the End Times, Our Future, and Christian Hope*: by Robert J. Allen and Robert D Cornwall (Westminster John Knox Press)
 - This is an overview of the history of Christian thought on the second coming of Christ and the end times written for a general audience. It gives a really good broad overview of the major views the Church Universal has or had on these topics along with addressing where things come from in scripture.
- *Second Thoughts about Hell: Understanding What We Believe* by Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornwall
 - This is an overview of the biblical origins of hell and the various understandings of hell historically and presently in the Church Universal.
- *Deliver Us from Evil: A Call for Christians to Take Evil Seriously* by John Swinton (Cascade Books)
 - This is a discussion of evil and sin that is fairly accessible and short.

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.

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

This month, I attended a Roman Catholic Mass in honor of a family member who had passed away. As I sat in the pews and followed along with the liturgy, I found myself noticing both the differences and the similarities between their service and ours. One of the first distinctions was the practice of communion. The priest carefully explained who may receive the Eucharist and why it is such a sacred act within the Roman Catholic tradition. His explanation reminded me of the way Pastor Katrina guides us through communion, grounding the practice in meaning and reverence. Yet in our Congregational tradition, we extend the table to all who are on life's journey, welcoming everyone to partake in the holy meal.

I also observed the rhythms of prayer throughout the Mass. Like our congregation, there were prayers spoken in unison and others led by clergy. However, the physical expressions of prayer differed. At certain moments the congregation stood; at others, they knelt. These embodied acts of devotion reflected a tradition rich with symbolism and history. Though the gestures were not my own, I could appreciate the reverence they expressed and the intention behind them.

Even amid these differences in ritual and tradition, I was reminded of something deeper that unites us. It is important to approach all religious and personal beliefs with respect, even when they do not perfectly align with our own. I participated in the ways I felt comfortable, speaking the shared words and honoring the sacred space we held together. While denominational names may distinguish us, we are still children of God, rooted in a shared belief in Christ's resurrection.

In a world that often feels divided, moments like these call us back to hospitality and grace. "No matter who you are or where you are on life's

journey, you're welcome here." God calls us not only to gather with those who believe as we do, but also to welcome those whose traditions may look different, trusting that unity in Christ is greater than any distinction between us.

Brittany Romaniello,
On behalf of the Board of Deacons

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

The Missions Committee hosted a community blood drive on February 7, during which 15 individuals generously donated. Due to inclement weather that Saturday, the Red Cross experienced difficulty securing a driver to transport the mobile unit in time for the scheduled start. As a result, the drive began later than planned, which impacted overall participation compared to last year. Despite the delay, the Red Cross expressed appreciation for the 15 pints of blood collected, recognizing the meaningful impact those donations will have on patients in need.

Our annual Super Bowl Sunday soup sale was a great success. We raised \$405 in sales and still had 14 pints remaining to offer the following week. We extend our sincere thanks to all the members who shared their culinary talents to provide a wonderful and diverse selection of soups. The variety made choosing just one quite difficult, and many attendees happily purchased multiple options to enjoy.

This month, the Missions Committee voted to support the Anne C. Courtney Foundation with a \$500 contribution to further their important work. The foundation assists young adults who have aged out of foster care by helping them secure housing, obtain employment, develop essential life skills, and build the support systems needed to live independently. In addition, we have committed to supporting three young adults currently housed through the foundation by providing holiday dinner baskets in the future. We believe this is a highly worthwhile organization serving our local community. Our future rests in the hands of our young people, and there is no better way to invest in that future than by supporting and empowering them while teaching the enduring value of community.

The Missions Board extends its sincere gratitude for your continued generosity and faithful support, which make these outreach efforts possible.

Mission Board
Carol Rollins

FAITH FORMATION

After several snow-filled Sundays, we were so happy to get back into the rhythm of Sunday School. The kids enjoyed Valentine's Day crafts, a lesson on Noah's Ark, youth choir singing Arky Arky in service, and the meaning of love and the ripple effect our kindness can have on others. Thank you to our volunteer teachers Pam, Erin, Robbie, Katie, and Norma!

As we enter the Lenten season, we will continue focusing on reflection, growth, and love in action as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

Palm Sunday (March 29): The kids will create egg-shaped bird nesting material holders during Sunday School and then share their creations and teach them for the intergenerational craft during coffee hour.

Easter Sunday (April 5): Annual Easter Egg Hunt will take place after the service.

Sara Hubbard, *Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator*



MUSIC NOTES

THE HYMNAL- MORE THAN JUST HYMNS!

Dave and I have served in churches of several different denominations and have had opportunities to visit additional ones and find it interesting how each community has different practices. In many evangelical churches, some members will walk into worship carrying their own bibles. Less common today, but many Roman Catholics used to carry their own Missals with the Mass readings. And I've known a few Lutherans who had carried own hymnals (my dad kept a hymnal at home embossed with his name).

I don't know how any MCC members might have hymnals at home, but if you only ever have one in your hands during worship, you may have missed some of the additional resources in The New Century Hymnal. Look in the back, after the final hymn, NC #617. There's an extensive Psalter and Canticle section with music and texts for the Psalms and Bible Canticles (biblical songs) with a Worship Music section (responses, musical amens, etc.) after that ending with #815. Then, after the last piece in the Worship Music section, there are lovely pages called "Worship Resources"- a very nice resource for any MCC member. Look there for things like prayers Before Worship, for various needs, for home use, graces and even creeds.

Here's just one prayer (NC #853), a prayer for peace that seems particularly appropriate these days:

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your church, peace among nations, peace in our homes and peace in our hearts. Amen.

Happy singing,
Donna Obarowski

ST. PATRICK'S DAY MILE-HIGH CORNED BEEF ON RYE – JOIN US! ♣

Come celebrate St. Patrick's Day with us with good food, laughter, and community spirit! Come enjoy a delicious meal of a Mile-High Corned Beef on Rye with traditional sides — we'll take care of all the cooking so you can simply relax and enjoy.

If you would like to help us offset the cost of this special event, we warmly welcome monetary donations or if you'd like to shop the sales you can bring us a package of corned beef. Any size or cut is fine! We've done this in year's past and it's made a big difference in our bottom line! You can drop it off any Sunday between now and March 13th, let the office know (office@middleburyucc.org) or let Ellen know (spirit2000@aol.com) *Your contribution will help make the dinner possible and keep it affordable for everyone in our church family and community.*

Whether you bring a corned beef or simply bring your appetite, we would love to have you join Please see our flyer for date, time and details — and thank you for helping us make this gathering a success!

JOIN US!!
FOR A
MILE-HIGH
CORN BEEF ON RYE!!



EAT IN OR TAKE OUT

ADVANCE ORDERS

APPRECIATED

EMAIL ELLEN AT SPIRIT2000@AOL.COM

OR

OFFICE@MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG

OR CALL THE MCC OFFICE-203-758-2671



Where:
MCC Social Hall
When:
Tuesday 3/17/26
5-7:00 P.M.
Come for the food,
stay for the
fun...friends, music,
and a little luck of the
Irish!



CHURCH RECORDS

Deaths

Wendy Cooper on December 12, 2025

IMPORTANT DATES

- 3/1:** 10am Worship, Open & Affirming Anniversary Service
Potluck following worship (Social Hall)
- 3/4:** 6:30pm Lent Discussion Supper
7pm Discussion (Social Hall)
- 3/8:** 10am Worship, 3rd Sunday in Lent
- 3/11:** 6:30pm Lent Discussion Supper
7pm Discussion (Social Hall)
- 3/15:** 10am Worship, 4th Sunday in Lent
11:30am Confirmation Class
- 3/17:** 5-7pm St. Patrick's Day Dinner: Corned Beef (Social Hall)
- 3/18:** 6:30pm Lent Discussion Supper
7pm Discussion (Social Hall)
- 3/22:** 10am Worship, 5th Sunday in Lent
11:30am Confirmation Class
- 3/29:** 10am Palm Sunday Worship
Intergenerational craft after worship (Social Hall)
- 4/1:** 6:30pm Lent Discussion Supper
7pm Discussion (Social Hall)
- 4/2:** 7pm Maundy Thursday Worship
- 4/5:** 10am Easter Worship
Easter Egg Hunt following worship (Green)

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

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