

CHURCH LIFE

JUNE 2026

FOUNDATIONS



BUILDING FOR THE THIRD CENTURY

MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG

FROM THE PASTOR

We have a lot of things going on here at MCC in the month of June. June 7th is Strawberry Festival. The following Sunday, June 14th is when we will be recognizing our Confirmation class. June 21st is Celebration Sunday where we will recognize the progress of our capital campaign, celebrate the end of the program year, and join together after worship for a celebratory picnic. June 29th through July 3rd is Vacation Bible School!

One of the books I've recently read is *The Vanishing Church* by Ryan Burge. (If you're at all into statistics and graphs about a myriad of religious and political topics, you would enjoy the book. I like those things, and I greatly enjoyed the book.) Burge demonstrates in the book that American religion is becoming more polarized along political/partisan lines, and the churches that are in most decline are politically diverse mainline Protestant churches like ours. His thesis is the decline of churches like ours, churches where people who don't all agree with each other on political matters regularly worship together, is one of the factors driving increased political polarization in our country overall.

The book has had me reflecting on the question of what is lost when a church closes. Burge in his book is covering the broad, nationwide impact of many closing churches, but each one of the churches that closes across the country is part of a local community. What's lost for the specific people of a community when a church closes? Or, to say it another way, what does a church do?

One of the questions I always asked search committees in interviews when I was in the search and call process was why people were at that particular church and what kept them there. The answers people gave to that question were always so moving and illustrative of the power of God working through local churches. I always tried to write notes on what people said. Here are some of the answers I got that stuck out to me:

“This was the first church where I as a married gay man could come with my children and husband where we could all be together without

hiding, and I'm so grateful I can share a love of God and church with my children like my parents shared with me."

"I felt like my life was falling apart when I got divorced, and this church welcomed me and my children. I felt cared for. I've now made so many friends here."

"We weren't part of a church, and my brother died. None of the other churches in the area would do a funeral for a non member or someone who wasn't particularly Christian. This church said yes, and everyone was so nice as we planned things for my brother. After the funeral we just kept coming, and we've become friends with so many people. I didn't think I would go back to church as an adult, but I've rediscovered my faith through this church."

"I grew up coming to this church, and I kept coming when I got older because my family and friends were here. I didn't realize how important this church was to me until my father died, and I was devastated. I was so moved by all the support from the community for both me and my family. I don't know what I would have done without all of that love."

There were countless more stories about how a particular UCC church was the only one who would do a protestant/catholic wedding, or it was the only church that welcomed their child with special needs, or how as a new mom living far from family the old ladies of the church stepped up to share wisdom, prayers, and support so the new mom didn't feel so overwhelmed or alone

As best as I can figure, what a church does is it transforms lives through people living, giving, and receiving the love of Christ. It knits disparate people together into the Body of Christ, into a community that is able to do so much together than any one person can do on their own.

I know many of you here at MCC have similar stories to the ones I shared, stories where the church changed your life, times where you felt the love of Christ. As you consider what you will contribute to our

church's capital campaign, Foundations for Our Future, I invite you to consider all the lives that have been changed here at MCC over the last 230 years and all the lives that will be changed in the future. Through your contribution, you will be part of that life changing work today and years to come.

I'll leave you with a couple verses from the hymn "They Did No Build in Vain"

*They did not build in vain who founded here a church
As witness to God's love amid a world of pain;
They built upon the rock that is the risen Christ,
The one foundation laid, that stands each earthly shock.*

*Those who have loved this place, a cloud of witnesses,
Surround and urge us on as we now run our race;
Though the horizon's bend conceals the way ahead,
The footprints on the road show Christ waits at the end*

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister



THE DEACONS' BENCH

Growing up in the church, the youth group became one of the most meaningful parts of my faith journey. What began as a weekly gathering eventually became a place of belonging, growth, and encouragement during some of the most formative years of my life. In the youth group, I found mentors who listened, friends who supported me, and a community that reminded me I was never alone in my struggles or questions. Through retreats, service projects, and conversations about faith, I learned that church was not simply a place to attend on Sundays, but a living community where people of all ages come together to learn, serve, and grow in God's love. Those experiences showed me firsthand how important it is for churches to invest in their youth and create spaces where young people feel welcomed, valued, and empowered.

The importance of youth within the church cannot be overstated. Young people bring energy, curiosity, compassion, and new perspectives that help the church continue to grow and evolve. Scripture repeatedly reminds us that God works through people of all ages, and youth are no exception. When churches invest in young people, they are not only shaping future leaders, but nurturing faith in the present moment.

One ministry that beautifully reflects this spirit is Vacation Bible School. VBS creates a space where children and youth of all ages learn to work together through music, crafts, games, lessons, and service. Older youth often step into leadership roles while younger children learn what it means to be welcomed and cared for within a faith community. These experiences foster teamwork, patience, and compassion while helping young people build lasting connections with both God and one another. This year VBS will be from June 29th to July 3rd, so if you would like to be a part of this life changing experience, please contact me or Sara Hubbard.

In a world where many youth feel disconnected, the church has the opportunity to offer belonging, purpose, and hope.

Brittany Romaniello,
On behalf of the Board of Deacons

FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR FUTURE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN MOMENT

For the past several months, we've been talking about our upcoming capital campaign, *Foundations For Our Future* and I wanted to take a few moments to share what this church, and this campaign, truly mean to me personally.

I'm going to be honest. When we first began talking about the possibility of a capital campaign, I wasn't entirely sure the timing was right. I wondered if this was the moment. I wondered if we were ready. And I suspect I may not have been alone in feeling that way.

But as I spent time looking over the details of what needs to be done here, participating in conversations and meetings, and reviewing the facts and figures for myself, my perspective began to change.

And along the way, I also found myself reflecting on what this church has meant in my own life. I realized very quickly that it is almost impossible to separate this church from the story of my life.

This is not simply a building that I attend on Sundays. It is the place where I found joy in my faith. It is the place where I learned what it means to belong to a church family and to walk through life together.

Within these walls, I have said goodbye to some of the people I loved most in this world: my mother, my father, my husband, and many dear friends whose faith, kindness, and presence helped shape who I am. In moments of grief and heartbreak, this church surrounded me with love, prayer, comfort, and community. This church has also been the setting for some of my greatest joys. It is where I stood proudly beside my daughters as they were confirmed in their faith. It is where my four grandchildren were baptized. It is where I have celebrated love, laughter, friendship, music, traditions, holidays, and the blessing of watching another generation grow up here.

What I know for certain is that my story is not unique. For generations, families in this church and in this community have found meaning here during both the most joyful and the most difficult moments of their lives. This church has always been a place where people come together to celebrate, to grieve, to pray, to hope, and to heal.

During times of profound crisis, during times of war and times of peace, or the days and weeks following September 11th, people gathered here searching for comfort, understanding, and connection. In moments of uncertainty and sorrow, this building became more than wood and stone. It became a symbol of faith, stability, compassion, and community.

Beyond Sunday mornings, this church has become a gathering place for our entire town. People come together here for Homecomings, Strawberry Festivals, dinner theaters, variety shows, harvest festivals, auctions, book sales, concerts, and countless other community events. Friendships are formed here. Memories are made here. People feel connected to one another here. We bring people together.

This Middlebury Congregational Church has stood here for more than 230 years. During that time, every generation has left its mark. We have repaired our church, rebuilt it, re-envisioned it, updated it, cared for it, loved it, and adapted it for the next generation.

Through all of that change, there is one thing that has not changed. It's what happens here: people come together. When I think about all of those moments, I realize that what we are preserving through this capital campaign is not simply a building.

We are preserving a place where life happens. A place where faith is nurtured. A place where people are welcomed, comforted, celebrated, and loved. Many came before us and cared enough to preserve this church for *us*. And ultimately, that is what changed my perspective.

I realized this campaign is not simply about maintaining a building. It is about preserving a legacy. It is about making sure that generations to come will still have a place where people gather in faith, in hope, in sorrow, in celebration, and in community.

I want future generations to have a church where they can bring their children for baptism, celebrate weddings, find strength during difficult times, and discover joy in faith and friendship.

For 230 years, each generation has done its part to carry this church forward. And now, I truly believe this is our time to do the same. That is why this campaign matters to me.

Not simply because of roofs or sidewalks or parking lots, important as those things are, but because of what this place represents in the lives of the people who walk through these doors. This church has helped

carry me through sorrow and joy alike. It has helped shape my family's story. And I believe with all my heart that this tradition, this faith community, and this legacy deserve to continue for generations yet to come.

With love, faith, and gratitude,
Ellen Aronheim
MCC Church Council Chair

MUSIC NOTES

There's good news from the choir loft! Our exceptional Holtkamp pipe organ...acknowledged as one of the better instruments in the region, an instrument that would cost over \$800,000 to replace today, continues to perform beautifully. Dave reports that there are no major issues. When I asked him if there were any organ-related concerns being addressed in the Foundations for our Future Capital Campaign currently happening at MCC, he advised that there was no need plus the good stewardship and generosity of previous generations has kept the organ in good condition.

Thanks to regular ongoing maintenance, tuning and cleaning...not to mention the not infrequent "tweaks" that Dave provides at no cost to MCC as our in-house "organ whisperer", the organ remains in remarkably healthy condition for its age. Of course, like any member of the MCC family, it occasionally groans, wheezes, or complains about the weather...but with a little attention and encouragement, it continues to sing faithfully every Sunday!

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

Our monthly food contribution to GWIM will be Cereal.

For Mother's Day missions provided 7 women in the Safe Haven shelter with personal care gift bags. They were so appreciative of our

efforts and said that the women were surprised and were grateful for the pretty gift bags they received.

We received a gracious thank you from the Annie C. Courtney foundation for our donation and attending the fundraiser dinner. Monies acquired from that event made it possible for them to purchase another unit to house another teen that has aged out of foster care. This is a big accomplishment for this organization.

We are also in the midst getting ready for our Strawberry festival and by the time you read this our festival will be over. Just a big thank you to all those who donated baskets and items for baskets. Hoping for a big success at the Strawberry Festival. We will update you with the results of all our efforts next months Church Life.

A reminder that again this summer we will support the Wellmore Foundation with book bags and school supplies in August. Can't believe I'm writing this now but you know time flies by in the summer and before you know it we are at the start of a new school year. Keep your eyes open for those sales.

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

Mission Board
Carol Rollins

FAITH FORMATION

As another church season begins winding down, Faith Formation has been making the most of these busy spring days at MCC! In May, our Sunday School children learned about *Timothy being chosen*, *Lydia*, *Paul & Silas*, and *Pentecost* and discovering how God calls people to serve, share kindness, and spread the Good News.

VBS Registration is Open!

Registration is now open for **VBS 2026: Snowball Mountain Challenge!** Children ages **Pre-K 4 through 6th grade** are welcome

to sign up as campers, and youth entering **7th grade and up** are invited to volunteer as camp counselors and assistant counselors.

Middlebury Congregational Church

June 29 – July 3, 2026

9:00am–12:00pm

\$50 per child

Please visit the MCC website for more information and to register. We're excited for another fun and faith-filled week of summer camp!

Strawberry Festival

We are also looking forward to the annual **Strawberry Festival on June 7th**. Our Youth Group will be face painting and accepting donations to support the Faith Formation and Youth Group program. Be sure to stop by and say hello!

As always, thank you to all of our teachers, volunteers, parents, and church members who continue to support Faith Formation throughout the year.

Sara Hubbard, *Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator*

STEWARDSHIP

As cast members in MCC's spring play production *As Much As You Want*, written by Christopher Avcollie, members of the Board of Stewardship became especially aware of the backstage cues of "Lights On!" and "Lights Off!" Those familiar calls reminded us of the "Keeping the Lights On" lighthouse stewardship theme from a few years ago.

That theme reminded us that, like a lighthouse, our church shines as a beacon of faith, hope, and welcome — guiding people through uncertain waters and helping them find safe harbor. A lighthouse shines continuously because faithful people care for it, and we are deeply grateful for the many ways each of you shares your time, talent, and treasure each year. Through your annual pledges and stewardship support, you help keep the "Lights On!" through worship,

ministries, outreach, music, fellowship, and the daily life of our church community.

This spring, church leadership is also inviting members and friends to prayerfully consider supporting the capital campaign, *Foundations for Our Future*. While annual stewardship helps keep the light shining day by day, the capital campaign helps ensure that the “lighthouse” itself stands strong for years to come by maintaining its structural integrity.

As members and friends consider both annual stewardship and capital campaign gifts, it may also be helpful to know that new federal tax law changes taking effect in 2026 may affect how charitable giving is treated for some households. Under the new rules, many taxpayers who take the standard deduction may once again be able to deduct up to \$1,000 in charitable cash donations for individuals or \$2,000 for married couples filing jointly. In addition, some itemized charitable deductions may be subject to new limitations, so donors may wish to consult a qualified financial or tax advisor regarding how these changes could apply to their individual circumstances.

Most importantly, we simply want to say thank you. Your faithful annual stewardship keeps the light shining through the ministries and daily life of our church, while capital campaign support helps strengthen the lighthouse itself for future generations. Together, these gifts help ensure that our church continues to shine brightly as a beacon of faith, hope, and welcome for years to come.

On behalf of the Board of Stewardship,
Michele Rowell Finn

VBS MATERIAL REQUEST

- Corn Starch
- Rock Salt
- Disposable Gloves
- Lard/Shortening (Tubs)
- Chessboard
- Instant Snow
- Cardboard
- Paper towels
- Disposable Plates
- Baby wipes
- Blue Plastic Table Covers



CLASSIFIEDS

Looking for Car to buy, Garage to Rent, Offering Handyman/Yardwork Services (Volunteer or Paid)

David Haase dshinwtbyct@hotmail.com 860-993-9285

- looking for a 2002 or older 4cyl. or 6cyl. pickup truck or hatchback car
- looking for a garage to rent for storage.
- Looking for paid work or willing to help people as a volunteer if they need a helping hand
- I have work, personal, volunteer, references. I have background checks done with two different sources

Running Club

Established in July 2025, the Middlebury, CT Run Club meets twice a week, Thursdays at 6pm and Saturdays at 9am. Currently each meetup gathers at the Middlebury Volunteer Fire Department at 65 Tucker Hill Road we run on the safe and off street Middlebury Greenway Trail. ALL are welcome as well as ALL skill

levels. We are a no pressure group that is comprised of walkers and beginner runners all the way up to competitive marathon runners. Run/walk at your own pace or bring your leashed dog and just take a nice stroll and meet some new people. We have occasional team



events, theme nights, raffles, swag, etc. Also, each meetup will always have a first aid kit on hand, bug spray, and a water bowl and healthy treats for the puppies. We practice SAFE: S(Safety) A(Accountability) F(Fun) E(Exercise). So what are you waiting for?! Check us out, you may have just found your new favorite weekly event.

Portraiture

Bring the joy of portraiture into your home!
Commission a quality hand drawn or painted portrait in Charcoals or Oils. See examples of my work on Wenty's poster or at www.shawnalee.com



Scions

Wanted: Branch clippings (scions) from Old Apple Trees and Native Dogwood trees. Willing to gift very young Red Japanese Maple saplings.

ShawnaLee / artist@shawnalee.com. Can leave message with Sarah in office too. Thanks!

Bottle Drive: June 6th

Troop 5 and Troop 6 will be running their Bottle Drive fundraiser from 8:15 AM to 1:15 PM at 530 Middlebury Road. This is one of the Troops big fundraising events to help fund events throughout the year.

Dorm Fridge

If you have a small (apartment or dorm-style) fridge that you aren't using on June 6th or June 7th we would love to borrow it!!

We need some extra storage space for some special "picnic fare" for our Strawberry Festival. Please contact Ellen at 203-217-5363 or spirit2000@aol.com or see me anytime after church!!



Classifieds

If you want to include a classified in the July Church Life, please email your classified information to the main office at office@middleburyucc.org by Friday, June 19th.

VBS 2026 REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

Vacation Bible School will be held **June 29-July 3, 9:00am-12:00pm** at Middlebury Congregational Church. Join us for *Snowball Mountain Challenge*, a fun week of games, music, crafts, Bible studies, and faith-filled learning for kids. More information and registration on the website at middleburyucc.org/vbs2026/

IMPORTANT DATES

- 6/6:** Troop 5 & 6 Bottle Drive (more information on page 13)
- 6/7:** 10am Worship
3-7pm Strawberry Festival
- 6/14:** 10am Confirmation Sunday & Worship
- 6/21:** 10am Celebration Worship
Celebratory picnic following worship
- 6/28:** 10am Worship
- 6/29-7/3:** Vacation Bible School



Strawberry Festival

Sunday, June 7, 2026

3-7 pm

Middlebury Congregational Church
1242 Whittemore Road, Middlebury, CT

*Strawberry shortcake, food, games
raffle baskets, silent auction and more!*

Take out or Eat in

OR

*Bring chairs, listen to the music
and enjoy it on the Town Green!*

(Credit Cards will be accepted)

(203) 758-2671

www.middleburyucc.com



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

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