



CHURCH LIFE

DECEMBER 2011



Middlebury Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
The Green
1242 Whittemore Rd.
Middlebury CT 06762
203-758-2671
www.middleburyucc.org

CHRISTMAS 2011

Dear Friends,

This season of Advent and Christmastide evokes many emotions and traditions. In New England they are laced with snow and evergreens. In Florida they are sand and palm trees. We wrap our traditions around the meaning of the season so we can be comfortable and *enjoy* the holiday.

For Christians, this season is a time of reflection looking once again at the age old story of the coming of Immanuel. God being with humanity is an awesome concept. As modern Christians we can only look back and assume what that might have been like. Then one asks the question of whether God is still with us.

Not in physical form as in times of old but very much in the spiritual sense. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God to all of us to help us in the living of these days. God once dwelt among us in a physical form but now is within our hearts in a spiritual presence that exists because we allow it to exist. Unlike the inn keeper in the old story of Bethlehem, we find room for the presence of God in our hearts.

The manger still exists but not in a cow shed but in the human soul that over the centuries has adapted and changed and accepted God's great presence. The shepherds could come and see the Christ. The kings could bow and worship the Christ. Mary and Joseph could provide shelter and a place of love for the Christ.

We have given Christ a permanent home in our being, in our lives, in our witness to others. Christmastide is a season to reflect on our role in this awesome story. We keep the story alive with our faith witness, our carols, and our worship. Is this really tradition? It is more a continuance of the story told. We are the living testimony of prophetic scrolls, angelic witness and yes the everyday living out of the Christian story.

As you trim a tree, bake a cookie; wrap a gift it is with Christ in mind. These symbols are symbols of love and honor to God. The ultimate witness at this time of year is how we as Christians share all that we have with "the little ones" who have nothing.

Abide in Christ as Christ abides in you.

Pastor Ken Hoyt

The Sunday School Scoop

December is full of fun events for our children and families. On Sunday, December 11th, we will have our annual Christmas Pageant, "The Greatest Story Ever Told", during church. One of the things I love most about our pageant is that it allows everyone in the church to participate. The only requirement for being in the pageant is enthusiasm! There are parts for the children, as well as speaking and singing parts for teens and adults. We will have our rehearsal on Saturday the 10th from 10am-12pm. If you would like to participate in any way, please let me know.







On Sunday, December 18th, we will have our annual Advent Workshop, where the children make crafts to celebrate the Christmas season. On Sunday the 25th and the 1st of January, we will not hold Sunday School classes so that our children can spend time with their families. Sunday School classes will resume on January 8th, continuing with our yearly theme "The Messiah".

I hope everyone has a wonderful Christmas season and I hope to see you at the pageant!

Merry Christmas!

Valerie Beard

Sunday School Grade Schedule December 2011

	<u>Dec. 4</u> Jesus as the Fulfillment Week 3	<u>Dec. 11</u>	<u>Dec. 18</u>	<u>Dec. 25</u> Christmas Day
Storytelling Tent 	K/1 st	Christmas Pageant 	Advent Work Shop 	All In Church 
Bibleland Theatre 	2 nd /3 rd / 4 th			
Mary & Martha's Kitchen 	5 th /6 th / 7 th	All in Church	In Noah's Ark	For Family Sunday

Youth News!

Well, October didn't work out according to our plans! The snow and power outages took care of our fundraising events. This month, December and the first week of January we will be selling God's Creations wall calendars. These are beautiful calendars for \$10.00 each, and they make great Christmas gifts. We hope to be able to sell enough to offset the cost of our Silver Lake retreat in February.

Both youth groups will continue to meet on Friday evenings from 7:00 – 8:30pm. Everyone is welcome. With the Hanging of the Greens service, Christmas pageant and Christmas activities, December is already a busy month. We have nothing specific planned yet, but will help our mission committee with the star tree and other charitable events.



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Be sure to join us in worship for our annual Christmas pageant which will be held on Sunday, December 11th (snow date: Dec. 18th). This will be a multigenerational event as we re-enact The Greatest Story Ever Told through words and music. There is a part for everyone and all ages, so don't forget to sign up in the social hall. We will have a practice/run through on Saturday, December 10th from 10:00 am -12:00 pm for anyone involved.

PLEASE BUY YOUR 2012 WALL CALENDAR FROM OUR YOUTH GROUP!

The youth group will be selling God's Creations 2012 wall calendars for a fundraiser. They are beautiful calendars with photographs of nature scenes from all over the world, and scripture statements to go with the pictures. The calendars will sell for \$10 each. These make wonderful gifts as well! We will be selling the calendars after church in the social hall for the next several weeks.



Our Annual Advent Workshop



Our advent workshop and potluck will take place on Sunday, December 18th, 2011. The children will be escorted to Noah's Ark to take part in the Advent Workshop to celebrate the season.

The Deacons' Bench

Is it December already? It's been quite a year: record-breaking snowstorms, spring floods, a hurricane, tornadoes, an earthquake, more floods, a freak winter storm in the middle of autumn. We cancelled Sunday services several times because of the weather, which insurers sometimes refer to as "acts of God."

God acts, indeed, in mysterious ways. No one really understands why these things happen. The truly amazing thing about this year of natural disasters is that, considering the scope and cost of the damage, so few people were hurt in the process. God is mysterious, but also merciful.

We've learned about ourselves in the process – about preparation, about neighborliness, about giving help and about receiving it. As Christians, we probably know more about reaching out to others than we do about grabbing someone else's extended hand, but in the last year we've seen it from the other side. Enlightening, isn't it?

The next year will bring new challenges and new lessons, but thanks to the last one, we'll be better prepared for whatever comes. As individuals, we'll know more about being prepared and responding to emergencies. As a congregation, we'll know more about planning ahead, communicating with our members and neighbors in need, and helping each other out. As Christians, we'll better understand receiving as well as giving.

God does work in mysterious ways, but also wants us to get a clue and start unraveling those mysteries. Let's start doing that in 2012.

- Howard Fielding for the Board of Deacons

'Tis the Season for Gifts

Yes, December is the season for giving – when we remember that greatest of gifts - the gift of the birth of Jesus Christ. With His birth, God fulfilled a Great Promise.

This is also the season when we ask each and every member of our church family – as well as the devoted friends of our church – to make their own promise to be part of the financial health of our church. That promise is through your pledge. And with that promise of support, your church – our church – can answer Christ's call to do His work.

This year, we have used the idea of "forecasting" as our theme – as provided by one of our members at homecoming. He noted that pledged support enables our church to more realistically forecast for the coming year. As the recent storms have taught us forcefully, good forecasting is *really* important for good planning.

You might be happy to know that so far, our forecast for 2012 is pretty sunny! We have already received more pledges than we had at this point last year, and the level of giving has gone up as well.

We need that promise from *each and every member* as we plan for 2012. Our Stewardship goal for a bright and sunny 2012 is for at least 100 pledges of an average amount of \$1,500/pledge, with other higher pledges as well as the smaller contributions getting us close to our true need of \$250,000. That would ensure that we don't have to cut into some of our important programs and missions to make budget.

Our new year will be a time of new beginnings, and with the support and commitment of each member of our church family, this will be the beginning of a new and stronger chapter in the life of the Middlebury Congregational Church as we move forward to do what Christ has called us to do.

Your promise, at this time when we remember the fulfillment of God's promise, is a special and wonderful one. It's up to each one of us to bring our gifts forward. And it is so easy now that you can provide your support in church, or by mail, or by the electronic options of direct debit and credit card. (Please speak to Bob Gianinni or Shari Morris for more details on the latter.)

With your help, we can move through this holiday season into a bright and sunny 2012.

MITTEN TREE/CLOTHESLINE

Please bring new or gently used mittens, gloves, scarves, and hats for the Mitten Tree/Clothesline in the social hall. These will be distributed to the needy in the greater Waterbury area.

GWIM DELEGATE MEETING

At the November 8 GWIM Delegate meeting, the Middlebury Congregational Church was once again singled out for the 200 bag lunches we made and distributed on Columbus Day. We were also thanked for our monthly donations of peanut butter, jelly, and cereal which continue to be the most requested food items. In these tough economic times, your donations are greatly needed and appreciated.

If you would like to attend a GWIM meeting, please contact Debra Balletto. They are held every 2 to 3 months.

CAN YOU HELP?

The mission committee is looking for people who can help pack items that are donated when the auction/flea market committee learns of unwanted goods. We often hear of these opportunities last minute and have to go within a few days to pack or these items will be thrown away or donated elsewhere. It only requires a few hours and the work goes quickly when it's done with another. If you are interested, please contact the office or a mission committee member.

Leslie House	Karen Waranowicz	Marnee Palladino
Brenda Romaniello	Dave House	Alberta Weller
Andrea Douyard	Debra Balletto	



Christmas Dinner for Local Families

We are sponsoring 3 local families for Christmas, providing Christmas Dinner and Gifts. The families whose lives we are brightening are:

Family of 2: Mom & Boy age 6
Family of 3: Mom, Boy age 11, & Girl age 12
Family of 4: Mom & Dad, Girl age 13, & Boy age 14

You will find sign-up sheets on the bulletin board outside the kitchen or you may call the office to find out what is left on the list.

All contributions must be in the office by Friday, December 16th at 9:00 am.

Mark your calendars for *An exciting Advent Season*



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT **Sunday, December 11th**

This will be a multigenerational event as we re-enact The Greatest Story Ever Told through words and music.
(There is a part for everyone and all ages, so don't forget to sign up in the social hall. We will have a practice/run through on Saturday, December 10th from 10 am -12.)

ADVENT WORKSHOP **Sunday, December 18th**

The children will go to Noah's Ark for Advent/Christmas crafts to celebrate the season.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES **Saturday, December 24th** **5:00 pm**

Candlelight Service of Music and Celebration

11:00 pm

Candlelight Service of Prayer and Music

Sunday, December 25th

10:00 am

Casual Family Service of Fellowship and Celebration

Despite our unusual storm, the children finally went to the Town Hall for Tick-or-Treating. We also had a wonderful trip to the Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, CT. It was very informative. We continue to collect "Labels for Education" UPC. If you have any you would like to donate to the preschool, there is a collection envelope hanging on the bulletin board in the social room. Also, another way to help is to go to the Labels for Education website, register your Shop Rite courtesy card number and specify points to go the Preschool On The Green. As your items scan at the register, our school will automatically get a point for each eligible item.



PRESCHOOL ON THE GREEN **REGISTRATION**

It's time for preschool registration of the 2012-2013 school year. The deadline for priority registration for church members is December 1, 2011. If any church members are planning to enroll their child in the preschool program, please call the Preschool (203-577-2275) for an application. Children who will be three years of age by December 31, 2012 are eligible. Open registration begins January 2, 2012 and church members must register before that date to retain their priority.

CHURCH RECORDS

BAPTISMS

Julianna Eloise Weigel, Daughter of Jennifer and Joachim Weigel,
Granddaughter of *Ronald & *Julie Clark on November 20th.

DEATHS

*The Deadline for January
Church Life:*

December 20th @ 9:00 a.m.

If you take pictures during a service or a
function please email them to me for the
Crier, Church Life, Bulletin Board and/or
website.

Thank you! Jeanine
(jbonaventure@middleburyucc.org)



CHRISTMAS FLOWERS 2011

Those wishing to contribute toward Christmas flowers are asked to fill in the form below and place it in the offering plate or send it to the church office, 1242 Whittemore Rd. We must know by **Monday, Dec. 19th**, if you wish to purchase flowers.

I would like to give \$_____ toward Christmas flowers.

___ I would like to pick up my plant after the Christmas services.

___ I would like the church to distribute my flowers for me.

I would like to give flowers in memory of:

Given by: _____

Please print names as you wish them to appear in the bulletin.