

CHURCH LIFE

DECEMBER 2023



MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

**1242 WHITTEMORE RD
MIDDLEBURY, CT 06762
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

FROM THE PASTOR

As we begin the month of December, we enter the season of Advent. Advent is the season of preparation and waiting for the birth of Christ, and Advent also marks the start of the Christian year.

We've got a lot going on this December in celebration of Advent and Christmas. The Middlebury Tree Lighting is 12/2 at 4pm. Westover is opening up their Red Hall from 3-5pm for treats and photos. Westover will also be helping us with distributing hot chocolate and cookies during the Tree Lighting. After the Tree Lighting at about 5pm we will open up the sanctuary for caroling!

The First Sunday of Advent is 12/3. The annual Christmas Pageant is during worship on 12/10 with a snow date of 12/17. The evenings of 12/9 and 12/10 there is a planned holiday laser light show on the buildings on the Green. I don't have the full details of the event yet, but we'll share them once we do. MCC will be selling concessions for the event.

Friday, 12/22 at 7pm we will have a Longest Night Service in the sanctuary. The holidays can often be bittersweet times as people cope with grief and stress that seems to hit extra hard at a time where everything is supposed to be merry and bright. Longest Night Services (some churches call them Blue Christmas services, but that branding just always makes me think of Elvis), are an opportunity to acknowledge the hard moments that come with the holidays while also remembering the hope of Christmas.

On Sunday 12/24, we will have a Fourth Sunday of Advent service at 10am. You're welcome to wear your best Christmas sweaters! We will have two Christmas Eve services, 5pm and 11pm, that evening. The 11pm service will have communion.

On Sunday 12/31 we will have worship at 10am. A number of Protestant denominations celebrate December 31st as Watch Night, and one of the traditional parts of a Watch Night Service is to re-covenant, or rededicate ourselves to God ahead of the coming year. We will be doing that on 12/31, and we will also offer the opportunity

for people to come forward for individual blessings/reaffirmation with water like we've done during some services before the pandemic.

The central idea of Christmas is the concept of the incarnation, that God became human in Jesus Christ to be our Emmanuel, our God with us. God came to us in this world, not some perfect world where everyone has it together or where bad things never happen, but this messy world filled with sorrow and joy and everything in between. On Christmas a savior was born into a world that needs saving, and Christmas is the proof that we have a God who is willing to risk everything so that we know that our human lives are understood and precious to God.

There's an A.A. resource prayer inspired by the words of the late Sister Jane SLG that captures the miracle of the incarnation:

“For the huge risk you took
in becoming human
in order to bring out the best in us,
we praise you.

For the huge risk you took
in entrusting yourself to us
and sharing our vulnerability,
we praise you.

For the incalculable risk you took
in emptying yourself
and allowing yourself to be abused and killed
to free us from the power of evil,
we praise you.

God in Jesus,
God with us,
Emmanuel.”

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

SABBATICAL SPOTLIGHT

I read a number of books and learned a lot of things I think are interesting during my sabbatical that I've not been able to work out fitting into a sermon, so for the next number of newsletters, I thought I'd add a section spotlighting fun facts and stories so you all can know some of the things I learned.

One of the churches I found most interesting to visit was the Fraumunster in Zurich. The Fraumunster was a convent church of nuns until the convent was dissolved during the Reformation. After that, the church functioned as a normal parish church. The part of the church's history I found the most interesting was actually what happened before the Reformation. In the medieval period, Zurich was part of the Holy Roman Empire as a city directly under the Holy Roman Emperor, and the day to

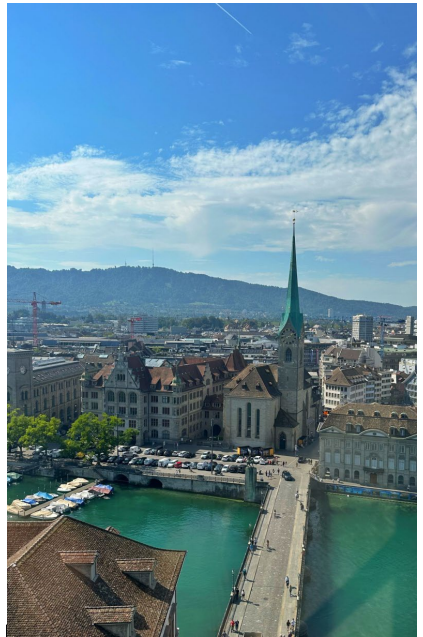
day ruler of Zurich wasn't some important lord, but was actually the abbess of the convent at the Fraumunster. So, for centuries, the ruler of Zurich was actually a woman. The abbess's official title was princess abbess. In the centuries between the abbess being set up as the ruler of the city and the Reformation, the actual power of the abbesses began to wane in proportion to the growth of the power of the city mayor and government, so by the time the Reformation came around the abbess was more the ceremonial ruler of the city than the actual ruler.

One fun and also somewhat problematic fact about the abbess being in charge of the city is that it caused perpetual friction with the head priest of the other important church in Zurich, the Grossmunster, because both the abbess and the head priest viewed themselves as the most important religious leader in the city. Zurich had a tradition of big Palm Sunday parade through the city, but every year there was an argument over whether the abbess or priest would lead the parade.



Interior of the Fraumunster

One year, they didn't resolve the argument ahead of the parade, and they were hashing things out mid-parade on a narrow wooden bridge over the Limat River where only one person could go at a time at its narrowest point. The bridge wasn't equipped to have half the city standing on it while the argument went on, and the bridge actually collapsed causing many people to drown in the river. (The story is a good frame for thinking about whether the petty arguments we all have when our pride is wounded are really worth it in context of the whole of life.) The location where that bridge was is now a much sturdier stone bridge that I've got a picture of.



Exterior of the
Fraumünster viewed from
Grossmünster Tower

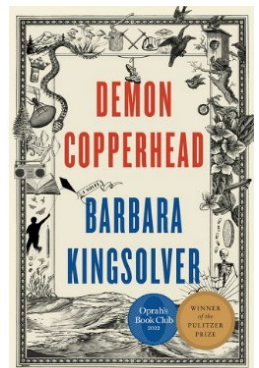
Anyway, I just found this history interesting because there is a lot of research on woman in the Church that argues that the Protestant Reformation reduced the number of roles for women and reduced the power of women in society and the Church. The Fraumünster is a good example of an event that would support that argument given that once the Reformation started women no longer had any role in Zurich church hierarchy or in secular government until well into the 20th century when women were given the right to vote in Switzerland and the women's ordination movement gained steam.

MCC BOOK CLUB

Please join us Thursday, December 14th, 2023 to discuss *Demon Copperhead*!

Middlebury Public Library has copies for anyone who is interested in joining us!

Hope to see you there.





THE DEACONS' BENCH:

“Now He was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom of God was coming, and He answered them and said, “The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ For behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst.”

Luke 17:20-21

What does it mean that the Kingdom of God is in our midst? We know that the Kingdom is not a Kingdom of material things. It is a Kingdom of the Spirit. During this time of year we talk a lot about “spirit” don’t we? “Holiday spirit, Christmas spirit, the spirit of the season” ...but what do we really mean by it? When I think about the Kingdom being among us it seems that Luke says: The Kingdom is among us. The Kingdom is *between us*. In other words we bring about the Kingdom of God when we treat each other the way that Jesus treated all of us, with abundant love and with regard for the sacred spark of the Holy Spirit in each of us. As we make preparations for our holiday traditions let us go about them with the knowledge that the Kingdom is indeed among us this season. Let us continue to find the Kingdom in each other and in ourselves. May your season and your Spirit shine this year in the glory of Christ.

Chris Avcollie

On behalf of the Board of Deacons

FAITH FORMATION UPDATE

Dear siblings in Christ,

As many of you are aware, Valerie Beard stepped down as our Faith Formation Coordinator at the end of June.

Throughout the spring and summer we conducted a search to find a new Faith Formation Coordinator, but we were unable to find a suitable candidate with the skills necessary for the position. This fall, we went back to the drawing board and narrowed the position to focus

more on the administrative aspects of the Faith Formation Coordinator position, which yielded much better results.

As of October 29th, we are pleased to welcome MCC member Sara Hubbard as our Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator! Sara will coordinate the Sunday School volunteers and manage communications and administrative support for the Faith Formation program.

Sara is a creative spirit and dedicated stay-at-home mom to her 4 daughters, ages 5 to 13. After spending over a decade raising her girls, she's excited to now share her faith, creativity, and experience with youth in her new role coordinating Sunday school programs. Sara looks forward to collaborating with teachers and inspiring the next generation. Outside of work, she cherishes time with family and friends, making art, and finding opportunities to positively impact her community. We are delighted to have Sara on board.

On behalf of the church, I want to thank our Faith Formation Board for their extra efforts in the past few months of interim time to ensure we had programming for our children.

Peace,
Pastor Katrina

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

The GWIM Sandwiches for November were a big success. We collected \$402. After expenditures we will send a check to GWIM for the difference so that they can stock their soup kitchen with needed items for the holiday season.

Thanksgiving baskets were a success. We supported three local families in Middlebury with all the fixings for a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner and more.

A word cloud shaped like a heart, containing various words related to love, family, and faith. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with 'Love' and 'Family' being the largest and most central. Other prominent words include 'God', 'Church', 'Friends', 'Home', 'Mom', 'Dad', 'Kids', 'Teach', 'Learn', 'Grow', 'Faith', 'Hope', 'Joy', 'Peace', 'Kindness', 'Generosity', 'Service', 'Love', 'Family', 'Friends', 'Home', 'Mom', 'Dad', 'Kids', 'Teach', 'Learn', 'Grow', 'Faith', 'Hope', 'Joy', 'Peace', 'Kindness', 'Generosity', 'Service'.

Like last year we will provide three local Middlebury families Christmas dinner baskets with all the fixings for a wonderful Christmas Day of food. Be on the lookout for these sign-up sheets in the social hall bulletin board.

This holiday season brings joy to all especially when we all pitch in to help. We have been so blessed with a generous congregation that always comes through to help those in need. Thank you to all and a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you.

Carol Rollins
Mission Board

MUSIC NOTES

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

As we enter the Advent season and prepare for Christmas and the twelve-day festive period ending with Epiphany, the choir and musicians have been planning music both old and new.

Something new will be our Community Carol sing-along on December 2nd at 5:00. Several of our choir members will be leading the singing of both sacred and secular seasonal songs. Also new is a

special Sunday worship time of rededication on Sunday, December 31st.

We'll be singing during some old favorite times, too. We musicians look forward to singing at the Christmas Pageant, scheduled for December 10th. And a highlight of every choir member's year is singing at the Candlelight Christmas Eve Service.

We are looking forward to singing with you all month long!

Donna Obarowski

TRUSTEES REVIEW WHAT WE DID IN 2023

1. First I believe all church committees that use the upstairs conference area appreciate the large conference table donated through Webster bank.
2. Funds from the Henry Fund were used to finish painting the front of the church.
3. Trustees signed a new charter renewal for 2023 for our BSA troops.
4. Sal and Russ patched and sealed the rubber roof over the church offices.
5. Greg worked to replace the push bar in Noah's Ark and re-key all exterior door locks and set up a system to control who gets a key.
6. Sal changed the electric suppliers of church and parsonage to get better rates.
7. With the change in church staff we have outside cleaning and volunteers helping Katrina to print Church Life and Sunday programs, etc.
8. Parsonage chimney was rebuilt to stop water damage inside.

9. Greg worked to get the elevator repaired and certified. John D replaced sump pump in elevation shaft to prevent electrical issues.
10. HVAC adjustments helped eliminate hot and cold rooms.
11. Trustees approved the Eagle Project to rebuild the outdoor chapel.
12. Rev Katrina revealed her Sabbatical plans and coverage during her leave.
13. Spring cleanup, Trustees, scouts and members with trucks, trailers, shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows cleaned the property and spread several tons of mulch.
14. The town, with help of an arborist and Eversource removed 2 poor trees and replaced them with 2 native trees. One survived and the other will be replaced.
15. Members from many departments joined together to put on “AS YOU WERE”. Thank you, Chris A., for your play and patience during Covid.
16. Painting the unfinished part of the parsonage garage and deck remains unfinished. Rainy weekends, availability of volunteers and now cold weather has hampered us for getting the work done.
17. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention all the people (from ALL departments) that worked to put on the Strawberry festival this summer.
18. Tree and bush trimming with Michele F, Tom C, Bob G, Sal S, Russ T cut, trimmed, pulled weeds around the church and personage in September.
19. We have quotes for painting and replacing gutters on the Parsonage. This work is expensive and has been pushed off long enough. The parsonage must be brought up into better condition for Katrina to live in.

20. I need to thank Diane B. and Bob G. (Finance) for all their guidance in the cost of operating the church, our connection with the pre school and the Stewardship committee in their efforts to keep the donations growing, and all the other committees in fundraising through the years. Trustees do not work in a vacuum; we are all a part of the church team.

Respectfully submitted for Trustees, Sal Sena, Greg Ecsedy, Sean Coughlin, Len Beard. Treasurer, Bob Giannini, Bookkeeper, Diane Barnard. Paster Katrina Manzi.

Russ Tolles

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

First, let's thank the 52 families who together pledged \$114,816.32 to our 2024 pledge campaign as of Consecration Sunday. Together we gave out of faith to support our mission of Worship, Spiritual Growth, Service, and Fellowship.

The total fell short of the \$200,000 needed to balance our budget without drawing down on our endowment, but that's the point. Like many other churches, we can no longer support our mission through member donations alone. So where do we go from here?

Grace Duddy Pomroy, director of the Stewardship Leaders Program at Luther Seminary, recently surveyed 200 churches of all sizes and several denominations from the U.S. and Canada that were experimenting with new models for sustainable ministries.

Twenty percent of those surveyed had reduced their budgets by 5% or more in the past 10 years. The most common methods were:

1. Reduced the number of paid clergy/staff: 65%
2. Employed bi-vocational, part-time, or contract clergy/staff: 55%
3. Reduced the budget of church programs: 50%

4. Relied more heavily on volunteer or unpaid leaders and staff: 45%
5. Eliminated specific church programs: 40%
6. Reduced pastor/staff salary and/or benefits: 25%
7. Sold church property: 20%
8. Shared property with another church: 15%
9. Transitioned a current church program from congregationally funded to self-sustaining: 15%

Budget cuts, although often painful, are often the first step because they show immediate results in the monthly financial reports. Unfilled vacancies helped ease our budget shortfall in 2023.

But cuts are not always enough to bridge the gap. Next month, we'll look at some ways the study found churches are using to increase revenue from other sources.

Howard Fielding
For the Board of Stewardship

CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Please join us for Christmas Caroling! Meet at our church at 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, December 19, 2023.

We will carpool around town to sing to our wisest church members!

A small flashlight is handy to navigate front yards and to see the words in our Christmas songbooks. If you plan to go caroling with us, please let Cynthia Flisher know by leaving a voice message the old fashioned way at (203)758-8454.

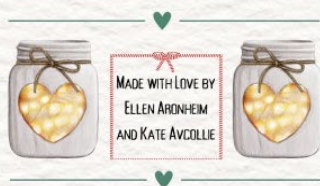
Hope to see you there! 🎄

COOKIE MIRACLES

BAKING WONDERS FOR A SWEET LIFE



"GIVE THE GIFT OF SWEET MEMORIES WITH OUR IRRESISTIBLE COOKIE
COOKBOOK! DELIGHTFUL RECIPES THAT BLEND FLAVORS AND
NOSTALGIA. BUY NOW FOR ALL YOUR LOVED ONES AND BAKE
YOUR WAY TO UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS!"
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We have a limited number of these one of a kind special edition cookbooks. They make a wonderful keepsake or gift for someone you love! Each recipe includes seasonal graphics, baker's notes, helpful tips and variations to simplify your Christmas baking. Make sure you reserve one today by calling the church office at 203-758-2671 (you can leave a message and we will get back to you) or emailing the church office at office@middleburyucc.org or emailing Ellen at spirit2000@aol.com.

May you be filled with light and hope this Christmas Season!

MIDDLEBURY TREE LIGHTING & CAROL SING SCHEDULE

The Middlebury Tree Lighting will take place Saturday, December 2nd at 4pm. MCC will be providing hot chocolate again with Westover supplying cookies.

Westover School Red Hall: From 3-5pm Westover is opening up their Red Hall for holiday treats and photo opportunities.

Community Carol Sing: At 5pm, after the tree lighting, MCC is opening up the sanctuary for a Christmas carol sing! Join us to have fun singing favorite carols!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Advent Wreath Schedule & Volunteers

We're looking for volunteers to light the Advent Wreath during the Sundays of Advent and during our Christmas Eve services. Here is the schedule:

- 12/3: Children in worship will put together and lead lighting the Advent Wreath
- 12/10: Confirmants and youth
- 12/17: Volunteers needed
- 12/24 @ 10am: Volunteers needed
- 12/24 @ 5pm: Volunteers needed
- 12/24 @ 11pm: Volunteers needed

Please contact Pastor Katrina (kmanzi@middleburyucc.org) if you're interested!

Readers for Christmas Eve Services

We are looking for 10 volunteers, 5 at 5pm and 5 at 11pm, to read the lessons for our Christmas Eve services. Please contact Pastor Katrina (kmanzi@middleburyucc.org) if you're interested!

Christmas Pageant Sign Ups

The Christmas Pageant this year is December 10th (snow date December 17th). Sign-ups for parts are posted on the bulletin board in

the church Social Hall. The Pageant rehearsal is Saturday, December 9th at 10am.

IMPORTANT DECEMBER DATES

12/2: 4pm – Middlebury Christmas Tree Lighting on the Green

5pm – Middlebury Community Carol Sing in Sanctuary

12/3: First Sunday of Advent

12/9: 10am – Christmas Pageant Rehearsal in Sanctuary

Evening (time to be announced) – holiday laser light show on the Green

12/10: 10am – Christmas Pageant

Evening (time to be announced) – holiday laser light show on the Green

12/11: Star Tree Children gifts due in the main office

12/14: MCC Book Club Discussion

12/17: 10am – Third Sunday of Advent

12/19: 5:15pm – Christmas Caroling

12/22: 7pm – Longest Night Service

Don't spend the longest night of the year alone. Christmas can be a difficult time, especially with grief, loss, illness, or stress. You aren't alone. Join us for a service where we remember those we've lost, acknowledging the difficulty of the season, and experience the quiet hope of Christmas in the midst of it all.

12/24: 10am – Fourth Sunday of Advent

5pm – Family Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

11pm – Communion Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

12/31: 10am – Watch Night Service

Many Protestants observe New Year's Eve as Watch Night. During regular Sunday worship we will be having a re-covenanting service where we rededicate ourselves to God for the coming year. There will also be opportunity for people to come up for individual blessings.

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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