

CHURCH LIFE

MARCH 2024



**MIDDLEBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

FROM THE PASTOR

As we begin March, we're still in the season of Lent. Please join me on Wednesday evenings in the Social Hall for our Lenten Bible discussion on the Lord's Prayer. Join us at 6:30 for a soup supper and 7pm for the Bible Study.

Also, please join us for our Holy Week services. 3/24 is Palm Sunday and we will be having an Easter Egg hunt on the Green following worship along with an all ages craft in the Social Hall. 3/28 is Maundy Thursday, and we will be having our tenebrae service with communion at 7pm that evening. 3/31 is Easter Sunday, and we will be having one service at 10am in the sanctuary.

One of the traditional pieces of liturgy for Good Friday in the Catholic church, which has made its way into the services of many different denominations, is the "Solemn Reproaches of the Cross." The Solemn Reproaches are responsive part of the service where the leader speaks from God's/Jesus' perspective and the people then respond asking for mercy. All the sections of the Solemn Reproaches list the saving acts of God but then how humanity has responded. One reproach goes; "Forty years I led you through the desert, feeding you with manna on the way; I saved you from the time of trial and gave you my body, the bread of heaven, but you have made a cross for your Savior."

All the Reproaches end with the phrase "but you have made a cross for your Savior." What I appreciate about this tradition is that it emphasizes the corporate dimension of sin. Most of us tend to think of sin most on an individual level, but many of the evils of the world are carried out through regular people working in and on behalf of systems and structures that are flawed and perpetuate sinful results. For example, none of us as individuals are responsible for why statistically, women are paid less than men or white people being paid more than people in other racial groups, but we're all part of a society that continues to make these injustices occur. That is structural sin.

The other aspect of sin the Reproaches remind me of is the capacity we all have for evil. Martin Luther talks about this as we are all both saints and sinners at the same time.

On Netflix, there's a documentary called *Ordinary Men: The Forgotten Holocaust*. It deals with the difficult reality that many of the worst Nazi crimes were carried out by ordinary men. The documentary follows the actions of a German reserve police battalion. This was a group of men who were drafted, but overall were married and middle aged and therefore too old for frontline military service. They were drafted instead into a military police battalion to keep order in the countries occupied by Germany which freed up combat troops. None of these men volunteered to fight, and they all had established trades and professions back home.

Once this reserve police battalion was sent to Poland, however, one of their main tasks became to commit mass shootings of Jewish civilians and to facilitate Jews being sent to the death camps. Now, most of us tend to think ordinary men must have committed those atrocities under duress. They must have been threatened with death. But, the truly eye opening part of this documentary is that before the men were ordered to do the first mass shooting, their officer said anyone who objected to the order could step out and be given an alternative assignment.

About a dozen or so men did step out, but hundreds stayed put. Nothing fundamentally bad even happened to the men who objected. They were simply assigned unpopular jobs like latrine duty, and then also endured the constant ridicule of their peers for being weak or cowards. The rest of the men cared more about being part of the group and being well liked, so they chose to commit mass atrocities rather than risk getting made fun of. They hated what they'd been ordered to do; many of the men became violently ill in response to the horrors they were committing, but they felt that if it was what was necessary for their country they would do it.

The troubling truth this documentary confronts us with is that when ordinary human beings are put in certain situations, ordinary people are quite capable of doing great evil, especially when they don't feel they are ultimately responsible. Someone else made the decision.

"But you have made a cross for your Savior." Lent and particularly Holy Week are times where we're reminded of humanity's great capacity for sin, but at the same time we're reminded of God's great capacity to transform the worst of what humanity is capable of into redemption and life.

The great hope of the gospel, the great hope we're shown in Jesus Christ, is that God came into this world to save sinners, to save ordinary people like all of us, and to save even the very people who put Christ on that cross. And the good news of Easter and all of scripture is that through the grace of God, we all have the hope of transformation, to be far more than our worst thoughts and actions. It's the good news that though we might make a cross for our Savior, our Savior can transform that cross, that instrument of death, into the means for eternal life for all.

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

SABBATICAL SPOTLIGHT

As a child, after I realized being a paleontologist wouldn't be like *Jurassic Park*, one of the things I thought I wanted to be when I grew up was an architect. I later discovered "architect" was challenging to spell, and that being an architect would involve making designs constrained by gravity; so I realized I'd need a different career path. But, as an adult, I've retained an interest in church architecture.

You can tell a lot about what a church believes from its building. Reformed churches (Congregationalists, Presbyterians) like ours, especially older ones, will have buildings with a central pulpit. There's a pulpit in the center that's raised up, and then the communion table is centered below and in front of the pulpit. This represents a belief in the centrality of scripture and also that sacraments, like communion, flow from God's word. Reformed churches also don't have paintings or depictions of biblical scenes because it was thought these would distract people and could cause people to worship the images rather than God. Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches typically have the pulpit off to the side and the communion table or altar is central. (Many Congregational meetinghouses were renovated to look like this for both theological reasons but also because it's typically an easier set up for choirs.) And this architectural



choice is demonstrating a belief in the centrality of sacramental life to faith.

When visiting churches in Switzerland, I realized one of the difficulties the Reformers had was retrofitting formerly Catholic stone churches into being places of Protestant worship. I discovered that many of the alternations made during the Protestant Reformation were actually undone during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when sensibilities swung more in the direction of needing to preserve houses of worship as important historic landmarks. This means our churches here in the U.S. often look more Protestant than the churches that birthed the Protestant Reformation.

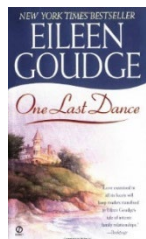
The Grossmunster, the main church in Zurich, was actually converted during the Reformation to have a giant central pulpit built on all the altar slabs of decommissioned Catholic altars. If you visit today however, the central pulpit has been removed and the chancel, the front part of the church, has been restored to more or less its condition prior to that pulpit renovation. If you didn't know, you might assume you were in a sparsely decorated Catholic church.

But, St. Peter's Church in Zurich was the first church built after the Reformation, and it's set up very similar to MCC. (See picture) But, that pulpit is huge. I never thought I'd think the pulpit in our building looked small. In addition to having a very large pulpit, St. Peter's is home to the largest clock face on a church in Europe. (See other photo). So, despite visiting about a dozen churches in Switzerland, this was the only one that was actually the result of Protestant architectural design.



MCC BOOK CLUB

Please join us for our MCC book club on Thursday, March 21st, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. In March, we will be discussing *One Last Dance* by Eileen Goudge. Middlebury Public Library has copies you can pick up. We hope to see you there!





THE DEACONS' BENCH

Welcome to Lent. UCC literature describes this time as a time of “conversation”, which is literally “turning around” or reorienting our lives toward God. Both as individuals and a community, we look inward and reflect on our readiness to follow Jesus in his journey towards the cross.

I recently wondered how as humans, we can use the chaos in the world and/or our lives as a useful tool toward our human inclination to lethargy. I find it hard in life to continue to push to fulfill my potential and battle on to be my best self. Given this I'm reminded of Christ's example of undeserved human cruelty and his forced march to his death on the cross. No clearer example exists in history of being saddled with carrying his own death device, to cavalry. Thinking about it, humanity at that time, would have had him nail himself and lift himself to his death, if able. Yet he followed God's allowed outcome, while begging forgiveness of his slayers. We would do well to carry our burdens with such trust and grace to our cavalry.

MARCH 28

The Scripture

UNTO thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. . . . Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of thy supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him. The Lord is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed. Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

Psalms 28: 1, 2, 6-9.

Adoration

I LOVE my God, but with no love of mine,
For I have none to give;
I love thee, Lord, but all that love is thine,
For by thy life I live.
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
Emptied and lost and swallowed up in thee.

Thou, Lord, alone, art all thy children need
And there is none beside;
From thee the streams of blessedness proceed;
In thee the blest abide,
Fountain of life and all-abounding grace,
Our source, our center and our dwelling-place!

Madame Guyon.

Happy/Blessed Spring

Mike Granja
On behalf of the Board of Deacons

PRAYER WORKSHOP

Sunday, March 10th

After Service

How we pray is a lot like how we learn - all differently! Interested in engaging with one another about how we pray and learn some prayer models? Led by deacons, this informal session will have both structure and time for sharing (as one is comfortable). The main goal is to start conversations about prayer, learn from one another, and feel encouragement. We welcome feedback and are prepared to host several workshops as interest dictates. This workshop is a complement to our Lenten Series on The Lord's Prayer.

Questions?

Contact Michele Rowell Finn michfinn@comcast.net

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

Mitten Line is hung in the Social Room for any new/gently used mittens, gloves, scarves, hats to be donated to GWIM.

February Blood Drive was a great success. We had 39 individuals who donated a pint of blood. Our congregational members made fresh breads, cookies and sandwiches for those who donated to help replenish their strength. Many were very impressed to have fresh goodies instead of the prepackaged items that the Red Cross supplies. Thank you to all who made a food donation and who also volunteered with sign in and conversing with the donors at the snack table.

Our Souper Bowl Sunday was a great success, we sold out!!! Yay!!! We made \$470 for our missions. THANK YOU to all who used their culinary skills on making the best soups ever. Many bought a variety and I must say the taste testing I think helped spur those sales.

We have been discussing how we as a congregation can make an impact at the GWIM soup kitchen pantry. After speaking to the director of GWIM (Barbara) and the cook (Regina) we have thought if we did a monthly food collection of one specific item each month that this could help them stock their soup kitchen pantry and if they know what we are sending them, then they could use their budget on other needed items. So below are the items we will be collecting on a monthly basis. I will include these in the Church Crier.

March – Dutch Egg Noodles and Elbows

April – Instant Potatoes

May – Jarred Spaghetti Sauces

June – Canned Chicken from BJ's or \$ Donations as they like this brand

July – Chicken Gravy

August – Cereal

September – Jelly

October – Peanut Butter

November – Dutch Egg Noodles and Elbows

December – Instant Potatoes

Thank you all for your generosity. You know that all that you give does make an impact for those in need. We thank you for your efforts.

Bless you all.

Carol Rollins

Mission Board



Lent had an unusual start in 2024. It's not often that Ash Wednesday falls on the same date as Valentine's Day.

Similarly, March 2024 will be unusual in that we will celebrate Easter quite early and will squeeze all of the rest of Lent and all of Holy Week into this one month.

Additionally, as only happens occasionally, St. Patrick's Day will fall on a Sunday this year. That makes it a good opportunity to remember and appreciate the contributions that the Irish culture has made to our sacred music, especially the hymns we sing. There are multiple Irish tunes and hymns made by Irish hymnists in both of our MCC hymnals.

One of our congregation's favorite hymns, "Be Thou My Vision" is a traditional Irish tune with an ancient Irish text, but it's only one of many. Plus, many of the melodies/hymns that we think of as Appalachian or other American folk music actually have Irish/Scots roots.

Thinking back, English culture and spiritually was set on a separate course from Irish because England was conquered and part of the Roman

Empire while Ireland never was. I'm glad that Ireland developed its own distinctive sound and spiritually and can be yet another contribution to our very multicultural hymnals.

Finally, I'm appreciative of the many "Irish Blessings," many of which have been set to music, including this famous one:

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And, until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

TRUSTEES

As the aroma of Jambalaya rose from the social hall, we started our monthly meeting at 7 instead of 6:30. Bob Giannini reported that all budget numbers for income and expenses are on track. Great news as we start 2024.

For those that frequent the church grounds, Verizon installed 3 bollards in front of their air conditioner on the Town Hall side of the church. It was necessary since there is very little margin of error for a car to avoid hitting the A/C unit. The other thing going on that you will not see is the addition of 5G equipment in the bell tower.

We all noticed the chairs in the social room are in poor condition. With a generous donation from a church member, we have the opportunity to replace the chairs. With that said, we have ordered 5 chairs to try out prior to replacing them. Anybody want a used chair for a good price? I'll keep you posted.

As I said before, no idea is a bad idea. We had a meeting with a person from Newington Electric talk to a few of us about a charging station for electric cars. Very informative about equipment, connection to church electricity and very rough price and future possibility of a source of income. We all agreed that the initial cost and time to realize income

from charging station is not realistic. We will ask Middlebury First Selectman if the town would be interested in partnering with us. Worth asking.

Cable vs fiber optic will be gone over thoroughly in the coming days and weeks. Issues of concern are our network within the church, live streaming church services, phone lines in church, emergency phone in elevator, and phone lines in parsonage as well as fire/security for church and parsonage.

Sal Sena has changed electric suppliers again. The best rate now is \$0.0889/kwh down from \$0.125/kwh Estimated about \$150.00 savings per month. Check out Town Square, the deal is for 9 months. Thanks Sal <https://energizect.com/>.

Parsonage gutters have been installed. The painting continued and 99%done and looks great. A small percentage of painting stopped due to concerns about water damage inside 2nd floor room and the kitchen below on the front right side of the parsonage. Insurance contacted and waiting for snow melt off roof and structural engineer to get up on roof. Thanks, Len, for gutters and painting work

At 7:59, Greg closed the meeting. Thanks, Greg snowy night to get home safely.

Respectfully submitted for the Trustees,
Russ Tolles

YOGA AT MCC!

What: Vinyasa Yoga for all fitness levels

Where: Our Social Hall

When: Mondays @ 5:30 p.m.

Why: Join us and RELAX!

How: Bring a mat and blocks. Bolster, water bottle, strap and blanket are optional. Please dress to move.

Any questions, ask Cynthia Flisher @ 203-758-8454

FAITH FORMATION

Thank you to our Volunteer Sunday School Teachers for January and February. *Pam Albon, Norma Solberg, Jill Walsh, Katie O'Connor, Liz Walker, Chris Avcollie, Amy Coughlin, Kelly Pelletier, and Robbie Kamide*; your time is always appreciated as you are an invaluable resource to the children of our community.

Laughter filled the social hall during February's coffee hour as our talented Sunday School students performed a comical skit about Question Kid and Smarty Pants Bible Dude's adventures in learning about the Holy Spirit. Emma Avcollie's musical talents shined as she performed an original song on guitar to wrap up the performance. A special thank you to Chris Avcollie for writing & directing the skit.

Lessons were focused on discipleship and spreading God's love. The children created heartwarming Valentine's that were gifted to a local convalescent home, with meaningful uplifting messages that were sure to brighten their day.

In March we look forward to our annual Easter Egg Hunt for kids of all ages! It takes place after worship service on the Middlebury town green across from the church. We also look forward to putting on the child-led craft during coffee hour for all to participate. Both of these events take place on March 24th (Palm Sunday). ***Please invite friends and family!***

Note: *Please help support these activities by donating to our Easter egg and special craft fund. Any amount helps offset costs and is greatly appreciated. Look for the pink envelopes in the crier to donate.*

Sunday School teacher volunteers are needed!

Teaching Sunday school is a hugely rewarding way to serve our MCC church family. By leading our children in exploring faith, you help nurture their relationship with God in their most formative years. No special experience is required, as everyone has a unique perspective to offer from their own walk in faith and life. Lesson plans and materials are provided. Time commitments are flexible based on your availability. This is a great opportunity for anyone (16 and older) wishing to support the spiritual growth of our youth. If you are interested in volunteering, I

am happy to answer questions and get you signed up. You'll be glad you did! Contact me at shubbard@middleburyucc.org.

As we journey through Lent, let's continue to nurture our children's faith and inspirational service.

Sara Hubbard
Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

YOU OUGHT TO BE IN PICTURES!

Last month in Church Life, we thought about some of the new ways we can elevate our presence in the community – and maybe our finances – while sharing our faith and fellowship.

Some churches have had success leasing their properties for short-term “filmed on location” settings, so we thought we’d give it a try. We connected with the state Film, TV & Digital Media office and obtained a free international listing of filming locations. We uploaded more than 30 interior and exterior photos of the church and the parsonage, along with a description of our location:

Classic, well maintained Greek Revival white New England church on the Green (which we own) in center of unspoiled historic district at the crest of a hill in the center of town. The Green is bordered by the Town Hall, Federal era homes, a stone Catholic church, and the stately, century-old Westover School. Adjacent to the church is its parsonage, a Colonial-era former tavern that some say is haunted. Both the church and the parsonage were repainted, inside and out, over the past three years and landscaping is well maintained by our volunteers.

The church sanctuary seats about 250, with wooden pews and a balcony. The main level has two aisles (i.e. no center aisle). The focal point is our large, 1,396-pipe Holtcamp organ, dating from the 1980s and considered one of the best in the state. A demonstration of the organ is available on our YouTube channel.

Today's church is a reconstruction of the church's second meetinghouse, which was built in 1839. A fire destroyed that building and the adjacent Town Hall in 1935. Both buildings were rebuilt along the same lines as

their predecessors, although the Town Hall is a bit more contemporary. The Green and its surroundings look much as they did at the turn of the 20th century.

In addition to the sanctuary, possible interior venues for filming and production include a lower-level social hall with a small stage suitable for musicians, talent shows, and one-set plays. The social hall includes room to seat about 70-80 at tables. The adjacent kitchen was remodeled in 2021 and includes stove, refrigerator, dishwasher, and separate pot and hand sinks.

An addition built in the 1950s includes office spaces, a conference room, and Sunday School rooms decorated with hand-painted murals of Biblical scenes. On the lower level is Noah's Ark, a meeting room decorated with scenes from that story. It is used mostly for community meetings like Scouts and AA.

Behind the parsonage, alongside our parking lot, is our Outdoor Chapel, which was renovated this year as an Eagle Scout project. It has a rustic feel with a small pulpit, bench seating for about 60, and a large cross at the entrance near the rear.

Middlebury is conveniently located to both state Route 8 and Interstate 84, about 1.5 hours to New York and 2.5 hours to Boston.

Perhaps a bonus: Our steeple contains a Verizon cellular tower, which assures good cellphone coverage.

Just like auditioning for a show, a portfolio alone won't land us a part. But thanks to your generosity, MCC is ready for its close-up!

Howard Fielding
For the Board of Stewardship

NOTE OF GRATITUDE

We would like to extend a note of gratitude to one of our longtime church members, Jane Connery. After many years of service to the Bank of America, Jane retired in August of last year. In honor of her retirement, Bank of America offered to make a charitable donation on

her behalf to a worthy organization of her choice. We are pleased to announce that Jane has chosen the Middlebury Congregational Church to receive the donation!

We will be using a portion of the funds to purchase some much needed replacement chairs and furniture for our social hall and the remainder will be used to restart a program for our teen members who have essentially been without an organized structure following the pandemic. We will be asking for their input on what is most important to them, what they would like to do, and how we can support them to make it happen. We look forward to sharing their activities and accomplishments with you in the coming months.

Congratulations to Jane on her new direction. We are deeply grateful for this gift and we wish you many years of relaxation, travel, health, and happiness!

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD: A LENTEN STUDY ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

Matthew 6: 9-13, Luke 11:2-4

*Social Hall, Wednesdays during Lent: 6:30 Soup Supper, 7pm
Discussion*

3/6: "Give us this day our daily bread"

- Exodus 16:1-31, Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 14: 13-21

3/13: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

- Matthew 18: 21-35, Matthew 6:14-15, Leviticus 25

3/20: "and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil"

- Matthew 26:36-46

3/27: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen"

- Psalm 146, Psalm 150, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, Romans 8: 31-39

For further reading:

- N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*,
 - General accessible overview. Adapted from a sermon series.
- C. Clifton Black, *The Lord's Prayer*

- Deep dive into translation, language, and interpretation of the Lord's Prayer with extensive bibliographies for further research

- Karl Barth, *Prayer* (2002, 50th anniversary edition)

Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth's lectures on the Lord's Prayer. This edition includes a bunch of pastoral prayer from Barth's sermon and essays by current scholars. If you want a short, accessible entry point into the writing of one of the most important theologians of the 20th century, this is a great option.

THE MCC VIRTUAL TIP JAR

We've all seen tip jars at stores and restaurants, but this tip jar is for MCC. This Lent, we're practicing gratitude. When someone goes the extra mile, does a small thing that means a lot, or you're just feeling grateful, drop something in our virtual tip jar and tell us what you're thankful for. During the season of Easter, we'll publish all our thanksgivings in Church Life so we can all appreciate the many things we all do to be of service and make this community special. Scan the QR code or go to



<https://middleburycc.breezechms.com/form/f8778a73> to leave a tip! All proceeds go to support the church general fund.

IMPORTANT MARCH DATES

3/6: 6:30pm Soup Supper, 7pm Bible Discussion (all in the Social Hall)

3/10: Guest Preacher: The Rev. Margret Hofmeister, Area Conference Minister, South West Region, Southern New England Conference UCC

11am: Prayer Workshop after worship

3/13: 6:30pm Soup Supper, 7pm Bible Discussion (all in the Social Hall)

3/20: 6:30pm Soup Supper, 7pm Bible Discussion (all in the Social Hall)

3/24: 10am: Palm Sunday Worship

11am: Easter Egg Hunt on the Green following worship & All ages craft in the Social Hall

3/27: 6:30pm Soup Supper, 7pm Bible Discussion (all in the Social Hall)

3/28: 7pm: Maundy Thursday Tenebrae worship with communion

3/31: 10am: Easter Sunday Worship

**Middlebury Congregational Church
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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