

CHURCH LIFE

DECEMBER 2024



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 first Sunday of Advent is 12/1. It's a communion Sunday, and I will be having the children help me set up and light the Advent Wreath. After worship, volunteers are welcome as we decorate the meetinghouse for the Advent/Christmas season.

The Middlebury Tree Lighting is 12/7 at 4pm We will be distributing hot chocolate during the Tree Lighting. After the Tree Lighting at about 5pm we will open up the sanctuary for caroling!

The annual Christmas Pageant is during worship on 12/15 with a snow date of 12/22

Saturday 12/21 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 12/22, we will have a Fourth Sunday of Advent service at 10am. We will have two Christmas Eve services, 5pm and 11pm, that evening. The 11pm service will have communion.

There's a poem by Anglican priest and Welsh poet R.S. Thomas that gets at this truth of Christmas;

The Coming by R.S. Thomas
And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look, he said.
The son looked.

Far off.

As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crushed buildings
Cast their shadows; a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

On Christmas, we celebrate a God who said “let me go there,” a God who came here, to us. This is 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.

The good news of Christmas is the Son watched all the joys and sorrows, dreams and disappointments, good and evil of the world and said “Let me go there.”

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

THE ANGELS OF ADVENT & CHRISTMAS: ADVENT DISCUSSION GROUP DECEMBER 8TH, 11:30

The Advent and Christmas stories in the gospels are filled with angels bringing heavenly messages. Join Pastor Katrina after worship on 12/8 for a discussion on angels in the Christmas story.

CHRISTMAS EVE READERS/VOLUNTEERS

Our 5pm and 11pm Christmas Eve services have multiple volunteer opportunities. If you are interested in reading one of the scripture lessons on Christmas Eve or lighting the Advent wreath, please let Pastor Katrina know (kmanzi@middleburyucc.org). If you'd like to usher, there is a sign up sheet in the back of the sanctuary on a clipboard on the table there.



THE DEACONS' BENCH

December is a wonderful month for many, a challenge for others, and for some it is a time of anxiety, sadness or grief. It is the month with the least daylight. It is a month that brings great expectations: it is The Christmas Season. Not just our joyous remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ in a simple manger, in a town far from home, but a “gotta have it all” season. The hype starts earlier and earlier, meaning the expectations start earlier. It seems we are barely wrapping up summer when the first Christmas decorations show up in stores, nudging aside other holidays and occasions.

It is possible to tame these expectations and pressures, but for many (and I include myself in this category) it takes very conscious effort. First, it's important to consider how the holidays affect you. If you find yourself stressed and anxious, it's time to consider what you have in your own personal wellness toolbox. What helps in times of need varies from person to person. What works for you? For many, exercise – planned and regular - is very helpful. It can be as simple as walking every day. Spending time outdoors is especially helpful. Spending time with people who recharge our batteries can help us cope and feel balanced. Doing something for others – that is

remarkably effective in helping us feel better. Set boundaries – know your limits, and ask for help if you need it. The key is to remember to use what works – it’s easy for this season to get away from us. Prayer and spiritual activities can ground us and remind us of what the season really is about.

For some people, all the display of boundless merriment and perfect experiences can make their own lives feel even worse by comparison. It can help to remember that advertisements and all of the holiday movies are fiction – that is not true reality for most of us. If you have suffered a loss, it can make those depictions of perfection even more painful. If that is you, it’s OK to skip many of the Christmas events, and maybe consider going to The Longest Night service instead. It is for just such times as those. Some days – and even some years – can be really hard. Reach out to others, friends or professionals. Your pastor is just a phone call away.

A final thought about all of the expectations that this season can burden us with. My grandmother grew up on a farm in very northern, very rural Quebec, back in the early 1900s. Many years ago, I asked her what Christmas was like for her then. She said that it was mostly a special time in church. But what about presents? She happily remembered getting a simple, homemade doll as a present. That was it. I thought that sounded pretty pathetic (I was young). But she said no- she had everything she needed, and the doll was a treat. She noted (rather wisely) that TV, and magazines show all kinds of things you don’t have and that can make you think you don’t have what you need. That stayed with me: never mistake want for need.

So this holiday I wish for you that you look inside and think about all that we DO have, and not what the world would make us think we need. We can share what we have with those who need it more. And if there is something you really do need, remember that you have a church family here that is ready and willing to help you.

On behalf of the board of deacons, wishing you peace and happiness,
Janine Sullivan-Wiley

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

November Sandwiches

Thank you all who came down and helped with making 161 sandwiches for the GWIM soup kitchen. Many hands made light work of stuffing the lunch bags and the assembly line of workers made the sandwiches. The kitchen staff helped unwrap the cheese slices to make compiling the sandwiches easier. And also a Thank you to those who took their time on Friday November 8 to shop for all the items needed.

We delivered the sandwiches on Monday November 11th and they greeted us with such enthusiasm as they were so thankful for our contributions.

Thanksgiving Baskets

Thank you all for your generous donations of food items and monetary gifts for our Thanksgiving baskets that are helping two families in need this year. They were so thankful for all the great food that we provided.

Star Tree Children

We are excited to support the Wellmore Foundation in making Christmas special for their children. Starting Sunday, November 24th, you'll find the Star Tree children's stars and sign-up sheets on the multiplication table. Each star will list a child's name, age, and their requested items.

To participate, simply sign up next to the name of the child you'd like to help, take their star, and attach it to the wrapped present when you return it by **December 13th**. Thank you for helping bring joy to these children this holiday season

Christmas Baskets

We will also be helping those two families in Middlebury with Christmas dinner baskets. These lists will be placed on the bulletin board by the kitchen if you would like to sign up for a food item to buy. These families are so thankful that their community can help them.

We thank you all for your generous donations over this holiday season. Our mission board could not do the mission outreach we do without your kind and generous donations through the year. Your donations are so appreciated.

Bless you all and have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Carol Rollins
Mission Board

COFFEE HOUR

For the month of November, coffee hour will be hosted by the Mission Board.

MUSIC NOTES

This month, we'll be singing a great deal of seasonal music in church. We'll be singing some of the many hymns that celebrate the themes of Advent, the celebration of Christmas and the hymns of Epiphany (the end of the "12 Days of Christmas").

Many of the songs we think of as "carols" are not carols in the historical sense. True carols are simple songs which are more narrative/story-like (such as "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night"). Other songs which are more praiseful (think "Joy to the World") are technically Christmas hymns.

Meanwhile, there's lots of Christmas music that's completely secular and won't fit into our worship settings (like "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer), but there's one piece that is secular but also reputed to have religious symbolism: "The Twelve Days of Christmas".

Here are some possible symbolic explanations:

1. A partridge in a pear tree. (One true God)
2. Two turtle doves (The Old and New Testaments)
3. Three French hens (The principal virtues of faith, hope and charity)
4. Four calling birds (The four Gospels)

5. Five gold rings (The Pentateuch- the first five books of scripture)
6. Six geese a-laying (The six days of creation)
7. Seven swans a-swimming (The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit)
8. Eight maids a-milking (The eight Beatitudes)
9. Nine ladies dancing (The nine fruits of the Spirit)
10. Ten Lords a-leaping (The Ten Commandments)
11. Eleven pipers piping (The eleven faithful disciples)
12. Twelve drummers drumming (The twelve points of faith in the Apostles Creed)

Hoping you find many blessings during this beautiful season,

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski



Our Annual Christmas Pageant will be held during Sunday worship service on December 15th at 10:00 A.M.

Please join us for a memorable performance and a delicious cookie walk in the Social Hall following the service!

Cookie Bakers are welcome to bake and share their favorite recipes.

FAITH FORMATION

We have a lot to celebrate this season!

This November, our Sunday School children have been hard at work creating handmade holiday candles and “friendship soup” mason jar kits to sell. We invite you to support their efforts at the Middlebury Christmas Tree Lighting Event on **December 7th at 4:00 pm**, with all proceeds benefitting our youth programs. Look for our festive table!

The magic continues with our annual Christmas pageant on **December 15th at 10:00 am**. Please join us for a memorable performance and a delicious cookie walk in the Social Hall following the service!

We are looking forward to our next family movie night on **December 13th at 6pm**. Prior to the movie, we will have a party with pizza, cookies and hot chocolate. Donations for this program are welcome, but not required. Dress festive or wear your coziest pjs. 🌲

A huge thank you to Norma, Pam, Robbie, Amy, Kelly, Jillian, Raeghan, Charis, Callie, Joseph W., and all of the Sunday School kids for your help making candles, soup mixes, teaching, and watching the littles!

As always, if you're interested in teaching Sunday School, please email me at sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com

Thank you!

Sara Hubbard

Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

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.

A TIME TO SAY THANKS

December already? Time flies. As I write this, though, we are still nearing the end of November, with Consecration Sunday and our Thanksgiving services still ahead of us.

The final results of our Stewardship drive are not available yet, but the 37 families who together have promised \$87,788 to help us budget for 2025 have given us a good start. Pledges typically continue to arrive until the end of the year, so we won't have a year-end total until next month.

Many thanks to each of you who pledged your Time, Talent, and Treasure to help us fulfill our mission in 2025. Special thanks for their time and talent go to Pastor Katrina for her stewardship sermon, Donna for selecting the anthem "Like a Lighthouse" and hymns such as "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," and Dave for his soundtracks for our presentations. Thanks, too, to Bob Giannini, Erin Wells, Jack Traver, and others who sent in lighthouse photos for us to share during the social hour.

ShawnaLee and Drew Kwashnak (and their friend Captain Clueless) deserve applause for their stewardship moments, mail room efforts, and design and printing of the mailer you received. We're grateful to Sarah Kwashnak, too, for office support.

We have fun working together, and there's always room for others to join the party! Even if sales isn't your forte, your creativity and organizational talents are important gifts to your church. If you're interested in joining the Stewardship Board, talk to any one of us or to members of the Nominating Committee.

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

CHURCH CENSUS

We are finalizing and documenting all information from the surveys that were sent out earlier this year. Edits to membership information and requests for contact will be included in our update. If you haven't returned your form please take this opportunity to do so now. We look forward to hearing from you!

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

The Christmas season can often bring stress and be a hard time as we miss loved ones who have died or who are far away. Join us for a Christmas service acknowledging the heaviness that can come with this season along with the hope of Christmas. On the Longest Night of the year, you don't need to spend it alone.

IMPORTANT DATES

- 12/1:** 10am First Sunday in Advent – Children will help light the Advent Wreath
Hanging of the Greens, after worship
- 12/7:** 4pm Middlebury Tree Lighting on the Green
5pm Christmas Carol Sing in the Sanctuary
- 12/8:** 10am Second Sunday of Advent
11:30am Angels of Advent & Christmas: Advent Discussion Group
- 12/15:** 10am MCC Christmas Pageant
- 12/21:** 7pm Longest Night Service
- 12/22:** 10am Fourth Sunday of Advent (Pageant Snow Date)
- 12/24:** 5pm Candlelit Christmas Eve Family Service
11pm Candlelit Christmas Eve Communion Service
- 12/29:** 10am First Sunday of Christmas
- 1/5:** 10am Epiphany of the Lord

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
Prepaid
Permit No. 117**