

CHURCH LIFE

MAY 2025



**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
OPEN & AFFIRMING
MIDDLEBURYUCC.ORG**

FROM THE PASTOR

Happy Easter! The season of Easter lasts for 50 days, from Easter until the Day of Pentecost, which this year is June 8th. So, we've got a lot of Easter left! I want to offer thanks to all of our dedicated staff and volunteers who helped make our Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday worship and activities happen. Thank you!

The end of April and beginning of May are when the flowers start blooming, the leaves start growing, and the world just generally looks to be alive again. One of Jesus' favorite topics for preaching and parables was talking about growing things: seeds, vineyards, harvests, sowers, fields, and soil. One of the parables about growing things that appears in all three of the synoptic gospels (synoptic is the name of Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is the parable of the mustard seed.

Here's Mark's version: "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

The last Sunday in March, I attended my friend Thomas's ordination at the Preston City Congregational Church. Besides being very excited for Thomas, his family, and his church, one of the other things that brought me joy that day was seeing members from some of the tiny churches Thomas had served while in seminary. One of those little churches was actually one I had spent some time preaching at during seminary too.

It got me thinking about the outsized importance and value those little churches actually have for the wider church. These small churches that often can't always afford a settled minister are the churches that are willing to take a chance on seminarians and give them real experience. The faithful people of these little churches are who, on behalf of the church universal, endure seminarians' first and often very flawed sermons. They gently give feedback and teach seminarians some of the lessons that can't be learned in school about

how to be a pastor. While these small churches often struggle and are never going to be featured in any sort of media, they have quietly helped train up countless new ministers to serve the whole Church. Like the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds, these are the smallest of churches, and the impact, the branches from the little churches are growing everywhere.

Many of us have experienced mustard seeds who serve a similar function to those tiny churches. They're the boss who took a chance on us when we had no experience, the person who nurtured our potential, the people who helped us find a direction, or the people who were there for us in an important season. Those people, those actions have impacts far beyond what the person planting the seed will often ever see, but they often grow into the greatest of shrubs with so many branches.

In this season of growing things, let's give thanks for those small things, those people and places who gave us the chance we needed to grow.

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

MCC: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Over the last year and a half or so, MCC leadership has been looking at what we need to build for our future. In addition to having people be part of the church, a key thing we have to do to build for the future is invest in our infrastructure. Our church has a very good track record in continuously investing in our physical plant so our buildings can help us do ministry here in Middlebury. In the past 4 years, we've invested over \$90,000 in needed capital improvements to the church and parsonage. That number is also artificially low for the amount of work that's been done because we've saved thousands and thousands of dollars through members generously donating their time, skills, and labor to complete work in house. Our most recent capital campaign, Comfort Zone, for \$250, 000 for efficient natural gas boilers for the church and parsonage continues to pay for itself each winter.

However, some key improvements and investments in the church and parsonage were done 20 to 30 years ago and are nearing the end of their lifespan. We've also spent most of the investment money specifically designated for building improvement on building improvements over the last decade; replacing the parsonage roof last summer depleted most of the remaining building specific funds.

We've identified the following projects as the major ones we'll need to prepare for in the near future: church roof replacement, paying ourselves back for the parsonage roof replacement, steeple painting, sidewalk repair, and parking lot repaving. We've gotten preliminary quotes for all of those projects, and we're looking at needing to raise about \$240,000 to complete all those mandatory improvements. Plus, we should replenish the funds used to support the buildings so our buildings don't drain away money that is better used for ministry, mission, and operations.

We're in the early stages of considering a potential capital campaign in 2026. We've been talking to capital campaign consultants at the United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund, and they have been optimistic about our financial outlook and potential to raise what we need. We've also, thanks to Janine Sullivan-Wiley, applied for a competitive grant for the preservation and repair of historic religious buildings that would cover half the cost of the roof and steeple. We'll find out about the grant likely this summer.

MCC has been here for over two centuries, and that is because with the help of God people have continuously built and prepared to be here into the future. It's now our turn to continue building for the future so MCC will be here for years to come. We'll continue putting updates in Church Life as we get more information.



THE DEACONS' BENCH

HAPPY SPRING – The old New England saying is “April Showers Bring May Flowers”. God's earth, joyously, is “capable” of regeneration, if allowed.

Mankind has historically interfered or slightly altered, probably unintentionally, this gift. Please allow me to opine on this matter in

this setting. I personally believe that I should make every conscious effort to REUSE, REPURPOSE, RECYCLE, and REPLENISH, whenever possible, items I attain in Life. Lofty Goals? I also personally believe that products manufactured for use should have an afterlife plan of disposal, required. Simple but burdensome to our industrial complex, for sure.

When the Lord granted us domain over this Paradise, should we not give it every opportunity to thrive? We are the stewards of our planet and we should strive to leave an insignificant/neutral footprint behind.

From my perspective, our 2024 election was a step back in environmental stewardship as we collectively watch our climate's response change. Extended hurricane/tornado seasons, widespread droughts, extreme fire events are some of the most devastating I've seen in my lifetime. "Drill Baby Drill" may not be the solution sought, you decide.

As you decide, can we at least agree to reexamine our small influence. Do we always need to compete with the proverbial "Jones" in the acquisition of amenities? I preach to my family, "let the world live like the "Granjas""; meaning you should know what's right for your beliefs and set your own standards. Let the world follow the " ", your example and your last name.

Small steps of stewardship CAN make a big difference when collectively implemented.

I'll conclude by relaying to you that my Spring 2024 trip to France where I stayed with extended cousins in a small village revealed a more forward approach to recycling and plastics in particular. They do whatever possible to limit their use with a conscientious approach. It was reported that Rosylyn Carter would rinse her plastic seal bags for a secondary/multiple reuses. Extreme!? Not for ME.

PSALM 8

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

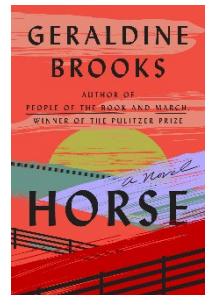
O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Respectively submitted for the Board of Deacons,
Mike Granja

MCC BOOK CLUB

Please join us for our MCC Book Club on May 28th at
6:00p.m. in the Parlor. In May, we will be discussing
Horse by Geraldine Brooks.

Middlebury Public Library has copies you can pick
up. We hope to see you there!



LITCHFIELD SOUTH ASSOCIATION UCC SPRING MEETING & DINNER

May 20th at 6:00pm in the Social Hall, MCC is hosting the Litchfield South Association Spring Meeting. (The Litchfield South Association is the regional United Church of Christ governing body for our area. The Association is made up of clergy and delegates from the area churches.) There is a dinner as part of the meeting, and you are welcome to volunteer or attend the dinner. The cost is \$15. Please RSVP to Sarah in the office if you're planning on attending (office@middleburyucc.org). The program for the evening is dinner, a brief vespers service led by Pastor Katrina, and then we will be doing and all Association mission project to assemble hygiene kits for Church World Service's disaster relief work. We'll have more information on volunteer needs as we get a bit closer.

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to our Dinner Easter Baskets for the two families we were supporting for this holiday. Social Services was so Thankful for all your contributions and said they couldn't do what they accomplish without our support. So again a big Thank You to our generous congregation.

This month **May** our food contribution to GWIM soup kitchen is **Instant Potatoes**. These items can be left on the multiplication table in the sanctuary.

This year we are getting ready for our **Strawberry Festival**. Missions will again do the following:

Raffle baskets- we will again have plastic totes to hand out to anyone who would like to contribute a raffle basket. A sign up sheet for themed baskets will be posted on the bulletin board near the kitchen. Some ideas for those themes will be; Beach, Date night, Cooks dream (kitchen items), Various gift certificates, Services offered, Book Lovers, Movie night, Italian, Gardening, Mexican night, Breakfast baskets.

Silent Auction items - we have a beautifully handmade quilt that a

members daughter made for one item. Anyone have a treasure or want to purchase an item for our silent auction will be greatly appreciated. These items will have a minimum starting price for the silent auction.

Treasure Table - This table will be stocked with a variety of special items from your home or donated that are of good quality or treasures that you think someone would appreciate.

We are hoping that we will have another successful fundraiser for our church please have these items at the Church by June 1st. The Strawberry Festival is on June 8th following service.

Thank everyone who participates, donates, and supports this mission.

Bless you all,
Mission Board
Carol Rollins

FAITH FORMATION & YOUTH GROUP

April Highlights:

April had us in full swing with the Lenten season and Easter celebrations. We're grateful to our Sunday School teachers Katie O & Amy C for their dedication to enriching the spiritual growth of our MCC youth!

April's curriculum centered on the joyous season of Christ's resurrection. On Easter Sunday, all children joined the service to sing the introit, followed by our annual Egg hunt on the Middlebury Green—with eager participants collecting all eggs in just about two minutes!

Youth Group: We are so proud of our amazing youth group, who continue to volunteer wherever needed at MCC. We're now planning some fun activities just for them. Stay tuned for more details coming soon...

Sunday School teacher volunteers are needed - no green thumb required!

Springtime brings new growth and what better way to nurture young minds than by serving as a Sunday school teacher? No green thumb required – we provide the lesson plans and materials, while you bring your unique perspective. Just an occasional hour of your time can help cultivate a lifelong relationship with God. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just taking root, this rewarding role is open to anyone 16 and older looking to sow seeds of spiritual growth in our MCC church family. So, don't let this opportunity blossom without you!

If you are interested in volunteering, I am happy to answer questions and get you signed up. Please contact me at sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com.

Sara Hubbard
Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

STEWARDSHIP

Barbara and I recently turned 70, which wasn't so different from our 60s. We got a friendly reminder from the Social Security Administration that after age 70, there's no point in waiting to apply for benefits because they're at the highest rate already.

And we learned that as of age 70½ we will be able to make Qualified Charitable Distributions, tax-free direct donations from our IRAs to charities of our choice. Retirement accounts are designed to last for the person's life expectancy, which is around 80, so retirees might as well use them to do some good in the world before they pass from it.

Normally, any withdrawals from a traditional IRA are taxable as income for that year because the money was deposited into your retirement account before taxes. It becomes taxable as income when you remove it from the IRA.

If your IRA trustee transfers it directly to the charity electronically, it does not count as income (although it's also not deductible as a charitable donation).

At age 73, the IRS will require us to start making Required Minimum Distributions from our IRAs according to a standard formula. The IRS will tax these RMDs unless we make them as QCDs to eligible charities, like MCC.

Does this alphabet soup sound complicated? It is, a bit, but it's worth it. Check with your tax adviser. Each taxpayer over 70½ can donate up to \$100,000 a year directly from their IRA to charities in this way.

When you do, be sure to remember your favorite faith community. Thanks!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship



THANKS FROM THE MUSIC STAFF

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Here's a huge "shout out" to all the choir members: Over the last several months, you've all done a wonderful job leading the congregation and providing your own special musical moments beginning with Ash Wednesday right through to Easter Sunday.

The MCC community is so blessed to have you all!

Meanwhile, there's plenty of Easter season music still to be sung. So this is a "shout-out" to anyone else in the congregation who can lend a hand with the singing (even if only occasionally). We would be even better off with a few more voices, so think about being a part of this lively, dedicated and supportive group of singers. We normally rehearse on Sunday mornings from 8:30 to 9:45. Come a bit early to sing with us and see how your worship experience will be enriched by this special role in Sunday Service.

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

SHARE THE CARE – MEALS!

Greetings from the Diaconite! As part of Share the Care efforts to support one another in all seasons of life, we hope to grow the list of members and friends willing to prepare a meal or donate toward a DoorDash or Grubhub gift card from time to time. Here's how it generally works:

- Pastor Katrina will ask if meals would be a comfort as situations arise.
- Direct contact is made to arrange details (delivery logistics, restaurant preferences, dietary needs, etc.)
- Participants receive a sign-up list with the basic information and dates. Options include preparing a home-cooked meal for the scheduled date, covering a meal delivery via DoorDash or Grubhub, or giving a gift card to a local restaurant (consider partnering with someone to share the cost of a gift card).

Expanding the list of willing participants helps to spread the care among us, and we want to make clear that helping does not necessarily involve turning on your oven! There is also no expectation to help each time. Whether once a month or once a year, every bit helps and is appreciated. As always, reaching out to one another directly is a blessing, too! This listing is for times we might need to coordinate a broader effort. To join the list, contact Michelle Rowell Finn at michfinn@comcast.net.

Don's Chicken Salad

Ingredients for the Salad:

3 pounds of boneless, skinless chicken breast,
1 cup dried cranberries
1/3 cup Sherry
3 ribs of celery/finely chopped
4 scallions, white and green parts,
trimmed and sliced diagonally into small pieces
2 tbsp. Fresh rosemary

Dressing:

1 2/3 cup of mayonnaise
1/4 cup sour cream
1 tablespoon honey mustard
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon of lemon juice
1 tablespoon of honey
Salt and pepper to taste

Poach chicken until tender and allow it to cool.

Cut into half-inch pieces. Set aside
Bring sherry to a boil and pour over
cranberries in a separate bowl.
Soak for three minutes and then add to the
chicken with the sherry.
Stir remaining ingredients together with
chicken and sherry.

Add dressing ingredients into a bowl and stir
together. Use the amount of dressing on
mixture that you prefer for your taste.

Enjoy!!



For those of you that remember the Cushman family, I am sharing this recipe that Don shared with me more than 25 years ago. It has appeared on many festive and commemorative tables at MCC over the years, most recently at our memorial reception for Mickey Shea. It's bittersweet to remember Don in the kitchen, but this is always a crowd favorite and it's worth the extra effort. Enjoy!

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.

IMPORTANT DATES

5/4: 10am Worship & Communion

5/11: 10am Worship

5/18: 10am Worship

5/20: 6pm LSA UCC Spring Meeting & Dinner (Social Hall)

5/25: 10am Worship

5pm Middlebury Memorial Day Parade (Green)

5/28: 6pm MCC Book Club (Parlor)

PHOTOS FROM APRIL 2025



Youth Choir Singing the Introit. © Sarah Kwashnak, 04/20/2025



Children's Moment. © Sarah Kwashnak, 04/20/2025



Easter Egg Hunt. © Sarah Kwashnak, 04/20/2025

**Middlebury Congregational Church
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