

CHURCH LIFE

JULY 2025



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

FROM THE PASTOR

Happy summer everyone! I hope you're getting the chance to enjoy the warmer weather.

We are continuing our tradition of summer worship with St. George's Episcopal Church, just down the hill from us. Our worship services will remain at 10am throughout the summer except for the services where we are at St. George's. Here is the schedule:

July 20 worship @ 9:30 at St. George's
July 27 worship @ 9:30 at St. George's
August 3 worship @ 10 at MCC
August 10 worship @10 at MCC

July 11 through July 16, I will be in Kansas City for the United Church of Christ General Synod. General Synod is the national governing body of the United Church of Christ.

I'm attending as a visitor this year through the continuing education program I'm part of for young, early career clergy with the United Church of Christ Pension Boards, the Next Generation Leadership Initiative. MCC's very own Diane Barnard will also be attending General Synod this July as a delegate for our local Litchfield South Association. Chris Cole, who served as our sabbatical pastor when I was on sabbatical in 2023, is the other delegate from Litchfield South. So, I thought I would do a primer on the structure and governance of the United Church of Christ so you all can get a sense of what will be going on this summer in Kansas City.

Our polity (governance structure) in the United Church of Christ is a bottom up structure. It's built on the bedrock of local churches having autonomy and being the basic unit of life in the UCC. Local churches own their own real estate, choose their own pastors, and are free to chart their own theological course with their own theological priorities. However, our New England puritan forbears realized that our churches could do more and be stronger if they agreed to join together, and many aspects of UCC polity today date back to the developments of the 18th century.

One of the things local churches quickly realized was better done in consultation with additional churches was preparing candidates for ministry and also general oversight and discipline of clergy. These are the sorts of oversight decisions that are handled by a bishop in other denominations. In

the Saybrook Platform of 1708, Connecticut (the Congregational Church was the established state church of CT at this time) established Associations, groups of local churches and clergy, to perform these functions. Our current Litchfield South Association is directly descended from the Associations established in the Saybrook Platform. Associations are made of up delegates and clergy from the local churches, and apart from the local church, the Association is where most of the decision-making power is in the United Church of Christ. I currently serve in leadership in our Association.

The next step up from the Association is the Conference. Our Conference is the Southern New England Conference. Conferences help provide good policy and guidance so Associations can harmonize and consult with each other on various topics. In parts of the country where there are fewer UCC churches, the Conference then takes on the responsibilities of the Associations. The Conferences also have paid staff who help provide continuing education, facilitate the search and call process for churches to find pastors and pastors to find churches, and generally to provide support to local churches and Associations in their ministry. Conferences are also able to do types of ministry that would be hard for a single church to sustain on its own. For example, our Southern New England Conference owns and operates Silver Lake Camp in Sharon, CT to provide a wonderful faith based summer camp experience to kids and youth.

And then beyond the Conference is the National Setting of the United Church of Christ, which is made up of the staff in the National Office, the United Church of Christ Board, and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ. The National Office runs domestic and international mission programs, coordinates with other denominations, and establishes the basic policies and procedures for Conferences and Associations to work with. They also update and maintain the national databases for clergy, churches, and for the search and call process. The United Church of Christ Board is the governing body for the National Office and staff and has members from all over the country.

The United Church of Christ General Synod is made up of delegates, both lay people and clergy, from every Conference, and it can do a number of things. It can direct the National staff and the Board of Directors to do various things or to create particular policies. Its approval is needed to call (hire) the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ

and to call a number of the other important staff in the National Setting. Synod also approves full communion agreements with other denominations.

Synod also weighs in to provide Christian witness regarding various social issues. If there's a hot button topic out there, often Synod will have a resolution on it. Some of the resolutions make major waves, and others don't. Probably the Synod resolution in my memory that has had the biggest impact was in 2005 Synod approved a resolution in favor of marriage equality. The United Church of Christ was the first mainline protestant denomination to come out in favor of marriage equality. So, it was big news, and here in New England it coincided with various (sometimes controversial) pieces of legislation about same sex marriage and civil unions being considered by our state legislatures.

One of the interesting things about UCC polity is that local churches are free to embrace these resolutions of witness from Synod or not as they choose. Synod doesn't speak for local churches; it can only encourage or urge local churches. When Synod is not meeting, the UCC Board of Directors takes on many of the functions of Synod.

In looking through the business for this General Synod in July, it doesn't look like we've got anything particularly controversial; though, emergency resolutions about current events are often brought forward at the last minute. Some of the positive things on the agenda are full communion agreements with the Evangelical Church in Germany and the United Evangelical Church in Puerto Rico. There are some bylaw changes about restructuring the National staff and about responsibilities of the UCC Board, which will definitely generate a good amount of discussion as the proposals created a more centralized power structure. Historically, the United Church of Christ has been allergic to attempts at centralization, but a number of our past National staff configurations resulted more in warring fiefdoms than healthy shared decision-making. So, I think it might be worth trying a more centralized structure.

I'm personally most excited for Synod to finalize the Manual on Local Church. The UCC has had established procedures for oversight of clergy (currently this is called the Manual on Ministry), but we never had a document explaining what it means for a church to be part of the UCC. The UCC Constitution simply says Associations can hold and determine the standing of local churches, but there were no parameters for what a church should be doing to be in good standing. So, the Manual on Local Church

finally defines parameters for establishing what being in good standing is, a process for Associations to review local churches and their standing, and then general guidance and best practices on various aspects of local church life. I've looked over and given feedback on the draft of the Manual, and there is a lot of good stuff in there.

All of that being said, I think the actual value of General Synod is getting to see a glimpse of the true breadth of the United Church of Christ, and it always helps remind me of how we here in little Middlebury are actually connected in the church with Christians around the world. We have the autonomy to chart our own course, but we have the benefit of being able to work together with our sister churches to accomplish together far more than we could on our own.

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister



THE DEACONS' BENCH

Many evenings I will say The Lord's Prayer, and to keep it from becoming the recitation of a mantra (although I think that has value as well) I try to paraphrase it, line by

line. That led me to really look forward to and enjoy Katrina's evening study series earlier this year, one of which was about that very prayer. For me, the line about forgiving trespasses always made me pause, as I debated a very personal question: are the two parts of that line conditional? Do I only expect forgiveness insofar as I forgive those who trespass/have a debt against me? (In which case, sometimes I think I'll be in for a hard time later. Forgiving those who have hurt us or those we love can be a hard one.)

But one night, as I was going through the prayer, it hit me kind of between the eyes that there was no "my" or "me" or "I" in there. In each line, it was the plural – us and we:

"OUR Father....

give US this day OUR daily bread...

Forgive US OUR trespasses....

lead US not into temptation,

deliver US from evil....

My head was reeling. I contacted Katrina, and asked about translation and wording. Yup. Plurals.

This was not taught by Jesus as a prayer just by me to God. It was about me as part of our community. That made it – at least for me – a whole different prayer that Jesus taught US.

It is a prayer about us in community, all of God's people.

It starts off noting that we are ALL God's created family. Not some of us, ALL of us,

Praying for our world to be the world as created by God, and following God's rules.

We then ask not simply for enough for ourselves each day, but that ALL can have what is needed. It's not a prayer for abundance, but for enough for each and every person.

The forgiveness we ask is from us - as a community - to others. Nothing about those others just being our friends and family. The implications of that for peace among all is kind of staggering.

We ask that all of us may avoid the temptations of not living as Jesus taught us to live: with love for all and mercy and kindness to all. For ALL of us to be protected from evil and bad things.

Suddenly I felt that every time I say this prayer, it is a reminder that in God's eyes, we – all of us – are in this together.

Wishing you all peace, love and that you have enough every day,
Janine Sullivan-Wiley

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

GWIM Monthly Food Contribution

This month, our contribution to GWIM is **jelly**. Thank you for your continued support!

Strawberry Festival

The Strawberry Festival was a tremendous success! Thanks to the Silent Auction, Raffle Baskets, and Treasure Table, the Missions Board raised an impressive **\$1,149** for the general fund—more than last year!

We are so grateful to everyone who donated beautiful baskets and quality items, and to all who worked hard to make the event such a wonderful team

effort. Your generosity and fellowship made it all possible. Thank you!

School Supplies for Wellmore Foundation

We will once again be supporting the children of the Wellmore Foundation by collecting school supplies this August.

While shopping this summer, please keep an eye out for deals on:

- Pencils, pens, erasers, sharpeners
- Markers (erasable, permanent), highlighters
- Glue sticks, glue, scissors, rulers
- Pencil pouches or boxes
- Notebooks, spiral notebooks, composition books
- Notebook paper, folders, pocket folders, dividers
- Assignment pads, backpacks

Supplies will be needed **by August 10th** so they can be delivered to Wellmore in time for distribution.

There's nothing quite like starting the school year with fresh supplies. Remember that feeling? Let's help these children experience that same excitement. Thank you for making their first day special!

Bless you all,
Mission Board
Carol Rollins

BUILDING FOR OUR FUTURE: UPDATES ON POTENTIAL CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Our church leadership is discerning whether we should do a capital campaign in 2026 to raise money for capital improvements. We've signed a contract with the United Church of Christ Church Building and Loan Fund to conduct a financial feasibility study to determine whether we successfully conduct a capital campaign. That study will be done the beginning of October.

The core projects most needed are to replace the church roof, repave the parking lot, repair the sidewalks, repaint the steeple, and replace funds spent to replace the parsonage roof in 2024. We're looking at needing to raise about \$240,000 minimum to complete all those mandatory improvements. In order to get a sense of what could be possible, we're also getting quotes for potential additional capital projects that would improve the church

facility but aren't as mandatory as, say, having the roof not leak. Some of the projects we're getting figures for are: replacement of the sanctuary balcony carpet, replacement of the floor in the ark/activities room, AC in the Social Hall, and replacement of the Social Hall floor.

TRUSTEES

As some of you know, this July we will be replacing the floor in the kitchen after water damage caused the tile to buckle and break. Because the floor underneath the current top layer of flooring is asbestos containing and the top layer of floor is too damaged to tile over, replacing the floor involves asbestos abatement. Our insurance is covering a decent portion of the costs, and we're hopeful that all the work should be completed while we're worshiping down at St. George's. Be on the lookout for an ask for volunteers to help move things out the kitchen ahead of the abatement work.

STEWARDSHIP

Last month, the Board of Stewardship announced our fall pledge campaign theme, On the Trail, with a short skit. We encouraged everyone to take pictures and tell the story of the trails you take this summer, whether those are paths in the woods or highways across the country.

Afterward, someone said that the trail is a great metaphor for our faith journeys but asked how we are planning to raise money with it. To be honest, we hadn't given that much thought. To us, stewardship isn't about fundraising. It's about using the time, talent, and treasure God has given us to accomplish MCC's four-point mission of Worship, Spiritual Growth, Service, and Fellowship.

As with summer vacation plans, money is a factor in our faith journey, but it's not the most important part. The places we go, the people we go with, and the memories we bring back are far more meaningful. Taken together, they can make us better people in an increasingly complicated and diverse world.

Whether on a vacation trip or a life journey, we have our choices of how to pay our way. Some people save up and budget for the trip, buying an all-expenses-paid cruise or tour. Some pay as they go. Others put it all on a credit card and pay it off in installments.

When something has value for us, we try to show our appreciation by chipping in—even when it's not expected. On the trail this summer, that

may mean buying a tankful of gas for a road trip, paying for meals when out with friends, bringing a hostess gift for a weekend at a friend's house, or sharing a campfire with strangers. Showing our gratitude makes the experience that much more valuable.

The same is true of our faith journey together. So, when traveling this summer, take a few pictures, write a sentence or two about your what the journey meant to you, and we'll share our collective thoughts this fall when we hit the stewardship trail together!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship



THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD

At this time of year, I find myself enjoying hymns that celebrate creation and God's natural world. "How Great Thou Art" and "When Morning Gilds the Skies" are good examples, but an even better example is "This Is My Father's World".

I especially like it because it was written by Presbyterian pastor Maltbie Babcock, who would specifically tell his wife that he was going out to walk in order to "see my Father's world".

Although he died at the early age of 43 (succumbing to complications of a bacterial infection), his friends eulogized him as one of the most optimistic and faithful men imaginable. This despite losing both sons in infancy and being called from the natural beauty of his beloved Niagara area to pastor a church in New York City.

A collection of his poems was published after his death (1901), and "My Father's World", set to music, quickly became a favorite hymn.

But one line from that hymn seems particularly fitting for our present day: "Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

1 This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:

I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--
His hand the wonders wrought.

2 This is my Father's world:
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

3 This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!
Have a wonderful summer in our Father's world.

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

OFFICE HOURS

Regular Office Hours: Wednesday & Friday, 1-5pm
The first week in July office hours are Wednesday, July 2nd & Thursday, July 3rd 1-5pm. The office will be closed Friday, July 4th.

MCC GOES TO THE YARD GOATS: FRIDAY, AUGUST 1ST, 7:10PM

We're looking to get a group together to go see a Yard Goats game. Tickets are around \$18 each, dependent on how many people we want to go. Please email Pastor Katrina (kmanzi@middleburyucc.org) if you're interested in going so we can get a headcount for what kind of tickets we should get. Tickets are being purchased on July 14th.

IMPORTANT DATES

7/4: Office closed

7/6: 10am Worship & Communion

7/13: 10am Worship: Guest Preacher the Rev. Rebecca Spencer
4:30-6:30pm Sundaes on Sunday (Social Hall)

7/20: 9:30am Worship @ St. George's Episcopal Church

7/27: 9:30am Worship @ St. George's Episcopal Church

8/1: MCC goes to the Yard



SUNDAES ON SUMMER SUNDAYS ARE BACK!!

Sunday July 13: 4:30-6:30

Sunday August 10: 4:30-6:30

*Join us in our MCC Social Hall as
we enjoy each other's company,
share a little ice cream, indulge in
homemade hot fudge sauce and
the highly anticipated return of
Erika's salted caramel sauce!
Bring a smile and a story to share*



...See you then!!

**Middlebury Congregational Church
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