

CHURCH LIFE

AUGUST 2025



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

FROM THE PASTOR

I hope all of you are getting a chance to enjoy the summer. We've been busy this past month at the church and parsonage getting various projects finished. The church kitchen floor was remediated for asbestos and replaced. The HVAC system for the church was repaired. The boys bathroom in the preschool was repainted. There were also a few places in the parsonage that had experienced water damage from before the roof was replaced. Those have finally all been repaired, and the bathrooms and kitchen have now been painted.

This past month, I attended the United Church of Christ General Synod. The UCC always manages to pack a lot into Synod, partially because I think they figure we can save on conventional hall rental if we just start things at 6:30am and finish at 9pm each day. My favorite part of Synod is always seeing many of my friends and colleagues who live in other parts of the country all in one place.

I also really appreciate getting to see examples of how we are part of the worldwide Body of Christ. This year leaders from our partner denominations in Canada and the Philippines offered the theological reflections, which are sort of shorter sermons that break up various parts of the business portion of Synod. America is such a big and powerful country, and it's important to hear from Christians outside of the U.S. to remind us that the Church is far bigger than one country and is doing good work everywhere.

The United Church of Christ was formed as a united and uniting church, meaning we are an intentionally ecumenical denomination. The UCC has also been out in front on a number of justice issues, which I also believe is good, but I personally always been most compelled by the founding church unity and ecumenical goals of the UCC. After a number of Synods without any major ecumenical news to share, at this Synod we entered into two new full communion agreements: one with the Evangelical Church in Germany and another with the United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico. (Our last agreement was from 2015 with the United Church of Canada.)

One of the reasons I find the ecumenical movement and ecumenical work compelling is because it's a conscious choice to focus on what Christians can do together rather than focusing on how we're different or think each other wrong. I think sometimes in our personal lives and certainly in our current political climate, we often can get extremely hung up on what we

disagree about. Our culture amplifies culture war topics and ideas that are divisive. We are encouraged to take sides, to build identities on who is like us and who is different. But, imagine if that energy were instead focused on actually trying to accomplish things together that we all agree are important.

The full communion agreement with the United Evangelical Church in Puerto Rico was particularly important because that denomination had been part of the United Church of Christ until they left after the Synod voted in 2005 to permit same-sex marriage. It wasn't a pleasant breakup, and there were hurt feelings on both sides. But this year, 20 years later, we voted to be in full communion with one another.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the world working for unity and good; it can just sometimes take us a long time to hear what the Spirit has been saying. So, I think there's hope for all of us in our divided world, but we need to be open to the possibility of relationship, even with people who wouldn't be our first choice.

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

BUILDING FOR OUR FUTURE: UPDATES ON POTENTIAL CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

On Sunday, September 14th after worship, we will have an informational meeting about the current capital needs of the church property and the upcoming financial feasibility study in October for determining the feasibility of a capital campaign.



THE DEACONS' BENCH

Years ago the New York Times interviewed retired U.S. tennis player Michael Chang about his 1989 legendary French Open match against #1 ranked tennis legend Ivan Lendl. At the time, Chang was 17 year's old, with few thinking he had much chance in winning. Down two sets and battling nearly debilitating leg cramps (the match is won best out of five sets), Chang reflects in the interview that he considered forfeiting but as he approached the chair umpire, he realized that if he quit in this moment, he would likely quit in future matches. He describes a "conviction" to press on, despite his pain and exhaustion, and what appeared to be imminent defeat. What many

remember about this match is not what was going through his mind (for how could anyone know), but how he changed his strategies during the match. He hit returns higher in the air to slow the game down, and famously used an under-hand serve. All totally legal play, yet completely unexpected, and it worked, throwing Lendl off his game. Chang won the next three sets in a row to win the match, and become the youngest player ever to win a singles major.

Yes, this is a reference to a famous tennis match, yet there is something about Chang's "conviction" to fight despite the apparent odds that makes it an intriguing metaphor for some of the battles we fight in our lives and in our faith journeys. One does not need to be a professional tennis player in this kind of match to understand what it feels like to stand in some seasons of life in pain and exhausted, perhaps even down enough "sets" that the whole match might be lost ... and yet feel a conviction inside that whispers *don't give up* and *time to try a new strategy*. Here is the greatest news for Christians: we already have the winning strategies, through Jesus Christ, to fight the battles we face. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he spells out the match strategy in detail, and hands us not only the defensive strategies to protect ourselves, but the one offensive weapon to win. The amazing part is that we do not yield this offensive weapon ourselves to fight our battles, it is taken up for us.

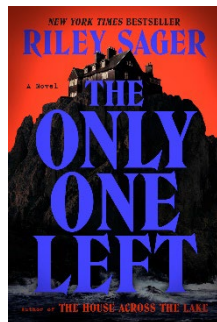
This Fall (dates to be determined), the Deacons will host a discussion on the armor of God. We will consider what Paul is communicating to us about this armor, and review the one offensive weapon available to all of us. Because it is so important to know, we will likely host two sessions to ensure folks have opportunity to come. I believe it could profoundly affect how you think about the power of God's word, and prayer.

On behalf of Deacons
Michele Rowell Finn

MCC Book Club

Please join us for our MCC Book Club on Thursday, August 28th at 6:00p.m. in the Parlor. In August, we will be discussing *The Only One Left* by Riley Sager.

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





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!!*

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

GWIM Monthly Food Contribution for August:

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

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

BRINGING BACK SUMMER SOUVENIRS

Our Stewardship theme this year, "On the Trail," asks us to think about the paths we take through life as part of our faith journey. We hope your trails this summer have been interesting and inspiring.

For Barbara and me, our trails this summer are taking us up and down highways to our place—and her summer job—in Vermont.

These interstates, although scenic and usually serene, aren't show-and-tell material. But Barbara was inspired by a fossil trail through a preserve on nearby Isle La Motte. Of course we've taken snapshots, but the fossils, some of the oldest in the world, are protected archaeological artifacts.

This sparked her interest in fossils enough to learn more. She researched with books on the subject and visited other sites and museums. She even browsed a rocks, minerals, and fossils show when it came to the Champlain Fairgrounds. There she found some privately owned fossils and minerals for sale that we could take home.

Whether you're hiking, riding, or just sight-seeing this summer, keep alert to the trails you find and follow. Take pictures and maybe bring home some small souvenirs to share during our social hours this fall. Tell us (stewardship@middleburyucc.org) what you have and want to show. Together we'll work find a way for you to show everyone your journeys and what they mean to you.

What does this what-I-did-during-summer-vacation exercise have to do with stewardship? I knew you'd ask.

Every joy, every adventure, every bit of history or wonder, is a gift from God. We should be open and grateful for that.

And one of the ways we show gratitude is by the time, treasure, and talent we give back to our church and faith community. Do we put as much into our church as we do into vacations?

Maybe we should.

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship

MUSIC NOTES

As we transition into the later weeks of summer, I've noticed the mornings brighten a little later and the sun sets a little earlier and the deep blue skies have that brightness that you notice when summer moves into its fulfillment. It's had me thinking of the hymn, "When Morning Gilds the Skies". I know the history of many hymns, but not this one, so I looked it up.

The origin of the original hymn text (in German) has been lost to history, but it was appearing in Catholic hymnals in the early 1800's. When Catholic convert (and former Anglican clergyman) Edward Caswall skillfully translated it into English in 1854 and it got a new tune in 1868, it quickly

gained in popularity. When it was adopted into Methodist hymnals, many others followed.

But as much as the lovely text, I think that the very effective tune is equally responsible for its popularity. Sir Joseph Barnby set the lyrics to his own tune (the one we sing now) to be sung in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

Notice two things-

The first two phrases of the hymn rise from low notes to higher notes calling to mind the rising of the sun.

The final notes and words of the hymn are at a slower speed and are sung on the highest notes of the entire hymn. So as we sing it, we end by singing "Christ be praised" at the tops of our voices and at the most deliberate pace.

Here's one of the verses that is omitted in our hymnal:

*My tongue shall never tire
Of chanting in the choir;
May Jesus Christ be praised:
This song of sacred joy
It never seems to cloy;
May Jesus Christ be praised.*

Blessings on these late summer mornings,
Donna Obarowski



MCC'S VERY OWN MARCHEL DUCHAMP
PRESENTS
THE MCC

DINNER & VARIETY SHOW

Find a talented partner or perform solo, but plan to save the date for a WORLD-CLASS dinner and a night of laughs, songs, and genuine entertainment.

If you are saying, "Put me in, Coach, I was born for this then get busy tuning that unicycle or polishing that ACCORDION!"

For more information on being a part of our show, tickets or information:
Contact the MCC office at 203-758-2671 or Ellen (spirit2000@aol.com) for more information.



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25 AT 6 PM

Middlebury Congregational Church



SHINE LIKE A STAR

FAITH FORMATION & YOUTH GROUP

Summer is quiet as Sunday School is not in session, but we love still seeing the young faces joining their family in Sunday service!

MCC Youth Group: At the end of June, the Youth Group took a field trip to *Escapism*, where they enjoyed a one-hour escape room experience, followed by pizza and snacks. This outing was a small way to thank them for their hard work and willingness to step up and volunteer around the church. Each of you plays an important role in the life of the MCC community, and we are so grateful for your contributions!



VBS: VBS came back in full swing this summer with five fun-filled days of songs, arts & crafts, science experiments, recreation, and friendships. A huge thank you to Brittany Romaniello for directing the program this year, and to all of our volunteer teachers and counselors—VBS wouldn't have been possible without you!

Sara Hubbard
Faith Formation Volunteer Coordinator

IMPORTANT DATES

8/10: 4:30-6:30pm Sundaes on Sunday

9/7: Homecoming Sunday

10/25: 6pm Dinner & Variety Show

Through the Years A Homecoming of Gratitude

SUN 7 SEPT

FOLLOWING A SPECIAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP

~ *Save the Date* ~

We can't wait to see you at our very special Homecoming Celebration! We will honor our members old and new and enjoy a delicious picnic on the Green!

Hot dogs on the grill, corn chowder, our now-famous lobster rolls and plenty of music, refreshments, fun and extras!

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

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