

CHURCH LIFE

OCTOBER 2025



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

FROM THE PASTOR

As I write, the leaves on the trees outside my office window are just beginning to change. My favorite tree, the one in front of the parsonage, is always a bit behind everything else. It won't turn orange until the very end of October/beginning of November. When that tree is at peak color is, in my opinion, the most beautiful the Green gets.

Fall means it's the season for a couple different things at church. It's the start of the program year and Sunday School year. And, it's also the time of year the church starts preparing financially for the new calendar year; it's the time of year for the Stewardship Campaign, where we all decide and plan for how we're going to financially support the church in the coming year.

Different religions and Christian denominations have various systems for figuring out how to support their work and worship. Synagogues usually have dues based on income. Some churches have people give each week without bringing up a specified amount. Colonial practice for churches like ours was to figure out the budget for the year and then set rent amounts for each of the pews to cover the budget. The more expensive pews were at the front and more economical pews were at the back, and people paid to rent the pew that best went with their income. (If we ran on that system today, we'd have to reverse things and charge more for the back pews!)

Currently, our church, like many protestant churches, uses a pledge system to fund our work and worship. We each are asked to look at our expected resources for the year and prayerfully decide how much we will give. This information then helps the church plan for the year, and it also gives each of us an opportunity to direct our giving with intention.

Most people don't really like to talk about money in church, but money is a major feature of human life. So, it's part of the life of the church. Scripture talks about money a lot too, usually regarding money being allocated justly or the dangers of loving money at the expense of everything else. (The scripture lessons from the Revised Common Lectionary for this year since the summer and through the

fall have been talking about money a lot.) What we spend our time and money on reflects what we value, so taking time to reflect and plan how we spend our money allows us opportunity to make sure our professed values line up with our actions.

So, how much should we give to the church? A traditional biblical approach is to tithe, or give 10% of our income. Giving 10% is a goal I've been working towards the past few years, and I'm not quite there yet. When I started here, I started my giving at about 5%, and I'm at about 9% currently. Personally, I like giving a percentage because it gives me a target, and it helps me think about how I'm spending my money overall.

Another option is to look at our spending in other areas of our lives and see how our financial pledge to the church compares (e.g. utility bills, discretionary spending, vacations, sports fees, etc.) If I'm spending more on things like eating at restaurants, for example, than I am donating to the church, what does that tell me about I'm valuing and investing in, etc. My college chaplain usually said we should give enough money to the church such that we notice it's gone. If we don't even notice the money from our pledge when we pay it, then that's a sign that we can increase our giving.

On a theological level, our giving reflects the truth that Psalm 24:1 tells us: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." All that we see and all that we have, even our lives, belongs to God. Everything that we have is a gift we hold in trust. So, our giving is an acknowledgement of all of that. No matter how much money we have, we all have the capacity to give a meaningful amount for our financial situations, from a few dollars to well beyond that. If you value the community, worship, and work here at MCC, I encourage you to make a pledge of an amount that is meaningful to you.

This old hymn sums up everything I've been trying to say quite nicely:

“We give thee but thine own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is thine alone,
a trust, O Lord, from thee.

May we thy bounties thus
as stewards true receive,
and gladly, as thou blessest us,
to thee our first fruits give.”

Peace,
Katrina Manzi
Minister

READ THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE WITH THE CONFIRMATION CLASS

As part of Confirmation Class, our confirmands will be reading the gospel according to Luke throughout the program year. Everyone is welcome to read Luke at home along with the class.

October: read chapters 1-2

November: chapters 3-6

December: chapters 7-8

January: chapters 9-10

February: chapters 11-14

March: chapters 15-18

April: chapters 19-22

May: chapters 23-24

We also need adult volunteers to be the second adult for confirmation classes offered after church from 11:30-12:30. All you have to do is attend the class. It's a great way to learn some new things and a chance to get to know some of the kids in our church better! If you're interested in volunteering, contact Pastor Katrina (kmanzi@Middleburyucc.org.)

NAMES FOR ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY 11/2

On November 2nd, during worship we will be observing the feast of All Saints. We will read the names of those who have died, particularly those who have died in the past year. If you would like a name included in worship, please send it to Pastor Katrina so it can be included on the list (kmanzi@middleburyucc.org)

BUILDING FOR OUR FUTURE: UPDATES ON POTENTIAL CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

October 6-8 the United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund will be conducting interviews as part of a financial feasibility study with our congregation to determine whether we could successfully undertake a capital campaign in 2026 to pay for important capital improvements the church property currently needs and to raise funds for future improvements and maintenance. Once we have the results of the report and church leadership is able to discuss the findings, we will update the church on next steps.

We had an informational meeting about the church's capital needs and where things stand on September 14th. The handout from that meeting is reproduced here in Church Life:

Building for Our Future MCC Capital Needs Informational Meeting 9/14

How We Got Here

- Our physical plant is a great resource for us to do ministry here in Middlebury, and our church has been diligent in investing in and maintaining our physical plant.
- MCC has a dedicated investment fund for maintaining and improving our physical plant: the Third Century Fund
 - In the past decades, that fund has been spent down using the money for its intended purpose. A selection of recent capital projects completed (last 8 years) using Third Century Funds without an accompanying capital campaign:
 - Repainting the front of the meetinghouse
 - Renovating the Men's and Women's bathrooms in the Social Hall

- Renovating the kitchenette in the Ark/Activities Room
- Repainting and repairing plaster in the entire parsonage
- Replacing the parsonage roof (funded partially from unrestricted investment funds due to the Third Century Fund being depleted)
- Repainting the parsonage garage
- Repaving the portion of the parking lot in front of the office door
- Rebuilding and capping the parsonage chimney
- Renovating the kitchen in the Social Hall
- Various smaller painting projects around the entire church campus

Where We Are

- A number of the major capital improvements to the church property were made 20-30 years ago and are reaching the end of their intended lifespan.
- The Third Century Fund doesn't have the funds to continue to support capital projects.
- We have the opportunity to continue to invest in the stewardship of our buildings to ensure future generations aren't faced with daunting deferred maintenance.
- MCC Capital Projects that must be completed in the near future:
 - Replacement of the pitched and flat roof on the main church building: \$110k
 - Repaving of the parking lot: \$56k
 - Repainting the steeple: \$26k
 - Repairing/replacing church sidewalks: \$8k
 - Repaving ourselves for the parsonage roof replacement: \$35k
- Additional potential Capital Improvements (non exhaustive and not finalized)
 - Repainting the sanctuary
 - Replacement of sanctuary carpet in the balcony and stairs
 - Replacement of the Ark/Activities room floor
 - AC in Social Hall
 - AC in Sanctuary
- **We're looking at needing at least \$350k to complete necessary projects and to have funds for future capital investment**

What Comes Next

- Our church leadership is discerning whether it is time for us to do a capital campaign to raise necessary funds.
- We have contracted with the United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund to conduct a financial feasibility study with us in October (10/6-10/8) to determine whether we would be able to successfully undertake a capital campaign in 2026.
 - Financial Feasibility Study Includes:
 - Reviewing our financial information
 - 20 interviews (multiple people interviewed per slot) with a representative sample of church members and leaders to do the following:
 - Gauge the overall wellbeing of the congregation
 - Take the temperature of the congregation about a capital campaign
 - Measure awareness of the capital projects the church is considering
 - Potentially identify donors and capital campaign leaders & volunteers
 - In the coming weeks we will be reaching out individually to members to participate in interviews
 - If the study comes back that we're in good shape to begin a capital campaign, we would likely contract with the Church Building & Loan Fund for them to serve as consultants for a capital campaign for winter/spring of 2026, and their capital campaign process is 14 weeks. Pledges for the campaign would be paid typically over the course of 3 years.

What You Can Do

- Sign up to be interviewed for the financial feasibility study!
- Consider if you'd be interested/willing to volunteer for running a capital campaign.
- Experience a large financial windfall (it never hurts to hope!)

FAITH FORMATION

Sunday School kicked off on **Celebration Sunday** with a special project! The children made ribboned cross bookmarks, which were placed in the pews for everyone to use in the hymnals, keep your eye out for them! In September, they learned about the power of prayer and also listening for and hearing God.

A big thank you to **Thomas Zold** for teaching his first class, and to **Pam, Erin, Katie, Liz, Robbie, Kris, and Shaelyn** for volunteering in our classrooms! We are so grateful for your leadership and support. And thank you to all the **parents** for registering your children, encouraging their participation, and helping the Sunday School program grow!

That said, we are still in need of **Sunday School teachers**. Even helping for just one Sunday makes a difference—please consider volunteering if you're able. Materials provided!

Looking ahead, **Youth Group kicks off October 10th** with our first gathering of the season.

If you haven't registered your child for Sunday School yet, please do so soon. For questions or to volunteer, contact sarahubbardmcc@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Sara Hubbard, Faith Formation



THE DEACONS' BENCH

The Fall Equinox and the first day of Autumn arrived here on Monday 09/22/2025 at 2:19p.m. The word Fall can be used as both a noun and a verb

with these abbreviated meanings 1) drop from a high place to lower, 2) becoming lower or less, 3) loss of power, or in our case, 4) a season.

This past summer, while in Maine, my wife and I travelled to Baxter State Park and walked a trail in a light rain. This reported easier trail

was a rocky climb with points of level terrain and narrow planks over wet landscape. It was a 1/2 hour hike from trailhead to terminous. Our projected hope was to spot a Moose in a mountain summit lake. The other potential use of the word fall was ever mindful both to enter and exit this trail. I had wished I'd secured a walking stick.

Aging has taught me that occasional use of a walking stick can give me an extra point of contact with the ground for needed stability. A walking stick in life can be provided by your faith and church community. Together we can stay grounded as we walk this treacherous path of life to God's promise of salvation. I'm okay admitting and seeking the Holy Trinity as my 3 points of contact to this promise. Let us together, also support and love each other on our shared journey.

The Scripture

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver? The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he. The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.

Proverbs 16:16-22

I heard the Voice of Jesus

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise
And all thy days be bright.

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my star, my sun,
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till traveling days be done.

Horatius Bonar.

Respectively Submitted for the Board of Deacons by Mike Granja

FROM THE MISSION BOARD

Soup Kitchen Contribution

October's monthly food contribution for the GWIM Soup Kitchen is **Dutch Egg Noodles and Elbows.**

October Blood Drive

We will be hosting another blood drive on **Saturday, October 11th, from 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM.**

If you would like to help at the snack table, please let us know — we would love your assistance!

Upcoming Events

November Sandwich Project

In November, we continue our tradition of providing **150 sandwiches** to GWIM's food kitchen. This is the one day Barbara gives her staff off, so she personally distributes sandwiches to her clients.

We will assemble the sandwiches on **Sunday, November 9th, during coffee hour.** Everyone is welcome to join in!

Thanksgiving & Christmas Dinner Baskets

We will once again be providing dinner baskets for Middlebury families in need for both Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Star Tree for Wellmore Children

As we get closer to the holidays, we will share the number of children we'll be helping with Christmas gifts.

All of us on the Mission Board sincerely thank you for your generosity. Your continued support helps us meet the needs of these children and families in our community.

Bless you all,
Mission Board
Carol Rollins

THREE IMPORTANT WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHURCH

This month, you will have three opportunities to share your time, talents, and treasure to strengthen our Middlebury Congregational Church faith community.

First, annual pledge drive mailings will go out to all members early in the month. This year's theme, *On the Trail*, asks you to consider your personal faith journey and MCC's role within that. Your church is a faith community, but like any community it requires leadership, infrastructure, and a place to meet. We budget for those things during our annual meeting in January, based on the amounts our members pledge in the fall. When you receive our pledge mailing this month, please give it your prayerful consideration.

The second opportunity is the feasibility study the church is conducting with the help of the United Church of Christ Building & Loan Fund. We want to know whether the church can support a three-year campaign to raise \$350,000, beyond the roughly \$120,000 we raise each year in our fall pledge campaign. This is distinct from the annual Stewardship campaign and will be conducted by other church leaders after the end of the year. Please give both campaigns your prayerful thought. We need to support our current efforts while building toward the future.

The third opportunity is a personal invitation from Barbara and me to take a leadership role in the church next year. Our second three-year term on the Board of Stewardship will end with this annual meeting and we will be unable to continue next year because of other commitments. We've greatly enjoyed working with Drew and ShawnaLee Kwashnak on the board and have had a blast creating Stewardship campaigns with them. Now we hope other volunteers will step up to fill our vacancy and bring your talents and ideas. Please contact the Nominating Committee if you are interested.

Many thanks!

Howard Fielding for the Board of Stewardship



Marcel DuChamps and The MCC Players present:

FALL VARIETY

&

HARVEST DINNER SHOW

October 25, 2025

6:00 PM

Middlebury Congregational Church

HARVEST DINNER

Caesar Salad

Beef Bourguignone, classically prepared

OR

Stuffed Portobello Mushroom

Indulgent Mashed Potatoes

Seasonal Vegetables

Coffee, Tea, Cold Beverages

Dessert

*Children's Option Available

Tickets available now \$25.00

Call or email today to reserve your seat for a night of entertainment you won't forget!

MCC office: office@middleburyucc.org

203-758-2671

Ellen: Spirit2000@aol.com

203-217-5363



We are looking for YOU!

Our **Variety Show** is just around the corner (October 25th)! We are looking for highly talented, moderately talented, or questionably talented folks to help us make the show fun for all!

Whether you can sing, dance, tell a joke, show off your karate black belt or ride your unicycle... *We are looking for YOU!*

Call the church office at (203-758-2671) or email the office at office@middleburyucc.org

Or call Ellen (203-217-5363) or email Ellen at spirit2000@aol.com

Tell your book group, your co-workers or your golf partners.
Reserve your spot today!

MUSIC NOTES

Here we are in the beautiful season of Autumn!

As we plan worship for all of you, we are naturally incorporating many of hymns that relate to the harvest season, culminating in the uniquely American holiday of Thanksgiving (now duplicated in other countries).

Interestingly, many of the seasonal hymns we sing are not American, but English, which doesn't have Thanksgiving as a holiday, But there is a long-standing tradition of "harvest" music, which celebrates the

agrarian history of England and continues the custom of harvest celebrations pre-dating Christianity.

What I'd like you observe is the secondary message of many of these hymn texts. Many of these texts speak to not only the agricultural harvest but also the final harvest of souls.

As many of the scripture readings in the Common Lectionary (our book of suggested lessons) suggested for this time of year speak of the end-times, the final judgement and the important teachings about sin, this is not really surprising. It makes these hymns resonate with both the season and the scripture lessons of these months.

Here are three examples:

From "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come": "Even so, Lord, quickly come, raise your final harvest home."

From "Sing to the Lord of Harvest": "Bring to this sacred altar the gifts His goodness gave, the golden sheaves of harvest, the souls He died to save."

From "We Plow the Fields": "Accept what you most welcome: our humble, thankful hearts."

Enjoy all the music of the season.

Blessings,
Donna Obarowski

IMPORTANT DATES

- 10/5:** 10am World Communion Sunday Worship
- 10/6-10/8:** Financial Feasibility Study Interviews conducted
- 10/10:** All Church Campfire Night (Parsonage Yard)
- 10/11:** 8am-1:30pm Red Cross Blood Drive (Social Hall)
- 10/12:** 10am Worship
- 10/19:** 10am Worship
- 10/21:** 6:30pm Litchfield South Association Fall Meeting & Dinner
(Milton Congregational Church, Litchfield)
- 10/25:** 6pm Dinner & Variety Show
- 10/26:** 10am Reformation Sunday Worship

HOMEcoming PHOTO



MCC Group Photo. ©ShawnaLee Kwashnak, 09/07/2025.

**Middlebury Congregational Church
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