



**THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

STEEPLE

34 Church Street
Monroe, CT 06468

Tel.: (203) 268-9327
Fax: (203) 268-3153

Office Hours:
Mon. Wed. Fri.
9:00a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras
Director of Faith Formation: Debi Mastroni-Kenyon
Music Director: Will Duchon
Administrator/Bookkeeper: Diane Prall
Church e-mail: secretary@mcc-ucc.org

January 1, 2020

STAR words: A spiritual practice for Epiphany



Here at MCC, it has become a tradition to pass out “star words” on the Sunday we celebrate Epiphany. On the day that we remember the star that led the magi to Jesus, we pass out pieces of paper cut into star shapes with one printed word. What I didn’t realize four years ago when we first passed out these stars was the impact they would have on my life.

The first word I drew in 2016 was **SANCTIFICATION**. To be honest - I wanted to throw it back! What was that supposed to mean, for me, a pastor? Am I not enough the way that I am that now I’ve got to seek after something as hard as **SANCTIFICATION**? It made me think about being what it takes to made into a saint, and the sacrifice that just seems like too much. These words were supposed to be a gift, but this did not feel like one to me. And yet, over time the word continued to work on my heart and mind.

Other words I received included **CARING** (2017), **OPTIMISM** (2018) and **IMPROVEMENT** (2019). The stars have allowed me to see God in unexpected ways and places. They’ve been challenging, life-giving and transformative. In those years, I think MCC has practiced all of those concepts as we’ve worked towards becoming even more vital to our community. Personally, I’ve seen each of these words manifest in my family’s life as we became therapeutic foster parents who adopted an older special needs child. As I reflect upon seeing these words as blessings and gifts, it helps me look forward with hope to the future that lies ahead.

I’m not one for New Year’s resolutions because (let’s be honest) they always seem to fail. Instead, these star words have become my practice for the New Year. Instead of making a resolution that I’ll feel guilty about a week later, I’ll take a star word as a gift and keep my eyes open. How has your word from last year influenced you? What new word are you hoping for in 2020?

At church on Epiphany Sunday (January 5th), we'll have our Young Adults (post high school – 30) lead us in worship. We'll have a basket of STAR words for 2020 for you to choose from. I hope that you find time to marvel at God's spirit working through these paper stars. Like the magi, these words allow us all to go home by another road, our eyes opened to God's presence in and around us.

In peace, Pastor Jenn

Resolve

The season of Advent provided a focus of devotion and preparation for the celebration of Christmas. The promise of Emmanuel, "God with us", was anticipated through themes of hope, peace, joy and love. The lessons and carols and candles of Christmas marked with rejoicing God's powerful love for all of God's people, and the gift of the holy baby in the manger.

The church year continues the celebration in the season of Christmastide, which carries us into the New Year. It is followed by Epiphany, a season which remembers and celebrates the visit of the Wise Men, the baptism of Jesus, and the wedding at Cana. These are occasions when the divine power of Jesus was recognized by others.

Epiphany is also a season of light, marking the very gradual lengthening of days after the winter solstice.

How might we nurture the spirit of Advent and the wonder of Christmas and the powerful recognition of Jesus Christ in Epiphany? The days will be cold, the darkness will lighten so slowly, and the echoes of carols and the scent of candles will fade.

The answer is resolve. We must each resolve to maintain the hope, to carry the wonder, to watch for the glimpses of Jesus' power. We are all familiar with the idea of resolutions at the New Year. We want to take advantage of a new beginning, a fresh start, a blank page. The regular cycle of New Year's resolutions prompts a feeling of mistrust, since so often New Year's resolutions are recognized as so easily and frequently broken.

We might, this year, resolve to live in the hope of God's love. We might resolve to live in active trust in the grace and new life Jesus Christ brings us. I received an interesting story by e-mail during Advent suggesting that happiness does not need to depend on circumstances and how things turn out; it can be determined ahead of time. We might resolve to make happiness and hope and peace and joy and love our intention. In the midst of difficulty and challenge, in the grip of loneliness and loss, we can resolve to remember who we are in Christ Jesus – God's people, no longer in darkness.

Happy New Year! Make your resolutions!

Debi



2020 Stewardship Campaign: It's a Wonder-FULL Life

Our generosity directly funds the mission and ministry of putting our faith in action here at the Monroe Congregational Church. Some of you have already submitted commitment cards with your pledge for 2020, and we are grateful for your support!

To date, we have received 79 pledges for a total of

\$182,748. *If your monthly or weekly pledge goes through Vanco, please fill out a pledge card so we can update our records for 2020.*

The goal of this year's stewardship campaign is to increase our pledge base by 10%, so that we can decrease our reliance on the endowment. We can reach our goal if those who have not pledged in the past join their neighbors and friends and submit a pledge – and/or – if those who already pledge increase theirs by 10%. **We are thrilled to share that 36 of our pledgers so far have taken the challenge and increased, many by 10% or more! And there are 7 new pledgers!** Let's keep all this forward momentum going and be grateful for such a generous church!

If you haven't had a chance to pledge yet, we invite you to complete and returning an estimate of giving card for 2020 in the plate or through the mail. Thank you for prayerfully considering how to financially support the Monroe Congregational Church in 2020.

~ Your Stewardship Committee, John O'Rourke (Receiver), Liz Sampson, Pastor Jenn



If you'd like to **give online** during worship (or anytime), simply scan this QR code, which will take you to our VANCO electronic giving page. Thank you so much for your support!

Have YOU turned in your annual report?

Annual Reports Due January 10th

Please submit your annual report to the church office by Friday, January 10th
Please call the church office with any questions. 203-268-9327 or email
secretary@mcc-ucc.org

Church Council

Annual Meeting of the Congregation

The members of Monroe Congregational Church are hereby called to attend the Annual Meeting of the Congregation to be held January 26th at 11:15 am, in the Meeting House. The agenda for this meeting will include Receiving of Reports, Election of Officers, Board Members and Delegates, Adoption of the 2020 budget, and any other business that must properly come before the Congregation.
Child care will be available.

In September, the Church Council adopted a "SafeConduct" policy. This policy replaced the "Safe Church" policy that had been in effect since 2007 to help ensure that all people in MCC's various programs would be safe from any form of abuse. The new policy takes into account many best practices that have been learned by churches and other organizations over the past several years. To get the word out, Don Parker-Burgard, a

member of the SafeConduct Committee, will be writing a series of articles for The Steeple about various aspects of the policy.

SafeConduct: Physical contact

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kate and I were fans of a folk singer named Fred Small. He had a song about a therapist, Dan, who hugged his patients at the beginning and end of every session. Small's song included these lines:

*I want a hug when we say hello
 I want a hug when it's time to go
 I want a hug 'cause I want you to know
 I'm awfully fond of you.*

Dan was clearly different from the stereotypical detached and analytical therapist, and Small thought of him as a hero. What Small learned after he released the song and began performing it for audiences was that many of his listeners had had unpleasant, even traumatic, experiences of receiving unwanted hugs from therapists, teachers, pastors, and other people in various situations of power. He soon stopped performing the song altogether.

I thought about this song as Debi Mastroni-Kenyon, Cady Gingras, and I were putting together the new SafeConduct policy. I think Fred Small's experience can help us with our own feelings of annoyance when our genuine behaviors of affection are questioned. He wrote a catchy song that celebrated the healing power of human touch—and then had to stop singing it after he learned how many listeners had been touched inappropriately by people who had some kind of power over them. Since Small's experience in the 1980s, however, we have learned that the problem of sexual abuse (which includes inappropriate touching) is appallingly large. Given that reality, it's important for us to use the power of touch with great care.

The SafeConduct policy includes this statement: "MCC encourages appropriate physical contact with minors and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact." But what's appropriate and what's inappropriate? The policy gives some helpful examples:

Appropriate Physical Interactions	Inappropriate Physical Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Side hugs ● Shoulder-to-shoulder or "temple" hugs ● Pats on the shoulder or back ● Handshakes ● High-fives and hand slapping ● Pats on the head when culturally appropriate ● Touching hands, shoulders, and arms ● Arms around shoulders ● Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full-frontal hugs ● Kisses ● Showing affection in isolated area ● Lap sitting ● Wrestling ● Piggyback rides ● Tickling ● Allowing a youth to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg ● Any type of massage given by or to a youth ● Any form of affection that is unwanted ● Compliments relating to physique or body development ● Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

The power of touch can damage as well as build up. In our displays of affection with the young people and others among us, let us always desire first and foremost to build them up.

Trustees



Thanks to the generosity of **Susan "Babka" Zaleha's** family and friends, we are pleased to announce that the Trustees were able to have ordered and installed a **new double-convection oven**. Baking at Christmas time was something she loved to do with her family. Some of you attended her fruitcake making workshop in 2018! You might remember that Sue was responsible for bringing the shortcake and pie recipes to MCC for our very first Strawberry Festivals nearly 50 years ago. We believe that it would make Sue smile to know that your gifts in her memory will enable us to bake delicious treats and meals in the MCC kitchen for many more years to come!

Outreach



Attention Mustard Seed Volunteers -please attend be a short, but important meeting in the Mustard Seed at 11:15 am on January 12th -thank you!

The Bridgeport Rescue Mission fights poverty from the inside out as they embrace the urban poor and addicted with the compassion of Christ, offering hope and healing for a changed life. We provide more than 450,000 meals each year through our dining room, food pantry, and mobile kitchens. Can you help? There is a bin located in Rexford Hall to drop off donations. Thank you for your generosity.

We are in need of:

Boxed macaroni & cheese	
Canned green beans, peas, & corn	Boxed rice
Canned sweet and white potatoes	Boxed cold cereal
Canned tuna & chicken	Pasta and sauce



Giving to Heifer International provides extraordinary gifts.

With your spare change we purchase animals which are sent to families. It's like giving someone a small business: providing wool, milk, eggs and more. These animal donations provide families a hand up, increasing access to medicine, school, food and a sustainable

livelihood. Morning Circle has a collection bottle on the coffee table which will be available until the end of the year. Your spare change can change and support the lives of families in need all over the world. Please contact Susie Cuseo at thecuseos@yahoo.com or 203-268-0280 with any questions and thank you for your generosity.

Fellowship



There's a new club in town!

Join the Yarn Group on January 13th 6:30 to 8:30 pm



Morning Circle: We will not meet in January or February. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, March 11 at 11AM. Birthday bags for the Food Pantry will be put together. Donations of cake mixes, frosting, birthday candles and birthday napkins would be greatly appreciated. You can leave them in the bin outside the Men's room. Please contact Jackie Bleakney at 203-268-0280 with any questions.



Happy New Year from Young at Heart! Details for January to be announced.



Please join us for the **MCC Book Club!**

January 20th-7:30pm The Rules of Civility by Amor Towles-Hosted by Dianne Griffiths in Dineson Parlor



Faith on Tap, Friday, January 3rd: Come talk about life and current events from a spiritual perspective at VERACIOUS BREWING COMPANY from 7:30 - 9pm. All are welcome.

Agreement is not required, but civility is essential. Tea-totelers and soda drinkers welcome too! The January theme is "*Remembering MLK*" Call/text Clark (203-895-5604) or Rev. Jenn (203-895-5607) Gingras with any questions.



Would you like to honor or remember a loved one, or celebrate a milestone? You can do so, while also helping Monroe Congregational Church continue its tradition of fresh flowers on the altar. Please see Ann Zeiner or sign up on the "flower list" poster inside Wilton Hall.



Sponsor a Month of Coffee Hours Would you like to help the people who come to worship get to know each other? What if we told you that you could sponsor a month of coffee hours at the low, low price of \$40? Our coffee is fair trade certified through Equal Exchange. You can use your sponsorship to honor loved ones – a dedication goes on a plaque and in the bulletin. Please make checks payable to MCC with "coffee sponsor" in the memo field. Thank you.



The MCC Coffee House Save the date and practice your act for the MCC Coffeehouse, to be held Saturday, February 8th from 7-9 pm. Sign up ASAP in Wilton Hall!



PF Chili Cook Off

Saturday, February 22nd in Wilton Hall Details TBA



Souper Bowl of Caring

In 1990, a Super Bowl Sunday prayer inspired a group of young people to do something more than celebrate a football game. They created the Souper Bowl of Caring, and have mobilized youth across the country to raise more than \$100 million for people in need.

2020 is the 20th Anniversary of the Souper Bowl of Caring and the Sr. and Jr. Pilgrim Fellowships are teaming up to learn about hunger and food insecurity in the United States and collect food and money to fight hunger.

On Sunday February 2, 2020 millions of Americans will tune in to the Super Bowl football game. There will be parties with abundant food, friendship and fellowship. At the same time, there will be people worrying about staying warm, finding shelter and a warm meal.

Please join our young people as they demonstrate God's love by loving their neighbors through the Souper Bowl of Caring. There are two ways you can participate:

1. On February 2nd, after worship, we will have a "Souper" Day where you can give a free will offering in exchange for a bowl of soup prepared by chefs Kelsey Kaminski (Maiolo) and Debi Mastroni-Kenyon. AND/OR
2. We will be collecting non-perishable food items throughout January. When you bring food to donate please let Debi know so you can earn a voucher for soup on February 2nd.

For more information or if you have any questions please contact Debi or Kelsey. For more information on the Souper Bowl of Caring visit www.tacklehunger.org

Christian Faith Formation



Epiphany Party

We will be having our Annual Epiphany Party on Saturday, January 11th, from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. This is a party to celebrate the arrival of the Three Wise folks to the baby Jesus – declaring him the Messiah! The afternoon begins with a dessert potluck and fellowship and then songs, games, and other activities follow. Bring a favorite treat to share, beverages and 3 Kings Cakes will be provided.

ALL are welcome!

January Calendars

Fruit of the Spirit

- 5th – Joyful Watermelons (K-2nd) Gather
- 12th – ALL Groups Gather
- 19th – ALL Groups Gather
- 26th – ALL Groups Gather



Jr. Pilgrim Fellowship



- 5th – Gather from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
- 12th – Gather from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
- 19th – NO Gathering
- 26th – Gather from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm

On January 12th Sr. and Jr. PF will be meeting jointly to have a lesson about hunger and food insecurity in the United States. On Sunday, February, 2nd, BOTH groups will gather at 11:15 to serve soup to folks in exchange for a bowl of soup to raise money to fight hunger. Please see the article about the Souper Bowl of Caring in this issue of the Steeple.

Check out what's coming up at MCC! Community Calendar

Wed. Jan. 1st

Office closed in observance New Year's Day

Week of Jan. 5th

Young Adult Sunday

Communion Sunday

10:00 am Worship

5:00 pm Senior PF

5:00 pm Adult PF (1st & 3rd Sundays)

6:00 pm Junior PF

Mon., Jan. 6th

7:30 pm Council Meeting (Dineson)

Tues. Jan. 7th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Jan. 8th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Jan. 9th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

Sat. Jan. 11th

1 pm Epiphany Party (Wilton Hall)

Week of Jan. 12th

10:00 am Worship

11:15 Mustard Seed Meeting (Mustard Seed)

5:00 pm Senior PF

6:00 pm Junior PF

Tues. Jan. 14th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Jan. 15th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Jan. 16th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

Week of Jan. 19th

8:45 am Deacon's Meeting

10:00 am Worship

5:00 pm Senior PF Lock In

5:00 pm Adult PF

Mon. Jan. 20th

Office Closed

7:30 Book Club (Dineson)

Tues. Jan. 21st

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

7:00 Bereavement Group (Dineson)

Wed. Jan. 22th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Jan. 23th

9:30 Bible Study (Dineson)

Week of Jan. 26th

10:00 am Worship

11:15 **Annual Meeting**

5:00 pm Senior PF

5:00 pm Adult PF

6:00 pm Junior PF

Mon. Jan. 27th

6:30 – 8 pm The Yarn Group

Tues. Jan. 28th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Jan. 29th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Jan. 30th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

Week of Feb. 2nd

10:00 am Communion Sunday

5:00 pm Senior PF

5:00 pm Adult PF (1st & 3rd Sundays)

Tues. Feb. 4th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Feb. 5th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Feb. 6th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

Sat. Feb. 8th

7:00 pm Coffee House (Wilton Hall)

Week of Feb. 9th

5:00 pm Senior PF

Mon. Feb. 10th

6:30 – 8 pm The Yarn Group

Tues. Feb. 11th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Feb. 12th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Feb. 13th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

