



THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST STEEPLE

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Office Hours:
Monday – Friday
9:00a.m.- 3:30p.m.

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras
Director of Faith Formation: Debi Mastroni-Kenyon
Music Director: Will Duchon
Secretary: Melissa Rosenberg
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December 1, 2018



Since the day before Thanksgiving I've been spending most of my evenings setting up Christmas decorations in the parsonage. I'm usually not eager to put things up so early, preferring to dwell in anticipation at least until the first Sunday of Advent. I've had to do things differently this year. Maybe this is one of those kinds of years for you, too?

For example, most of my gift shopping and charitable contributions are complete, because this Friday a new foster child moves in and I want to be attentive to her in our free time (usually I am a little more last minute). Another is skipping this year's Pastor's Open House, so that our home is a little more peaceful (although we'll still be hosting our between the services potluck on Christmas Eve for Choir and friends). Our daughter and son's ornaments probably won't make it on the tree until Dec 21st, after his flight lands in Hartford and he begins holiday break leave (Cady and Zack have always put on their ornaments together, and this isn't going to be the year they break that tradition).

Amidst this transitional time, I'd like to give parents of school-age children some information or "talking points" about foster care, in case they have questions about why Pastor Jenn and her family have a new foster daughter. Especially since she'll be joining the Loving Lemons in Fruit of the Spirit!

It's a tough conversation. How do you tell them about something like foster care without scaring them? Kids are not afraid to ask difficult questions, and it's important to be honest and straightforward with them. Here is a sampling of questions that kids often ask and suggestions on how to answer them:

What is foster care? A child in foster care is not living with his or her parents because it is not safe. Instead, they live with a family that has been trained to help them. Sometimes all it takes is a little extra time and training for their parents to learn how to raise them safely. Other times, they become permanent members of a foster family through adoption or guardianship.

Do the kids get to see their parents? If it is safe, and if a child's parents are available, a child will get to visit, often once a week. Sometimes visits are supervised just to make sure everyone is safe. As time goes on, a child may get to visit for longer periods of time.

Does a kid in foster care ever get to go back home to get his or her things? This depends on the safety of the situation. If a child is very unsafe at home and must be removed, the move will probably happen very quickly, and the child will not be able to take much. This is why children sometimes enter foster care with only the clothes on their backs. (*The Fruit of the Spirit classes are making emergency care kits for just this occasion!*) The most important thing is safety, and sometimes that means that a child's things get left behind.

What does a kid in foster care do on the weekends? Kids in foster care are just like other kids. Their foster parents do just about everything that a parent would do, like picking up the child from school, taking the child to a sports practice or an extracurricular activity, and spending time with them on the weekends. The foster family's home is the child's home, too, so the child sleeps there and spends the weekends there—just like other kids do at their homes.

What does a kid in foster care do for the holidays? A kid in foster care may celebrate the holidays with family members if possible, but he or she may also celebrate the holidays with his or her foster family. If a kid in foster care is used to celebrating the holidays differently, or even celebrating different holidays than his or her foster family, the foster family can work with the child to honor those traditions. A kid in foster care has a new foster family, but that does not mean that his or her past interests and traditions no longer matter.

What if a kid in foster care has a disability? Not all disabilities can be seen from the outside. Their challenges make them a part of a very vulnerable population and it is very important to protect them. The best way to protect them is to give them age appropriate information, honesty, and openness. The more information young people have, the more informed and better choices they make. It is also important to make their home, school, and communication as safe and accessible to them as possible.

What else can we do to help kids in foster care? One of the most important things that kids can do is understand that even though some kids are not able to live with their parents, it doesn't change their love for them. Foster care is a result of something out of a kid's control, and it is never their fault.

There are many different kinds of families, and some may look different than yours. Whether grandparents raise their grandchildren, aunts or uncles raise their nieces and nephews, older siblings raise their younger siblings, adoptive parents raise their adopted children, or foster parents raise their foster children, these are all just families. What is most important is that kids are safe and well taken care of. Understanding that some kids may have experienced difficult things in their lives and choosing not to judge them by those situations can be so helpful to a child in foster care. They need friends to stick by them, just like any other child.

In 2017 there were 442,995 children in some form of foster care¹ in the United States. If you have ever thought about fostering, please come and talk to me.

In peace, Pastor Jenn

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf>



This Advent Season

The Advent Season is always a good time to meditate upon the meaning of the birth of Jesus. Jesus' humble birth in Bethlehem is God's signaling, to all of history, that God's love, God's presence, and God's wisdom and power never departs from accomplishing God's "Reign on earth as it is in heaven." The birth of God's presence among us is a wondrous revealing of the intimacy of God's nature. Our God is an intimate God,

declaring in the birth of Jesus an intimate bond between the Divine and their people.

We are not alone in the universe this is the Good News! That our lives have meaning so significant, that our Creator is willing to live and to experience life in human circumstances, makes clear that our lives are, indeed, precious. That God should speak many parables and teachings to us from the lips of Jesus, lets us know that there is a mission of God on this earth to which we are all called to apply these teachings. That the world did its worst against the Son of God and yet failed to defeat God's power of resurrection, gives us great hope for the present day.

There are many situations in the world that keep us worried and fearful, as many threaten to deal with relationships with violent reactions. Though the world has a long way to go to fulfill the ideals of God's Reign, we already live in the present with a certainty by faith that the worst that the world can ever do is not and will never be more powerful than the best that God can and will do.

And here is the part that calls upon and involves you and me. A portion of the best that God can and shall do in this world, God chooses to do through us. Much was done in the life of Jesus; and now, much continues to be done in God's name through our lives. Your part is never too small if you do it in a faith partnership with God and your faith-friends in the Church. There are no powers on earth that are greater.

May we devote our energy to knowing what lies at the core meaning of the birth of Jesus this year. Remember, our God is an intimate God. Let Jesus enter and be born in your heart this Advent season and beyond.

Peace be with you,
Debi



December 2nd at 5pm - Community Tree Lighting on the Green Gather with our friends from St. Peter's to light the Christmas Tree on our shared green. It's a wonderful change to become spiritually grounded during what is often a hectic season. The tree lighting will be followed in at St. Peter's for coffee and cookies. Please bring a flashlight and dress warmly!

Calm and Bright: 200 Years of Silent Night = Advent is Here!



The classic hymn, "Silent Night," made its debut 200 years ago on Christmas Eve, 1818 at the St. Nicholas chapel in Oberndorf bei Salzburg, Austria. The melody by composer Franz Gruber is instantly recognizable from the first few notes. The original text by Joseph Mohr has been translated from the original German into over 140 languages.

In 1914, just four years shy of the 100th anniversary of "Silent Night," soldiers fighting World War I along the Western Front held a ceasefire out of mutual respect for the holiday. They exchanged gifts and stories with one another, played games, and sang carols together, including the beloved hymn "Silent Night." Today, churches all over the world gather together on Christmas Eve to light candles, sing "Silent Night," and participate in a timeless tradition of story and song.

Sometimes it feels as if our communities, churches and world are torn and divided about so many issues. This may cause us to feel that hope, peace, love, and joy are in short supply. This Advent, we are declaring a ceasefire from our own sources of conflict. Instead, we will raise our voices in song to celebrate the birth of Christ with spirits of peace and love that transcends all barriers. We hope that you and yours are able to join us for these special events in our lives together:

December 2, 10 am 5 pm	First Week of Advent Worship, "Sleep in Heavenly Peace" Community Tree Lighting (Hosted by St Peter's)
December 9, 10 am	Second Week of Advent Worship, "Glories Stream"
December 16, 8:30 am 9 am 10 am 5 pm	Third Week of Advent, "Redeeming Grace" Special Christmas Coffee Hour Christmas Pageant Service Community Caroling with Senior & Junior PF
December 23, 10 am	Fourth Week of Advent, "Let Us Sing"
December 24, 4 pm 7 pm 11 pm	"Calm and Bright" Christmas Eve <i>Quiet Service</i> , a contemplative, prayerful service. All are welcome to walk the labyrinth in Wilton Hall following the service. <i>Family Service</i> , worship for all ages, come 15 minutes early to enjoy the opening music <i>Lessons & Carols by Candlelight</i> with traditional readings, candlelight, and special music, come 15 minutes early to enjoy the opening music
December 30, 10 am	"Is Born", Young Adult Sunday

Trustees



What Shall We Bring? 2019 Stewardship Campaign

Jesus invites us to bring all that we are and all that we have when we become a disciple. Our generosity funds the mission and ministry of putting our faith in action, as God's realm grows among us here at the Monroe Congregational Church. Thank you for prayerfully considering how to financially support the Monroe Congregational Church's ministries in 2019. **To date, we have received 63 pledges for a total of \$144,947** *If your monthly or weekly*

pledge goes through Vanco, please fill out a pledge card so we can update our records for 2019.

Last year, the MCC Stewardship Committee introduced the concept of giving "tiers" to categorize and celebrate the various levels of giving in our membership. You can use this chart to identify what tier you were in for 2018, and what tier you might like to move up to in 2019. For example, if all 100 pledging families at MCC were able to increase their pledge by just \$5 per week, we would increase our overall pledge income by \$26,000 and come closer to funding our operating budget. Thanks for your support for MCC and please turn in your pledge card as soon as possible!

Pioneers (up to \$500/year)	17
Pilgrims (\$501-\$1,000/year)	18
Travelers (\$1,001-\$2,000/year)	32
Explorers (\$2,001-\$3,000/year)	17
Voyagers (\$3,001-\$5,000/year)	9
Sojourners (\$5,001-\$7,500/year)	5
Navigators (more than \$7,500/year)	2 = 100 pledging units

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

Parking at Town Hall: As Advent approaches, our parking lots tend to fill early on Sunday mornings. If you are able to park at Town Hall and walk over, so that we have space for the elderly, families with young children, and visitors, it would be much appreciated!



Faith on Tap, Friday December 7th: Come talk about life and current events from a spiritual perspective at a local pub. We meet on the first Fridays of the month from 7:30 - 9pm at VERACIOUS BREWING COMPANY! Anyone is welcome at the table. No topics are off limits. Agreement is not required, but civility is essential. Tea-

totalers and soda drinkers welcome too! The December theme is "Where Would Jesus Be?" Call/text Clark ([203-895-5604](tel:203-895-5604)) or Rev. Jenn ([203-895-5607](tel:203-895-5607)) Gingras with any questions.

SAVE THE DATE: Young Adult Christmas Brunch On Thursday, December 27th from 1-2:45 join us at the parsonage for a Young Adult (*older than high school, not yet 30*) Christmas Brunch. Come dressed in festive holiday attire (*cheesy Christmas sweaters encouraged*). We'll catch up with each other and celebrate the season.



Young Adult Sunday will be held on December 30th at 10am. If you would like to participate, please contact Kelsey Kaminski (203-362-9794)

Christian Education

Caroling Senior with Senior PF, 5pm December 16! Bring some joy into the lives of others by singing Christmas Carols at their doorsteps! Pizza and drinks will be served at 5pm in Wilton Hall, caroling caravans will leave promptly at 6pm. Please remember to dress warmly, bring a flashlight and a \$5 donation to help offset the cost of food



Advent in a Bag On Sunday, November 25th, you might have picked up an Advent wreath from our table, but we have an additional resource for you this Advent season: "Advent in a Bag".

Inside of each bag you will find a variety of interactive ways to include Jesus in your Christmas preparations. For each week of Advent there is a Scripture Sheet, a Talking About Sheet, a Hands on Activity Sheet, an Interactive Prayer Sheet, a Real Life Story, and a Shine Your Light Challenge. Everything you need to do the activities is inside the bag (aside from a couple of household supplies). You can do the suggested ideas all at once or spread them throughout the week. I hope you will take advantage of this wonderful resource, I know I can't wait to dive into my bag! Peace, Debi



Senior PF Wreath Fundraiser: It's that time of year where we're getting merry and bright! PF is holding our annual wreath fundraiser. If you would like to purchase a wreath, it's \$14 for 12 inch, \$16 for 16 inch and \$2 a bow. PFers will be at coffee hour the next few weeks taking orders. Thank you for your love, support and for making our 2019 mission trip a special one!



Jr. PF Calendar

December

- 2nd – NO Jr. PF – Tree Lighting on the Green
- 9th – Christmas Party with Secret Santa 6:00-7:30 pm
- 16th – **Christmas Caroling from 5:00-8:00 pm**
- 23rd – NO Jr. PF
- 30th – NO Jr. PF





Fruit of the Spirit (Sunday school) Calendar

December

- 2nd – ALL Groups gather for Pageant Practice
- 9th – ALL Groups gather for Pageant Practice
- 15th – **SATURDAY REHEARSAL at 10:00 am**
- 16th – Pageant during 10:00 worship
- 23rd – NO Gatherings
- 30th – NO Gatherings



Epiphany Party – Save the Date January 5th!

We will be having our Annual Epiphany Party on Saturday, January 5th, from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm. This is a party to celebrate the arrival of the Three Wise folks to the baby Jesus – declaring him the Messiah! The night begins with a potluck supper and then songs, games, and other activities follow. **ALL are welcome!**

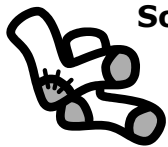
Outreach



The next St. George's supper is December 17th

Please look for the poster in Wilton Hall to sign up to help. We have a variety of needs, including shoppers, and servers. Simply take a tag (or two!) and you will be making a difference for those in need. **Please bring all food to**

the church by December 16th at 11am. If you take a tag and are unable to fulfill your commitment please contact the church office 203-268-9327 Or if you would like a tag but cannot make it to church please call Melissa in the office



Socks for St. George's

We will serve a special Christmas dinner at St. George's on December 19th and we will be collecting new men's socks, women and men's gloves and scarves. **Please drop off your donations by December 16th** so the Sunday school kids can assemble a care package for our guests. There is a box in the church office for sock donation.

Fellowship



Your Board of Christian Fellowship is asking for baked goods for the special Christmas coffee hour on **December 16th**. Please drop off your goodies in the kitchen and join us in Wilton Hall for fellowship and Holiday cheer.

The Morning Circle December 12th Luncheon will be at Stones Throw. 11:30am, 337 Roosevelt Dr. (Route 34) Seymour. Please contact nancy.s.smith66@gmail.com or call Nancy at 203-880-5228 and leave a message if you plan to attend



Retired Men will meet Wednesday, December 12th at 9:30 a.m. at Kings Restaurant in Monroe. Please RSVP to Paul Coward (pcoward46@comcast.net) by Monday December 10th. If you need a ride please contact the church office 203-268-9327

2019 MCC Men's Weekend Retreat ~ Friday, January 11 through Sunday, January 13 Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon CT. Registration is \$140, checks can be made out to MCC with Men's Retreat in the memo section. Scholarship help is available. Please sign up in Wilton Hall or contact the church office.



Please join us for the MCC Book Club!

✚ **December 17th -7:30pm** How to Find Love in a Bookshop by Veronica Henry
~Hosted by Mary Unger



In celebration of you and our church family community, Viana chocolates will be available after the Sunday service of December 9th, inclement weather date: Sunday December 16th. Love, Trees

Young at Heart will not have a December Luncheon. Attendees will be enjoying time with their families, as it should be. The next luncheon will be Thursday. January 24th at the Red Rooster Pub in Newtown. Jackie Bleakney will post details later. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all from Young at Heart.



Inclement Weather Policy

Here in New England we get to enjoy seasonal weather changes. At MCC, we have learned to be flexible and make safe choices about our scheduled plans. The safety and well-being of our people is one of our most important concerns.

This is our inclement weather policy, including who makes decisions about closings and how the decision is spread in the community. If you serve in a position of responsibility, please find your leadership role below.

1. **Sunday Worship Services:** At 7 am, Pastor Jenn (203-895-5607) and Larry Wissink (Chair of Deacons) makes the decision whether or not to cancel worship AND all other planned Sunday morning events, including Sunday School, Nursery, and coffee hour.
 - a. Chair of Deacons notifies CT Weather/IAN Snap and Channel 8 and the scheduled usher(s)
 - b. Pastor notifies staff and key volunteers (who in turn notify those they work with), including Debi Mastroni-Kenyon, Ann-Marie Campbell (Sunday School Coordinator), Will Duchon (music ministries), Ann Zeiner (coffee hour), Reader and Trustee of the Day
2. **Sr. and Jr. PF** groups will be notified of any changes or cancellations by e-mail, a phone tree and/or Facebook notifications as appropriate.
 - a. Cheramie Lee – makes and communicates Sr PF decision
 - b. Debi Mastroni-Kenyon - makes and communicates Jr PF decision
3. **Evening Meetings:** It is the responsibility of the convener to notify the meeting participants of changes or cancellations.
4. **Midweek Morning Programs:** If the Monroe School district either delays or cancels school, morning Bible studies and other church-sponsored morning programs are cancelled.
5. **Church Office:** If the Monroe School System is closed, and staff members are able to travel, they may choose to do so if conditions are safe. Otherwise, they may choose work remotely.

Any decisions to cancel or close will be communicated on:

- TV Channel 8, Channel 3
- CTWeather.com (sign-up for free notifications!)
- WMNR (88.1)
- Post on Monroe Congregational Church UCC Facebook page

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the church office at 203-268-9327, or Pastor Jenn's cell at 203-895-5607.

MCC Community Calendar

Week of Dec. 2nd

10:00am Worship w/Communion
11:15am Jr Choir (Meetinghouse)
5:00pm Community Tree Lighting (St. Peter's hosts)
5:00pm Senior PF
6:00pm Adult PF

Tues. Dec. 4th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Dec. 5th

6:30pm Confirmation Class
7:15pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Dec. 6th

9:30am Bible Study

Fri. Dec. 7th

7:30pm Faith on Tap (Veracious)

Week of Dec. 9th

10:00am Worship
11:15am Jr Choir (Meetinghouse)
5:00pm Senior PF
6:00pm Junior PF (Christmas Party)

Tues. Dec. 10th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Dec. 12th

9:30am Retired Men (King's, Newtown)
11:00am Morning Circle (Stones Throw Restaurant)
6:30pm Confirmation Class
7:15pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Dec. 13th

9:30am Bible Study-Christmas Party (Parsonage)

Sat. Dec. 15th

10:00am Christmas Pageant Rehearsal
12:00pm CE Meeting (Classroom 4)

Week of Dec. 16th

8:30am Worship
9:00am Special Christmas Coffee Hour
10:00am Christmas Pageant
11:15am Junior Choir
5:00pm Christmas Caroling

Mon. Dec. 17th

3:45pm St. George's Supper
7:30pm Council Meeting (Dineson)
7:30pm MCC Book Club @ Mary Unger's home

Tues. Dec. 18th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag
7:00pm Bereavement Group (Dineson)

Wed. Dec. 19th

7:15pm Adult Choir

Week of Dec. 23rd

10:00am Worship
11:15am Jr Choir

Mon. Dec. 24th

4:00pm Quiet Worship
4:00-6:00pm Labyrinth Open Walk (Wilton)
7:00pm Traditional Family Worship
11:00pm Lessons & Carols

Tues. Dec. 25th

Office Closed in Observance of Christmas

Dec. 26th – January 3rd

Pastor Jenn on vacation

Thurs. Dec. 27th

1:00pm Young Adult Brunch (Parsonage)

Week of Dec. 30th

10:00am Young Adult Sunday Worship

Tues. Jan. 1st

Office Closed in Observance of New Year's

Sat. Jan. 5th

5:00pm Epiphany Party (Wilton Hall)