

THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

STEEPLE

34 Church Street
Monroe, CT 06468

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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
Church e-mail: secretary@mcc-ucc.org

December 15, 2017

Don't Miss the Chrismon Display! A few months ago, my friend and MCC's Boy Scout Troop 63 scoutmaster Ed Gratrix, approached me with a proposal. "How would you like to have a display of my family's Chrismons this Advent?" I'll admit, I jumped at the chance. Saturday night he and his father will be decorating a tree in Wilton Hall for us to enjoy this Sunday, December 17th, at our 9:30 am special Christmas Coffee Hour!



Here's what he has taught me about his family's special tradition, which has been passed down to him from childhood days. Chrismons were created in 1957 by Frances Kipps Spencer at Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia. The story is that she approached her pastor asking what can be done about the commercialization of Christmas (sound familiar?). The pastor turned to her and said more or less 'why don't you try and do something about it?' (wise pastor!). She made a few simple ornaments and named her creations Chrismons, meaning 'Christ Monograms'. Each one depicts symbols of Christianity and the church through the ages.

There are very simple rules on a Chrismon's (which Ed was taught and he verified later on the internet)

- Chrismons must be hand made of white and gold (colors representing purity and majesty)
- Chrismons should never be purchased or sold but can (and should) be gifted.
- Chrismons are placed on an evergreen tree with only White lights (both have their own meanings as well)

Ed's family owns about 100 or so of the several hundred that were made from the late 50's and early 60's by his grandmother, Augusta (Gussy) Hahn of Daniel's Farm Rd, Trumbull. At Christmas time he remembers that his grandmother's house would have two huge live trees, one full with Chrismons and one with the classic tinsel and zillions of colored lights. His grandfather took care of the contemporary tree and other festive spirits while his grandmother's pride and joy was the Chrismon tree. The tree was surrounded by a short white fence with a tiny gate that was functional but always left in the open position.

All guests to her home were offered a Chrismon, often right from the tree. She gave away dozens at each house that she and my grandfather visited around the holidays. If you were simply there at the house she visited, you received one. When people carry 'spare' gifts to make sure everyone receives something, she carried Chrismons. His mother's side of the family were connected to the firehouse and even today when he visits houses of other firefighting families, he sees Chrismons from two generations passed down.

This Sunday will be the first time in perhaps 30 years that this much of the collection is displayed together on one tree. How fortunate are we? How many symbols do you think you will be able to find? Thanks, Ed, for making our special celebration that much more festive.

In peace, Pastor Jenn



Waiting – The “Thorn” of Advent

Lately I've been in a place of waiting; waiting for my husband Wayne to have a complete recovery and return to work, waiting for my daughter to call or stop by from college, waiting to see what doors open from the ones recently closed. I recently was blessed to read an article about Paul's "thorn" (see II Corinthians 12:1-10). Instead of speculating about the nature of his "thorn", the author focused on the purpose of it, which was to make Paul see that the power in his ministry came from God, not him. That hit home with me. I've now taken all the waiting in my situations as welcomed "thorns" to help me understand that

these are not my situations, they are God's and when that day comes to celebrate graduations and new paths before me, all glory and praise will be God's.

Now in early December we are waiting for Christmas. While the secular world has been shouting, "It's Christmas!" since Thanksgiving (or even before), the church leads us through Advent. I'm thinking that Advent is a welcomed "thorn" to remind us that the power of Christmas is not our own. The power of Christmas is certainly not found in the shopping malls or the hustle and bustle of seasonal activities. Without proper reflection and preparation, Christmas loses its real power. It simply becomes an event where on the 26th we sigh with relief and say, "Well, that's over for another year!"

Actually, Christmas marks a beginning, not an end. Advent, if practiced with care and reflection, helps us to see that Christmas is not something we need to get too quickly and then move on as before. It is God's act of coming into our world and becoming Immanuel, "God with us." Not with us for Christmas Day only, but for every day! God needs our

attention, so through the "thorn" of Advent, God calls to us, saying, in effect, "Do you see what I'm doing?" Advent tries to cut through all the party planning, pageant practice, gift buying, gift wrapping, baking this and baking that. The church uses Advent to slow us down and allow God's love for us to be revealed with wonder, power and mystery.

The true joy of Christmas comes in having taken time to prepare for it, to consider the fullness of God's plan which begins with the birth of the Savior Jesus. Give Advent its due: wait, prepare, reflect, be wonder-filled and dare to be changed, for God, indeed, is with us!

May the joy of Jesus' presence fill your heart this Advent and Christmas!

Yours in Christ, Debi Mastroni-Kenyon

Moderator

Annual Reports Due January 5th
Please submit your annual report to the church office by Friday, January 5th Please call the church office with any questions. 203-268-9327 or email mccsecretary123@gmail.com

Stewardship 2018: Journey to Generosity



Good News! We are getting very close to completing our 2018 Stewardship Campaign, with 74 families or individuals committed to giving \$177,000 in support of the 2018 mission and ministry of the Monroe Congregational Church. Thank you!

Our congregation's goal is \$200,000, so we are only \$23,000 away. If you haven't yet had a chance yet to complete a pledge card, simply and place it in the offering basket or drop it off at the church office. Please let us know if you have any questions and thank you for walking alongside us on the journey at the Monroe Congregational Church!

Your Stewardship Committee: *Scott Young (Chair), Roy Nealon, John O'Rourke (Receiver)*

Trustees

Do you know what makes a great Christmas Gift? Helping MCC Pave Its Way to a Brighter Future! Here is your opportunity to help us upgrade the MCC campus and ALSO honor a local business, friend, colleague, family member, or loved one by sponsoring the installation of a personalized, engraved brick! The Trustees are launching a "buy a brick campaign" to help finance the cost of replacing a deteriorated walkway running alongside Rexford House. Each standard-size, 4" x 8" brick is \$125, and allows three lines of text



comprised of eighteen characters each. **A PDF Order form is available on our church's home page, www.mcc-ucc.org** . For further information, please contact the church office or Mark Barnhart at msbarnhart515@gmail.com.



Christian Education

2017 Pageant This year we are having a Worship service based on a hymn written by Martin Luther, "From Heaven Above". This is a whole service experience rather than a Pageant performance. There are opportunities for folks to read dialog, Scripture, or even act in tableau parts. Anyone who wishes to participate is welcome. We are rehearsing on Saturday, December 16th, from 1:00-3:00 pm. If you have any questions or would like to volunteer you can call Debi at 203-444-6760 or email

debi@mcc-ucc.org.

Caroling Senior with Senior PF, 5pm December 17! 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



December Sunday school schedule

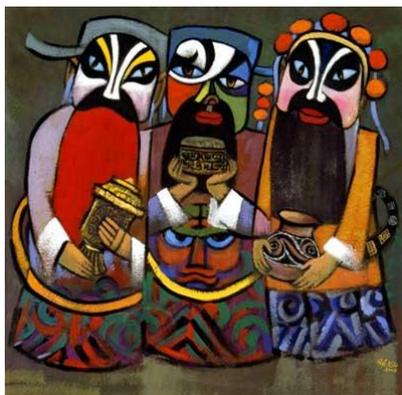
17th – Pageant Sunday, no Sunday school

24th – No Sunday school

December Jr. PF Schedule

17th – No Jr. PF

24th – No Jr. PF



Epiphany Party, Saturday, January 6th

On January 6th, 2018 we will be celebrating the Epiphany, or the arrival of the Wise Ones to present their gifts to Jesus. This arrival brought about the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, validating Jesus as the Messiah. We will be having a potluck supper at MCC starting at 5:00 pm and ending at 7:30. We will sing songs, play games, do crafts, have King's Cakes, receive our Star Word for 2018, and send the Christmas season out with a bang!

Please join us – ALL are welcome!



Young Adult Christmas Brunch On Thursday, December 28th at 12pm join us at the parsonage for a Young Adult (*older than high school, yet still in their 20's*) Christmas Brunch. Come dressed in festive holiday attire (*cheesy Christmas sweaters encouraged*). We'll catch up with each other, celebrate the season and make a plan for Young Adult Sunday (*coming up on January 7th*). All

are welcome!

Deacons



Come talk about life and current events from a spiritual perspective on **Friday, January 19, 7:30 – 9 pm (Location TBD) with Faith on Tap!**

Are you confused about what you hear in the recent news about **Jerusalem** and the embassy move? Would you like to learn more? Mark your calendars and join the conversation! And if you have a friend who may like joining us, please bring them along! Agreement is not required, but civility is essential. Tea-totelers and soda drinkers welcome too! Call/text Clark (203-895-5604) or Rev. Jenn (203-895-5607) Gingras with any questions.

Outreach



The next St. George's supper is December 18th
Please bring all food to the church by December 17th at 11am. If you take a tag and are unable to fulfill your commitment please contact the church office 203-268-9327



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 17th** so the Sunday school kids can assemble a care package for our guests. There is a bin outside of the church office for sock donation.

Help bring peace and cheer this holiday to kids and parents served by Empowering



Children and Families. ECF is a mission supported by MCC's Board of Outreach. Every day in CT, children and families fall through the cracks. ECF is comprised of a caring group of individuals who have experienced all too well the devastation to CT families due to a lack of appropriate services...and have decided it's time to make a change. We, as a society, can help to fill in the cracks by extending a helping hand out of love, trust, and mutual respect. **ECF is asking for gift cards \$25 or \$50** to help provide a little extra joy this holiday season. There is a poster in Wilton Hall with tags. Contact Leanne McEvoy or Kathy Maiolo with questions.



Heifer International With your spare change, we can help families support themselves and others through the purchases of livestock and plants that will go to bettering their present situation and then providing for a future that allows them to work on their own. Money will be collected during coffee hour and can be placed in collection jar on the coffee table. By the end of December, Morning Circle will pool the change and send out a check. This is a great way to start off the holiday with a donation to something special with the help of everyone from the

congregation. Please contact Susie Cuseo with any questions at [203-268-0280](tel:203-268-0280) or at thecuseos@yahoo.com



Food Pantry Donations Needed

Donations needed for the Monroe Food Pantry With the colder weather upon us the demand for food is greater than ever. We have almost 300 registered Monroe families who are eligible to receive assistance from the Monroe Food Pantry. Non-perishable food items and pet supplies can be left in the bins in front of the church office. To donate perishable items such as eggs or milk please call 452-3770 to arrange a drop off time. Thank you for your generosity!

you have any questions please contact Miriam Zalenski at 203-261-8550 or bigred722@sbcglobal.net

Covenant to Care-Please return your Covenant to Care Christmas gifts to the church office by December 18th

Fellowship



Your Board of Christian Fellowship is asking for baked goods for the Christmas coffee hour on December 17th . Please drop off your goodies in the kitchen and join us in Wilton Hall for fellowship and Holiday cheer.

Date of Young at Heart – 28th of December! A summit meeting was held at the last YAH and the decision was made that since by the 28th, the Christmas shopping and cooking would be completed and the inter-holiday lull would be setting in, we would stick with the 4th Thursday as usual – the 28th (not the date in the Deacons’ letter). Location TBA. RSVP to Arlene or Vaughan 203-345-3637



2017 MCC Men’s Weekend Retreat ~ Friday, January 12 through Sunday, January 14 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!

- ✚ **January 17th-7:30pm** A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles ~ Host TBD
- ✚ **February 21st-7:30pm** The Women in the Castle by Jessica Shattuck ~ Host TBD
- ✚ **March date TBD** Under Heaven’s Shining Stars by Jean Grainger~Host TBD

Beginning in January 1st, the Steeple will be published on a monthly basis. Please have your articles in to Melissa (mccsecretary123@gmail.com) by the 28th of each month for publication.



Waiting & Watching
 Advent 2017
 at The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC

Date	Event
December 17	8:45 am Advent Worship Service <i>“Joy for Those Who Are Watching”</i> 9:30 am Christmas Fellowship Hour, on exhibit: <i>The Gratrix Family’s Antique Chrismons</i> 10 am Christmas Pageant Worship Service 5 – 8:30 pm Christmas Caroling with Senior PF, all PF’ers (past & present) welcome to join us for pizza (\$5) and singing in the community
December 18	3:45 pm St. George’s Supper, Christmas Edition – MCC is collecting socks to give out as gifts for the dinner, please bring to the office by December 17
December 24	10 am Advent Worship Service <i>“Love for Those Who Are Wounded”</i> 7 pm Christmas Eve Family Service <i>“Hope for Those Who Are Willing”</i> 11 pm Lessons & Carols by Candlelight
December 28	12 pm Young Adult Christmas Brunch (Parsonage) 12 pm Young At Heart Lunch (Long Horn Steakhouse, Shelton)
December 31	10 am Worship
January 6	5-8 pm Epiphany Party – potluck supper and activities; receive Star Word for the year
January 7	10 am Young Adult Sunday

MCC Community Calendar

Sat. Dec. 16th

1:00pm Christmas Pageant Rehearsal
3:30pm CE Meeting (Dineson)

Week of Dec.17th

Third Sunday in Advent: Joy

8:45am Worship
9:30am Christmas Coffee Hour
10:00am Pageant
5:00pm Christmas Caroling
6:00pm Adult PF

Mon. Dec. 18th

3:45pm St. George's Supper

Tues. Dec. 19th

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

Thurs. Dec. 21st

7:15pm Adult Choir

Week of Dec.24th

Fourth Sunday in Advent: Joy & Christmas Eve

10:00am Worship
7:00pm Traditional Family Worship
11:00pm Lessons & Carols by Candlelight

*The church office will be closed from Monday
December 25th -Tuesday Jan. 2nd*

Thurs. Dec. 28th

12:00pm Young Adult Brunch at the Parsonage
12:00pm Young at Heart (LongHorn Steakhouse in Shelton)

Week of Dec. 31st

10:00am Worship

Wed. Jan. 3rd

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 4th

9:30am Bible Study (Dineson)
7:15pm Adult Choir

Fri. Jan. 5th

5:00pm Zach Gingras Court of Honor

Sat. Jan. 6th

5:00pm Epiphany Party (Wilton Hall)

Week of Jan. 7th

Young Adult Sunday
10:00am Worship
6:00pm Adult, Junior, & Senior PF

Mon. Jan. 8th

7:30pm Council Meeting (Dineson)

Wed. Jan. 10th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 11th

9:30am Bible Study (Dineson)
7:00pm Parents Support Group (Dineson)
7:15pm Adult Choir

Fri. Jan. 12th –Sun. Jan. 14th

5:00pm Men's Retreat @ Silver Lake