



THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

STEEPLE

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

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Music Director: Will Duchon
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January 1, 2016



A New Year's Reflection

As the glow of Christmas becomes a memory, the New Year opens before us with untold possibilities. Many of us consider New Year's resolutions to make various improvements in our lives; like giving up bad habits, eating better, or being more faithful about going to the gym. And yet, we also know that even our best intentions can get put aside. One person's quip was, "*New Year's resolutions go in one year and out the other.*"

For many years I have been in the habit of taking time between Christmas and New Year's for a big vacation rest. It is not only a time of personal renewal for me and my family, but a time for reflection. It's an opportunity to review the past year and remember the changes, struggles, growth, surprises, and the many graces that have poured from the people in my life which helps me see how bountiful and blessed our lives together have been.

First of all, I am continually blown away by the grace of being able to serve as your pastor. This very special church would not be the same without your generosity, acceptance, care, and love. I have witnessed God's Spirit working through you and that feeds my spirit and inspires my work.

Over the past year some in our faith community have undergone great health struggles. Yet within those struggles I have seen great fortitude and endurance in you.

There have been life changes among us which tear at our heartstrings. Again, the grace with which you live those changes is a sign of a merciful God who carries us when we think we cannot take another step.

Your witness and ability to grow in faith and discipleship are amazing. Your participation and contributions to our worship life are a gift to all who come to worship. The Spirit of God is leading us into a new day as we grow in faith, love and trust.

You may not literally move mountains, but you often come very close! The time and energy you give to your church are life giving. Even the most mundane task is vital to our

life and ministry here in at MCC – a smile given a guest to worship, a helping hand in getting our Sunday school kids ready for their pageant, a hug given to a friend who is grieving. Thank you for all of it.

Many of you do your work quietly behind the scenes. Sometimes it's an act that touches the heart so powerfully, like caroling to folks stuck in the hospital or their homes during the holidays. Or providing over 100 Christmas gifts to needy children in care of DCF, and having them all back in time for the grateful social care workers. We see in the faces of those we serve how much it means to them.

And yet, one of my continuing concerns, especially when meeting with lay leaders to plan 2016, has been our church's long term financial sustainability. Over the past few years, we have focused on vitality measures which have had a positive impact. Coming together as one in worship, implementing a Music Fest, and shoring up our Christian Education programs have all helped us reach new people. But these initiatives are not a quick fix. How we reach our neighbors every day – through generous outreach programs, strong faith formation ministries for children, youth and adults, impactful worship and music programs – all of it is crucial to our long term future, and more importantly, God's call to us in the present. Each member of our professional staff is gifted to lead well, and our hope is that they may continue to do so. But it's difficult to plan to travel the road of renewal if we're not certain that we can fill the gas tank. If you haven't pledged for 2016, please do so. Stewardship is important in these changing times, and we depend on you.

As I reflect back on all God's gifts of 2015, my heart is filled with hope for 2016. Last year we touched the lives of many people, and we are still here to share God's love and be the light in our community. In this New Year, our Still-Speaking God calls us to new ministries of love and hope as we live in the joy of serving others. Holding the past year in my heart, I look forward to the future and feel so grateful that I am making this journey with you. I wish you and yours all the peace of God in this New Year.

Blessings, Grace and Love to all, Pastor Jenn

2016 Star Gifts

Over a great distance the Magi journeyed to follow a star and see what lay beneath it. The Incarnate God is what they found, looking nothing like they might have imagined. As we begin 2016, we are offering everyone a Star Gift. A Star Gift is, put very simply, a word to pray about and meditate on in the year ahead. It is a way to focus on how God is guiding you. There is a basket of Star Gifts in the church office, come on by and select yours or call in and Melissa will set one aside for you. Blessings to you and yours in the New Year!



Happy New Year!

One of the Christmas cards that I received this year was from a childhood friend that I have known since we were in fourth grade together. Her message shared a brief prescription for this New Year and I pass it on to you. It offers simple and wise advice.

Compliment three people every day.

Be the first to say "hello."

Treat everyone as you want to be treated.

Never give up on anybody.

Forget the Jones's.

Never deprive someone of hope.

Be tough-minded but tender-hearted.

Be kinder than necessary.

Keep your promises.

Learn to be cheerful, even when you don't feel like it.

Don't rain on other people's parades.

And never waste an opportunity to tell someone you love them.

Well...if I do these things...and each of you do these things...and each of you shares this list with a friend...who shares them with a friend...the gift would quickly grow...from my friend...to me...to you...and to so many others. Just imagine how much better the world could be!

Happy New Year! Pastor Barb

Stewardship

Our stewardship campaign is winding down but it is definitely not over and it is not too late to pledge for 2016. The goal of our 2016 pledge campaign is 120 pledges and



\$250,000. We are happy to report that we have received pledges from 91 families in the amount of \$190,334. We are around 75% of the way to our goal. We have over 200 families in the church. Last year we finished with 101

pledges for a total of \$203,549. With 10 new pledges and 79 repeat pledges so far, we still need your help.

During January the trustees will work on the budget which will be presented at the annual meeting on January 31. This year is particularly challenging and we are currently showing a deficit as we work through the budget process. With your pledge we can maintain the current level of staffing, outreach, mission and care for our campus. Two thirds of the financial resources we use in our ministries here at MCC come from the pledges and loose offering gifts of our members and friends. If you are considering a pledge this year please let us know your plans so we can plan this year's budget accordingly.

If you haven't pledged yet, we would love to receive your pledge by January 15th in time for the annual meeting on January 31st.

We will begin making follow up calls starting January 4th so we can be ready for our budget planning and annual meeting.

In Christ's Service, Scott Young (chair), John Maiolo, Liz Sampson, Trees Whitbeck, and Sue Wilgan (receiver) email: stewardship@mcc-ucc.org

Fellowship



Morning Circle will not meet for the months of January or February. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, March 9, 2016 at 11AM in Dineson Parlor. At our last meeting in December the ladies met for a holiday luncheon at My Place in Newtown where they collected \$100 for Covenant to Care as well as dropped off 16 gifts for the Giving Tree. MCC is grateful to have such generous ladies in the congregation who consider those less fortunate during this time of year. Please contact Jackie Bleakney with any questions about future meetings at 203-268-5275.

Welcome to 2016, Prayer Partners!!!! - I hope that during this holiday you have been receiving my somewhat-daily emails containing prayers meant for you to consider your



partner and perhaps send them a card or note using the church's address as the return. Maybe you've even talked to them before service, pass the peace to them or had some coffee or tea with them after mass. Whatever you've done, I hope that you keep up with your communication between you and your partner. We will meet for the big reveal at the potluck luncheon on Sunday, May

15, 2016 at 11:30AM in Wilton Hall. A sign-up sheet will be posted that will include childcare for little ones while the big kids can dine with us. Please contact Susie Cuseo at 203-268-0280 with any questions.



Please join us for the MCC Book Club!

January 18th - 7:30pm, Host: Sue Smelzer, 491 Moose Hill Rd, Monroe. We are reading *Leaving Time* by Jodi Picoult

February 15th - 7:30pm, Host: TDB. We are reading *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah

Church Receiver

2016 Giving Envelopes can be picked up in the church office or at coffee hour

Christian Education



MCC Men's Retreat While it looks like Mother Nature may not give us the opportunity to do tai chi on a frozen lake this year, we'll still be able to do many of the things that make the men's retreat such a great experience. The retreat is a weekend filled with discussion, study, laughter (lots of that), good food, and outdoor activities in beautiful Sharon, Conn. It's also a chance to slow down, to put aside your to-do list, and to enjoy the fellowship of some of the wise, caring, and funny men we have in abundance here at MCC. Every year the retreat includes long-time participants as well as men attending for the first time. Last year we even had two father-son pairs. If you're a man, no matter what your age, you're welcome to join us. Scholarship funds are available, so don't let money be an obstacle to participating.

Where: Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon, Conn.

When: January 22-24, 2016

Cost: \$140 per person (includes meals and two nights' lodging)

Questions? See Don Parker-Burgard, David Bailey, or David Walker

'Spiritual Soul Food' Women's Retreat, April 1-3, 2016

Guest House Retreat & Conference Center, 318 West Main St, Chester, CT

www.guesthousecenter.org



Many of us are asking: "What am I doing here? Why am I still doing this? What's next?" and other soul-driven questions. This retreat will create a safe space to explore, understand, and grow towards a more empowered perspective on living and loving. Through thought-provoking activities and discussions, together we will search for optimism, tools for change, and deep, resonant joy. This is a retreat for spiritually blossoming women whose experiences have expanded their worldviews, whose souls are full of love and light, who feel drawn to purposeful and meaningful matters, and who seek other women like themselves to share all of this with.

Because the Guest House is quite an upgraded setting from our usual, it is a bit pricier. For six gourmet meals and 2 nights, the cost is \$296 per person for a double room. If you would prefer to spend only one night, let us know and we can try and negotiate that with the Guest House. Please sign up in Wilton Hall and send in a \$100 deposit to the church office by January 1, 2015. Scholarships are available. Contact Michele Mount (attymount@aol.com) or Pastor Jenn with any questions.

Let's Read Together in 2016

Your pastors and the Christian Board are inviting you to join us in some interesting reading for 2016. **The Thursday AM Bible Study 9:30-11:00am will read "Jesus is the Question" by Martin Copenhaver.** The book examines the 307 questions Jesus asked and the 3 he answered. The 13 chapters group the questions into categories such as longing, compassion, identity, faith and doubt, worry, healing, abundance, the reach of love, who Jesus is, the Risen Christ. This book costs \$12.



For an All-Church Read after Christmas, the book is "Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road" by Brian McLaren.

The theme of this book is Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World. In the spring and in Lent, your pastors will offer some forums that will encourage dialogue and we may even involve some of our sister faith communities who worship in proximity to MCC. This book costs \$14.25.

Any questions, please contact Pastor Barb barb@mcc-ucc.org or call the church office to order a copy.

You Are Invited!



On January 10th, Sunday School will be celebrating Epiphany. All classes will meet in Wilton Hall

Special Sunday School Tradition Junior Worship

What is Junior Worship?: A Sunday School special event with a theme, sometimes a guest, and lots of hands-on learning activities for all ages together with our older kids helping and leading the younger ones.

All the children will begin in church with their families as usual but then after the Children's Message, all the classes will be together to CELEBRATE "Three Kings Day!"

Come and Enjoy

Games and Puzzles, Stars and Lights,

Stones and Surprises,

Special Refreshments

This holiday / Three Kings Day on Jan 6 is called Epiphany, when the Three Wise Men brought gifts to the baby Jesus in recognition of his divine nature, according to the Biblical nativity story.

During the season of Epiphany, we celebrate the "manifestation," or coming of God to all people in Jesus Christ. The season of Epiphany is celebrated for nine Sundays.

Jr. Pf News

January 10th regular time 6:00pm-8:30pm. We will begin our "Game Night" meeting at 6 with make your own pizzas. Some ingredients will be provided and Jr Pfers are invited to bring some ingredients. Some of us received new games for Christmas I received "Quirkle" which is a lot of fun. Bring your new or old favorite game to share and teach others.

January 17th because of MLK weekend, there will be no meeting

January 25th 6:00pm-830pm We begin planning our SERVICE PROJECT which will be a Gathering for "The Young at Heart and other Senior members of MCC. The older members of our community are looking forward to meeting all of you. At this meeting we will talk about date, time, menu, possible entertainment for our "GATHERING." **Your leaders always have a program surprise or two for you and you can count on an active game!**

Friends are always welcome!

MCC Community Calendar

Week of Jan. 3rd

Tues. Jan. 5th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag
7:30pm Rachel's Well (Dineson)

Wed. Jan. 6th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 7th

9:30am Bible Study
6:30pm Bell Choir
7:30pm Adult Choir

Week of Jan. 10th

10:00am Worship, Junior Worship
11:15am Junior Choir
11:15am Fellowship (Dineson)
11:15am Trustees (Classroom 4)
6:00pm Junior & Senior PF

Tues. Jan. 12th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag
7:30pm Council Meeting (Dineson)

Wed. Jan. 13th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 14th

9:30am Bible Study
6:30pm Bell Choir
7:30pm Adult Choir

Week of Jan. 17th

10:00am Worship w/Baptism
11:15am Junior Choir
11:15am Outreach Meeting (Dineson)
6:00pm Adult PF @the Parker-Burgard
6:00pm Junior & Senior PF

Mon. Jan. 18th

Office Closed in Observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Tues. Jan. 19th

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

Wed. Jan. 20th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 21st

9:30am Bible Study
6:30pm Bell Choir
7:30pm Adult Choir

Fri. Jan 22-Jan. 24th

Men's Retreat at Silver Lake

Week of Jan. 24th

10:00am Worship
11:15am Junior Choir
6:00pm Junior & Senior PF

Tues. Jan. 26th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag
7:30pm Divorce Support (Dineson)

Wed. Jan. 27th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Jan. 28th

9:30am Bible Study
12:00pm Young at Heart (location tbd)
6:30pm Bell Choir
7:30pm Adult Choir

Sat. Jan. 30th

5-8pm Senior PF Chili Cook Off Fundraiser
(Wilton Hall)

Week of Jan. 31st

10:00am Heritage Sunday Worship,
Scout Sunday
11:15am Annual Meeting
6:00pm Junior & Senior PF

Tues. Feb. 2nd

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag
7:30pm Rachel's Well (Dineson)

Wed. Feb. 3rd

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Feb. 4th

9:30am Bible Study
6:30pm Bell Choir
7:30pm Adult Choir

Fri. Feb 5th-Sun. Feb. 6th

Confirmation Retreat at Silver Lake