



THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

STEEPLE

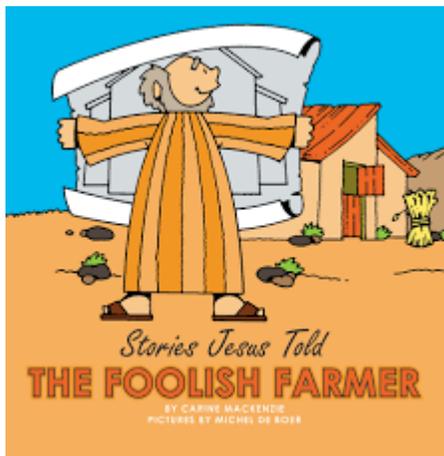
34 Church Street
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Office Hours:
Monday – Friday
9:00a.m. - 3:30p.m.

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras
Associate Pastor of Faith Formation: Rev. Barb Frey
Music Director: Will Duchon
Secretary: Melissa Rosenberg
Church email: secretary@mcc-ucc.org

January 15, 2016



The Foolish Farmer

The Gospel writer, Mark, tells us that huge crowds came to hear Jesus. In worship over the last few weeks we've heard that Jesus began his ministry by healing people – those with diseases and demon. It's no wonder that lots of people gathered to hear what he had to say.

On one particular day they hear Jesus tell a story about a farmer who scatters seed. And this farmer scatters seed everywhere – on the path, on rocky ground, among the weeds and thorns, and on good soil. As they listened to Jesus tell this story do you know what the crowds would have been thinking? They would have been thinking, "How wasteful! What a foolish farmer!"

In Jesus' day seed was a precious commodity. You didn't just run down to Benedict's and buy a bunch of colorful packets. You gathered seed by hand. No farmer in their right mind would be so wasteful as to throw seed on the path, the rocks and among the weeds and thorns where it had so little chance of taking root and growing. They would be a little more careful than that.

But that is exactly his point! This farmer isn't in his right mind, because this farmer is God who is out-of-his-mind in love with all people. This farmer is the One who "foolishly" cast his Son into a world full of hard and rocky hearts that would reject him. Is he a fool? Yep, a fool madly in love with you and me and all people.

But this story isn't just about God, the foolish farmer. It's a story that also speaks to us, the Church. On this side of Jesus' resurrection this story calls us to do the same and freely (and sometimes even foolishly) cast the seed of God's love into the lives of others.

So we forgive those who don't deserve it. And we love those who won't return our love. We serve those who may not "deserve it" or know what we've done or even thank us for it. We bear witness to our faith among those who may not quite "get it". We do justice with love and abandon, knowing that the struggle can be hard; we speak up for the marginalized who cannot speak up for themselves.

Every one of us can forgive and love and serve and pray and invite. And we don't need to be concerned with whether our forgiveness is received or our love is returned or our service is appreciated or even if our witness changes someone's heart, because that's God's job. Our job is to freely and even foolishly scatter what we have been given. One seed planted can, by God's grace, grow into quite an amazing harvest. Inch by inch, row by row...

In Christ, Pastor Jenn

Call to Annual Congregational Meeting * January 31st, 2016

The members of Monroe Congregational Church are hereby called to attend the Annual Meeting of the Congregation to be held in the Meeting House at 11:15am on Sunday, January 30th, 2016. The agenda will include the following: Receiving of Reports; Electing Officers, Board Members and Delegates; Adopting the 2016 budget and any other business that must properly come before the Congregation. Child care will be available.



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!

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 100 families in the amount of \$207,984. 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 11 new pledges and 88 repeat pledges so far, we still need your help.

During January the trustees are working 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 have begun making follow up calls as of January 6th 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

Christian Education



For our January Service Project, Senior PF (our church's high school youth group) is **collecting pet items** for the dogs and cats of the big condo fire in Bridgeport that happened earlier this year. If we find out that we are too late to give them to the actual families, they will be donated to the Bridgeport Animal Shelter (*in memory of the pets who did not make it out of the fire*). Please drop off any

leashes, toys, towels, clippers, brushes, cat or dog food to Dineson Parlor if you can help by January 31st and thank you!

'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.



Are you ready for camp?!?!
Registration for Summer 2016 conferences opens this Friday, January 15, at midnight! Are you ready? We are!

Log on to the [Silver Lake registration site](#) to find conferences for 4th through 12th graders, CIT training weekend, biking adventures, the National Youth Event, a trip to Mexico with Simply Smiles, and more! It's all waiting for you!

And if you register by Jan. 31, you can take \$50 off* your registration fee! Use coupon code JAN2016 at checkout!

Don't wait! Sign up on Friday, January 15th!

See you at the Lake!
Silver Lake Staff

*\$50 off promotion does not apply to Thinking About Working for God, Maple Sugaring, Women's Yoga, Spring Action, Counselor-in-Training, Simply Smiles trip to Mexico, Hammer & a Nail, or National Youth Event.



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

Mustard Seed Shop

Sales Associates Needed! The Mustard Seed Thrift Shoppe is looking for your help!!! We need sales associates who can cover the service counter on Thursdays 12-3, Fridays 9-3 and Saturdays 10-2. Each shift is two-three hours long and it's very easy to learn. If you are interested, please contact Susie Cuseo at 203-268-0280 who does scheduling.



Mustard Seed Meeting for all volunteers will be held January 24th at 11:15am in Dineson Parlor. Please grab a cup of coffee and join us!

Outreach



Food Pantry
Donations Needed

The Monroe Food Pantry Is Very Low On Supplies : While the need is still great, donations to the food pantry have decreased. To donate perishable items such as eggs or milk please call 452-3770 to arrange a drop off time. For nonperishable items please place in the bin in the Rexford House-Thank you for your generosity. Here is what the pantry needs the most for our neighbors:

Juice (apple, cranberry, etc)	Peanut Butter & Jelly or Jam	Brownie Mix, Cake Mix Bisquick, pancake mix
Hamburger Helper	Chicken or Beef Broth	Flour, Sugar, Spices
Canned Tomatoes Canned beans ex: Kidney Beans, baked beans	Pet Supplies: Dog Food dry and wet Cat Food dry and wet Cat litter, toys,	Bread Crumbs Snack items i.e. cookies, goldfish crackers etc.
Jarred Pasta Sauce	Cooking Oil	Toiletries
Cereal (hot or cold)	Non-Perishable Milk such as Parmalat	Shampoo & Conditioner, Soap
Canned Potatoes	Salad Dressing (any flavor)	Diapers, baby wipes, ointment
Egg Noodles	Ketchup, Mustard & Mayonnaise	Tooth Paste & Tooth Brushes

Inclement Weather Policy

Here in New England we get to enjoy seasonal weather changes. At MCC, we try to be flexible and make safe choices about our regularly scheduled plans here at church. This is a reminder of our inclement weather policy, including who makes decisions about worship and programs and how that information is spread in the community. If you are in a position of responsibility, please look to see what your leadership role is.

The safety and well-being of our congregation is one of our most important concerns. Therefore, in the event of extremely bad weather on any given Sunday, the following procedure will be followed:

1. **Sunday Worship Services:** At 7 am, Pastor Jenn (203-895-5607) and Joanne Malia (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, including Pastor Barb (AP), 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. Pastor Barb - 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.

MCC Community Calendar

Week of Jan. 17th

10:00am Worship w/Baptism
11:15am Junior Choir
11:15am Deacons (Dineson)
11:15am Outreach Meeting (Classroom 4)
6:00pm Adult PF @the Parker-Burgard's
6:00pm Senior PF (NOTE: NO JR 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
11:15am Mustard Seed Meeting (Dineson)
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

Week of Jan. 31st

Heritage Sunday, Scout Sunday

10:00am Worship
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

NO CONFIRMATION
6:30 Christian Education (Barb's Office)

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

Week of Feb. 7th

10:00am Worship w/Communion
11:15am Junior Choir
6:00pm Junior & Senior PF
6:00pm Adult PF @ the Parker-Burgard home

Tues. Feb. 9th

1:30pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Feb. 10th

6:30pm Ash Wednesday Meal
7:30pm Ash Wednesday Worship

Thurs. Feb. 11th

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

Week of Feb. 14th

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

Mon. Feb. 15th

Office is closed in observance of President's Day
3:45pm St. George's Supper

Tues. Feb. 16th

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

Wed. Feb. 17th

6:30pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Feb. 18th

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

Sat. Feb. 20th

5:00pm Senior PF Chili Cook Off