



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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December 1, 2019

Dear ones, welcome to the special Advent Edition of the Steeple! During the month of December, our theme during Sunday worship is "*Heaven and Nature Sing: 300 Years of Joy to the World*" Keep your ears open for all of the special music of the season. Be sure to take a look in awe at the Victorian style decorations that Andrew and Kristina Logan have graced the Meetinghouse with. It's spectacular!

When the holidays come around, we often gather together with family and friends to share a meal. This year, the Deacons and I decided to try an experiment... sharing communion every Sunday of Advent. Why? We think the practice might bring us closer to God, to each other and to the sacredness of the season.

I also want to thank you for your invaluable support as I was preparing for bariatric surgery and in the days of healing afterward. From cooking for our family, taking our daughter to your house to play, delivering flowers to brighten my day, the many inspiring cards, your prayers/e-mails/texts/supportive visits/gifts... I can't tell you how much I appreciate all your love and support. Recovering from surgery is never easy, but your care relieved a lot of my stress and let me focus on healing. Clark and I will never forget all that you've done for us – thank you! Because so much of my life lately has been about living a new, healthier lifestyle, I thought I'd share an Advent diet plan that a friend shared with me years ago as a way of preparing for the coming of the Christ child.



Fast from fear, Feast on trust
Fast from grief, Feast on joy
Fast from judging others, Feast on Christ dwelling in them
Fast from an emphasis on judging others, Feast on unity as God's children
Fast from thoughts of illness, Feast on Christ's healing power
Fast from anger, Feast on patience
Fast from worry, Feast on God's guiding presence
Fast from complaining, Feast on appreciation
Fast from negatives, Feast on positives
Fast from unrelenting pressure, Feast on resting in God
Fast from hostility, Feast on peace
Fast from bitterness, Feast on forgiveness
Fast from anxiety, Feast on hope
Fast from yourself, Feast on God

Wishing you a bright Advent season filled with Peace, Hope, Joy and Love, *Pastor Jenn*

Waiting – The “Thorn” of Advent

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! *Debi*

TODAY!: Step Back in Time with Monroe Victorian Christmas!



Hear ye, hear ye! You are cordially invited to participate in our first Monroe Victorian Christmas Event! It all begins today with a Victorian style worship service. At 1pm, a tractor drawn carriage from Benedicts will be ferrying visitors between the Monroe Congregational Church, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, the Washington Masonic Lodge #19 and the East Village School House for open houses and tours, some with refreshments and activities. Entertainment will be provided by roaming bands of carolers. **The afternoon culminates at 5pm with lighting the tree on the Historic Centre Greene and at the Washington Masonic Lodge #19.** Join in the fun!

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Elisha's Corner

By Gary Thompson, Church Historian

Our First Victorian Christmas



The first celebration of Christmastide by the members of our ancestral congregation had to also be our first Victorian Christmas. How Victorian by Dickens' standards is, however, anybody's guess. The earliest Puritans did not celebrate Christmas, albeit they acknowledged the birth of Christ as a holy occurrence. Its celebration close to the winter solstice was considered a superficially Roman Catholic established holy day of obligation and a pagan tradition that celebrated the winter solstice as well; both from which they fervently desired distancing themselves. Notwithstanding this conviction, near the end of December was an opportune time to celebrate the birth of Christ in rural areas of Connecticut. The crops were all harvested, beer and wine was made and stored, fresh meat was slaughtered because it was cold enough to stay fresh and/or be smoked. The farmers were in a more leisure time of the year. Puritans were not prudish; they liked having a good time and entertaining, but they fervently maintained that the celebration of Christmas was in and of itself pagan, corrupt and evil by the very carryings on, like the rowdy "wassailing", which they systematically attempted to abolish or "purify". Wassailing was an activity of frolic and song, overindulgence and insistent participation. Young men and women would gather and wander from house to house singing (not always Christmas carols), demanding food and drink for their efforts. "Oh, bring us some Figgie pudding" and "we won't go until we get same" so you better "bring it right here" and now expressed the tone of their nature.

Of course, Anglicans and Catholics did celebrate Christmas in New England: only they had to do it quietly if Puritans were around. There is historical reference of the Ripton Parish allowing the children of their Meeting House to attend the Christmas celebration in the Episcopal Church which was festively decorated for the occasion. Decorating with evergreen boughs was considered by our Puritan forbearers to be a form of paganism, too. Excessive revelry or indulgence was considered irreverent to ones soul and a sinful expression of disrespect and wasteful activity. Thus, it was a day like any other. Yet as the various cultures blended in Monroe and throughout New England, the strictures of the early Puritans and their Congregationalist successors began to loosen. Keep in mind that St. Peter's Church was established in 1808. Saint Nicholas, a Dutch tradition, and Christmas trees, a German custom, found their way into many colonial households. But it wasn't until the mid-1800s that the rituals of Christmas that we know today were common in rural Connecticut. The Congregational Church lost its standing as Connecticut's legally established church in 1818. Hartford's Brick Meeting House, or First Congregational Church, held its first Christmas service in 1823. *The Courant* endorsed the move, noting that, "It has been the wish of many pious people among those whose form of worship differs from the Episcopal Church that the day which gave birth to the Savior of the world should be generally commemorated by appropriate religious services."

By the 1840s many states began to make Christmas a legal holiday. An 1856 Massachusetts law accorded Christmas Day a state holiday. The success of this measure was due to the growing number of Irish Catholics in the electorate. Public offices were also to be closed on Christmas Day, and it was expected that businesses would follow suit. In time they did. In 1870, during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant, the Congress declared Christmas a federal holiday in an effort to unite the post Civil War North and South. By the end of the century the Puritan objections to the observance was relaxed and accepted as a solemn and simple feast day for family gatherings and the exchange of gifts, a tradition recounting the visit of the Magi. The publication of Clement C. Moore's poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, in 1822 enlightened the notion that it was a

family holiday, emphasizing giving presents to children. With the help of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* published on December 19, 1843, the focus on charity and goodwill entered into the celebration. Dickens solidified his view of Christmas with his 1867-68 U.S. tour reading *A Christmas Carol*.

It is very likely that the members of the Congregation Society of Monroe slowly accepted and participated in Christmas recognition or celebration family by family between 1850 and 1870. It is also very likely that at the Sunday worship service on December 25, 1853, or at least 1864, many members greeted each other with the traditional "Good tidings to you and a very happy Christmas". But alas, records in our archives fail to provide clear evidence that would support in what year our Congregational Society congregation actually first embraced and celebrated their first Victorian Christmas. The records in our archives do tell us this. During the three years from 1880 to 1883 when Rev. Benjamin L. Swan was our minister, he performed at Christmas concerts and was the first of our ministers to have Christmas entertainment for the children. And, the records of the Monroe Young Peoples Society (our original Pilgrim Fellowship) note on Tuesday, December 27, 1892, their meeting "Subject [was] – The Babe of Bethlehem, What gifts do we bring Him ...", and in the following year on Monday, December 26, 1893, they recorded, "Christmas Service. What can we give to Christ..." Anyone of those years could have been the year of our first Christmas celebration as a congregation.

In the true spirit of this Christmas season for peace and good will for all mankind, good tidings to all of you for a very happy Christmas and may it last throughout the coming year.

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 59 pledges for a total of \$155,076.** *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 29 of our pledgers so far have taken the challenge and increased, many by 10% or more!** 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!



Heaven and Nature Sing: 300 Years of Joy to the World = Advent is Here!

You know where that line in the title comes from, right? Sing it with me: "Joy to the world...the Lord has come!" One of the best-loved hymns in history, "Joy to the World," turns 300 this year. In 1719, Isaac Watts penned this beautiful song, and we have been singing it at Christmastime in

faith communities all around the world for three centuries. That makes this year a special occasion!

This year, we will go on an Advent journey looking at several different ways that we can experience and bring joy to everyone around us, even and especially when our circumstances and current events are not so happy. When we use the word joy in modern language, we usually think of simple happiness or bliss. But true joy goes so much deeper than that. Inspired by The Book of Joy with the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, this series expands our experience of joy and calls us to a new understanding of what it means to be peace, hope, love, and joy in a troubled world.

December 1, 10 am 1-4:45 pm 5 pm	First Week of Advent Worship, "Hopeful Joy" Victorian Christmas Open Houses Community Tree Lighting featuring <i>Just Voices</i>
December 8, 10 am 11:15 am	Second Week of Advent Worship, "Peaceful Joy" Congregational Conversation, Dineson Parlor
December 15, 10 am 11:15 am 5 pm	Third Week of Advent, "Unabashed Joy", special presentation by Fruits of the Spirit about Chrismons Advent Faith + Fellowship + Fun, Wilton Hall Community Caroling with Senior & Junior PF
December 22, 10 am 11:15 am	Fourth Week of Advent, "Loving Joy" Special Christmas Coffee Hour
December 24 4 pm 7 pm 11 pm	"Incarnate Joy" Christmas Eve <i>Quiet Service</i> , a contemplative, prayerful time with communion <i>Family Friendly Service</i> , worship for all ages, come 15 minutes early to enjoy the opening music <i>Lessons & Carols by Candlelight</i> with traditional readings and special music, come 15 minutes early to enjoy all the music
December 29, 10 am 12 pm	"Compassionate Joy", Christmas Casual, wear your favorite PJ's or Christmas Sweater, enjoy cocoa and cookies at coffee hour Young Adult Christmas Brunch, Parsonage

Outreach

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:

Canned green beans, peas, & corn

Canned sweet and white potatoes

Canned tuna & chicken

Boxed macaroni & cheese

Boxed rice

Boxed cold cereal

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.

Safe Conduct Committee

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: Bathrooms

During activities such as Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, the outer door of each bathroom shall remain open. —MCC's SafeConduct policy

Privacy and bathrooms go together. No one wants to do their business in public, even if their business is simply combing their hair or getting a piece of food unstuck from their teeth. However, it's the private nature of bathrooms in churches and other buildings that make them attractive places for adult predators, not to mention children or youth who want to bully or otherwise abuse a peer.

You've probably seen bathrooms in public places that were designed without outer doors. People doing their business are still shielded from others outside the bathroom, but not by a closed door. To enhance the safety of children and youth in the bathrooms in Rexford House, while still providing privacy for people whose business is of the number 1 or number 2 variety, **we will begin propping open the outer doors to those bathrooms whenever minors are in the building.**

Doing this will make it less likely that an instance of abuse will go unnoticed, but it will also serve another purpose: It will make our bathrooms unattractive places for potential adult predators and young bullies. In fact, prevention is a key part of the entire SafeConduct policy. If we foster a culture where the safety of children and youth is respected, there will be no opening for a potential predator or bully.

Fellowship

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

- ✚ **December 16th-7:30pm** The 100 Year Old Man by Jonas Jonasson-Hosted by Mary Unger in Dineson Parlor
- ✚ **January 20th-7:30pm** The Rules of Civility by Amor Towles-Hosted by Dianne Griffiths in Dineson Parlor



Faith on Tap, Friday December 6th: 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. Come learn more and join in! Call/text Clark (203-895-5604) or Rev. Jenn (203-895-5607) Gingras with any questions. **December Theme: *Running Aground: Recognizing Burnout and Getting Help.***

Your Board of Christian Fellowship is asking for baked goods for the special Christmas coffee hour on **December 22nd**. Please drop off your goodies in the kitchen and join us in Wilton Hall for fellowship and Holiday cheer.



Morning Circle invites the ladies of the congregation to their annual Christmas luncheon on Wednesday, Dec 11 at 11:30AM at Jennie's Pizza in Monroe. For those



who've taken a gift tag for the Giving Tree, please bring your wrapped gift with the attached tag and drop it off in the church office by Sunday, Dec 8th. Thank you in advance for your kindness and generosity. We will not meet in January or February. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, Mar 11 at 11AM in Dineson Parlor. We will be putting together birthday bags for the Food Pantry. Donations of cake mix, frosting, birthday candles and napkins are welcomed in the bin across the Men's room. Please contact Jackie Bleakney with any questions or comments at 203-268-5275.

Prayer Partners are keeping others in their thoughts and prayers!! Advent is upon us and you've been receiving my emails every so often. I will be helping you celebrate



Advent each week with a message that entails a prayer, a Hospitality Challenge and what each week of Advent is all about, as well as pictures of my Nativity scene. Give your prayer partner a moment of your day or a handshake during the passing of the peace or converse with them at coffee hour. I look forward to our "Big Reveal" potluck luncheon on

Sunday, May 17 at 11:15AM in Wilton Hall when we meet over a meal and discover who's been praying for whom. Please contact Susie Cuseo with any questions at 203-268-0280.

Deacons

SAVE THE DATE: Young Adult Christmas Brunch On Sunday, December 29th at noon join us at the parsonage for a Young Adult (*older than high school, not yet 31*) 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 January 5th at 10 am. If you would like to participate, please contact Jacob Parker-Burgard (203-400-2148) or Kelsey Kaminski (203-362-9794)

Christian Faith Formation

Calendars:

Fruit of the Spirit Gatherings in December:

- 1st – ALL Groups Gather
- 8th – ALL Groups Gather
- 15th – Chrismons Presentation
- 22nd – NO Gatherings
- 29th – NO Groups Gather

Junior PF Gatherings in December:

- 1st – Victorian Christmas from 1:00-4:00
- 8th – Gather from 6:00-7:30 pm
- 15th – Gather for Caroling from 5:00 pm-8:00 pm
- 22nd – NO Gathering
- 29th – NO Gathering

Advent Faith, Fellowship, Fun: On Sunday, December 15th, the Board of Christian Faith Formation will be offering a day of Faith, Fellowship and Fun based on the Chrismons Story. Beginning at 10:00 am our Fruit of the Spirit (Sunday school) groups will be offering Worship with a presentation on the Chrismons. Following worship, at 11:00, we will be making Chrismons for you to take home and hang on your own tree. We hope you can join us for this fun filled day!

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 2020 mission trip a special one!

Caroling Senior with Senior & Junior PF, 5pm December 15! 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



Tools for an Advent-ure - To help you along with your Advent journey this year be sure to visit the Advent Table on December 1st. We will have our traditional Advent Wreath materials, Random Acts of Kindness Advent Calendars, and back by popular demand – Advent in a Bag. In this bag you will find Scripture readings, devotions, and fun activities that engage people of all ages!



The Christmas Poinsettias are ready to order! All poinsettias are red double plants. The cost is \$25.00. **All orders must be received no later than December 15th** to ensure delivery by December 24th. Please make your check payable to Monroe Congregational Church with "poinsettia" in the memo line. The check may be dropped off in the church office, left in the offering plate or given to Ann Zeiner. Questions? 268-5302

Parking at Town Hall: In December, 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!

Church Council

Congregational Conversation: December 8th Each year we develop at budget for the next year of ministry at the Monroe Congregational Church. We hold this informal congregational conversation so that everyone has a chance to ask questions about the process, individual board allocations and even make recommendations which help shape our priorities as a plan is developed. No votes are taken, but ideas are shared. Knowing this financial information ahead of time helps us be better informed prior to our Annual Congregational Meeting on January 29th. Please join us in Dineson Parlor on Sunday, December 8th, 2019 at 11:15 and join in on the discussion!

Annual Reports Due January 11th
Please submit your annual report to the church office by Thursday, January 11th Please call the church office with any questions. 203-268-9327 or email secretary@mcc-ucc.org

MCC Community Calendar

Week of Dec. 1st

Victorian Christmas

Communion Sunday~First Sunday of Advent

10:00 am Worship

1-4:45 pm Victorian Christmas Open Houses

5:00 pm Tree Lighting

5:00 pm Senior PF

Tues. Dec. 3rd

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Dec 4th

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Dec. 5th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

Fri. Dec. 6th

7:30 pm Faith on Tap at Veracious

Week of Dec. 8th

Second Sunday of Advent

10:00 am Worship

11:15 am Congregational Conversation

5:00 pm Senior PF

5:00 pm Adult PF (Parker-Burgard home)

6:00 pm Junior PF

Tues. Dec. 10th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Dec 11th

11:00 am Morning Circle (Location TBD)

6:30 pm Confirmation Class

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Dec. 12th

9:30 am Bible Study Christmas Party (Dineson)

Week of Dec. 15th

Third Sunday of Advent

10:00 am Worship-Fruits Presentation

11:15 am Crismon Making (Wilton Hall)

5:00 pm Adult PF

5:00 pm Senior/Junior PF Christmas Caroling

Mon. Dec. 16th

3:45 pm St. George's Supper

Tues. Dec. 10th

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

7:00 pm Bereavement Group (Dineson Parlor)

Wed. Dec 18th

7:00 pm Adult Choir

Thurs. Dec. 19th

7:00 pm CE Board Meeting (Dineson)

Week of Dec. 22nd

Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:00 am Worship

11:15 am Special Christmas Coffee Hour (Wilton Hall)

5:00 pm Adult PF

5:00 pm Senior PF

Tues. Dec. 24th

Office Closed

4:00 pm Quiet Christmas Eve Service

7:00 pm Traditional Christmas Eve Service

11:00 pm Lessons & Carols Service

Wed. Dec. 25th

Office Closed in Observance of Christmas

Week of Dec. 29th

10:00 am Christmas Casual Worship

12 pm Young Adult Christmas Brunch, Parsonage

Tues. Dec. 31st

Office Closed

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)

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

5:00 pm Senior 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)

