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Office Hours:
Mon. & Wed. 9 am – 5:30 pm
Fri. 9 am – 5 pm

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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Music Director: Will Duchon
Administrator/Bookkeeper: Diane Prall
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THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST STEEPLE

Find us on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/monroecongregationalchurchucc>

December 1, 2020



Luminarias first appeared around the 16th century. They were used to guide people to midnight mass on the last night of Las Posadas (a Spanish word meaning lodging or inn). Las Posadas is a nine-day celebration which began in Spain, although it's now a holiday tradition celebrated primarily in Mexico and the southwest part of the US. We don't see luminaria as often in the northeast because we spend less time outdoors (*perhaps not in 2020 – we are outside all the time*).

Early on, when used in Christmas celebrations, the Roman Catholic Church believed the lights would guide the spirit of the Christ child to people's homes. They have also been linked traditionally to a vigil bonfire, such as one that would light the night, in order to fend off the growing darkness of this time of year.

Just about everybody loves making a luminary, especially during the Christmas season, because they are pretty and decorative to look at. The original way luminaria were made is similar to how they're made today: put sand (or even kitty litter) in the bottom of a paper bag and insert a candle into the sand, which holds a lit candle in place. Punch out a design in the bag to make it even prettier!

Remember the holidays are all about creating memories. While it is fun to carry on the holiday traditions you grew up with, it's also nice to add a new one to your family's repertoire every once in a while. In the year 2020, as so much has shifted and changed, let's light up our neighborhoods with festive luminaria.

My prayer is that – together – we can think of many ways to make this season special, even in the midst of challenging times. This will not only be a balm for our hearts, but can also help us build a stronger, more connected community. If you'd like some luminaria bags for home use, simply let me know at jenn.gingras@gmail.com.

May you and yours have a blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas!

In hope and peace, Pastor Jenn



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

P.S. It's not too late to participate in "**The Art of Advent**"!

Just give Debi a call at 203-444-6760

Tue. Dec. 1st

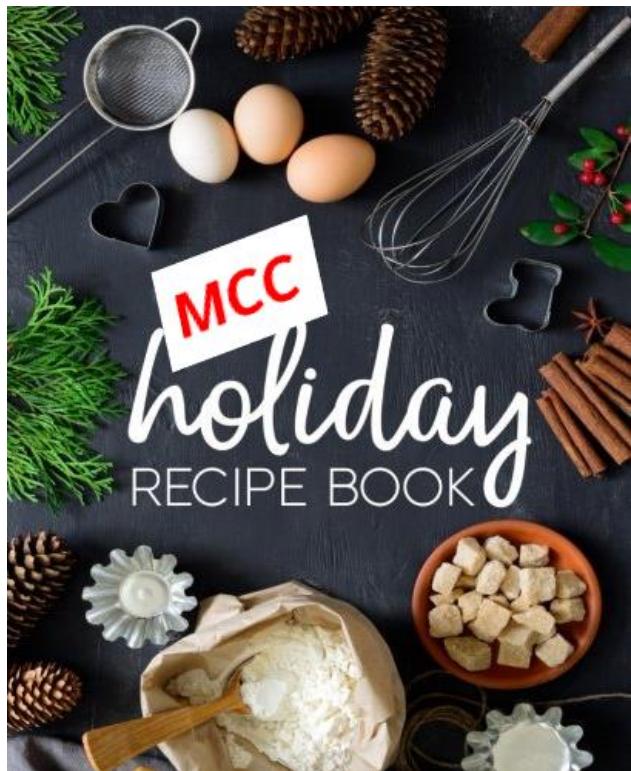
10 am The Art of Advent -Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81864422523?pwd=TkFqeEd6cnNMU1RLdVpIL0laMkRxQT09>

7 pm The Art of Advent -Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85437860502?pwd=eHN5Y1ISQ2tmSUxwM0xuOTFDcWxnQT09>





Seeking Holiday Recipe Book Entries

It seems like many of our traditions, like the Christmas Coffee Hour, will be postponed until next year in order to comply with health and safety guidelines. Many of our church families are adapting their Thanksgiving and Christmas festivities this year too.

With that being said, at MCC we won't be entirely skipping our celebration, just modifying this year's approach. The slogan of 2020 has been "we are all in this together" and what better way to keep that feeling of togetherness than to create an MCC Holiday Cookbook where we can share some of what we love about the holidays with each other? This year's book will be a packet we will print ourselves and share over e-mail. Maybe by next year, we'll have enough to make a more formal book.

A Holiday Recipe template can be found on our church's homepage: www.mcc-ucc.org. You can use it to type up your recipe, or you can send a handwritten copy to me and I will take care of typing it up for you. Please include a little note sharing why this recipe is special to you, and a picture if you like. I would love to get books printed before Christmas if possible, so I ask that you kindly submit all recipes to me by December 15th.

Thank you and stay safe!

On Behalf of Your Fellowship Board, Michelle Cardentey (michelle.cardentey@gmail.com)

Trustees

Ladies' Bathroom Renovation Project has been completed! Thank you again for your generosity that allowed this project to proceed. Here are some pictures of the finished product.

The Ladies' Bathroom Renovation Team (Dave Allen, Kyla Allen, Julie McClenathan, Arlene Redmond)

A Note of Thanks...

As I write this, it is the day before Thanksgiving, and I am grateful for a lot of things, but I am going to focus on one! I went up to MCC yesterday to do reconnaissance on the newly renovated ladies' room. It is 98% finished and might be finished by the time you read this.

I am very grateful to the team who made this happen. Julie McClenathan spent untold hours doing research and purchasing pretty much everything - with some help from Diane Prall (Honorary Member of the Ladies' Bathroom Renovation Team). She has been busy returning things, buying more things, consulting with Kyla Allen on design decisions, making independent decisions, and interfacing with Eric Schneider, our contractor. She even picked up and delivered various (heavy) items to MCC - with the assistance of Rob

McClenathan (another Honorary Member of the Ladies' Bathroom Renovation Team). I am grateful for Julie's dedication, energy, taste, expertise, perseverance, judgment and watchful oversight. I am grateful for Kyla who found our contractor whose bid came in at an affordable price. Eric did a good job and always kept in mind that we are a church and very budget conscious. Kyla is an interior designer and lent her expertise, creativity and time to research, meetings and consultations. And, I am grateful to Dave Allen whose knowledge about all-things-MCC is unsurpassed. He had as much enthusiasm and passion for the project as those of us who will actually use the room. He is calm, steady, and super-dedicated to MCC and our campus. He holds us together and beautifies us ("us" being the campus!). You can count on Dave to always be a loyal voice of reason. The whole team put in time, caring, enthusiasm and commitment. We also had a very supportive group of Trustees and particularly, a very supportive and helpful Head of Trustees, Frank Wittenauer.

Let's not forget our congregation who—even in this difficult year—made this happen with their generous contributions. Thank you. And thank you to Pastor Jenn for her support and encouragement of all of us.

As you can see from the pictures, we have new everything – floor, ceiling, walls, window, heating fixture, lighting, counter, sinks, faucets, toilets, stalls and miscellaneous other items like a wastepaper basket, step stool for the kids, and more.

I hope for lots of reasons that we can all get back to the campus full time. As Pastor Jenn would say, "May it be so, and may it be soon."

Arlene Redmond





Advent Fireside Vespers: In order to keep our capacity down during popular December services, and to prepare an additional place for worship where some may feel safer, we are adding a 4 pm Advent Campfire Vespers every Sunday in Advent and on Christmas Eve. This is an outdoor, socially-distanced, masked, casual worship service around the fire pit with readings, prayer, Advent Candle and a little music (weather permitting). Dress warmly!

Please join us on December 6, 2020 at 5:00 pm for the **Lighting of the Christmas Tree on the Monroe Center Green: A Community**

Celebration of Advent and Christmas, Hosted by the Monroe Congregational Church, UCC & St. Peter's Episcopal Church. In order to keep our community members safe, please follow safe gathering guidelines by wearing a face covering/mask and maintaining a holy distance of 6 ft from those outside your household. Dress warmly and bring a flashlight!



Zoom Christmas Caroling & Trivia: Sunday, December 20th at 7 pm

Join us for some festive holiday cheer from the comfort of your home! Pastor Jenn will host and screen share the lyrics to some Christmas favorites, and we'll do a round of Christmas trivia:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82297857035?pwd=MlV0cEpEbm41N0N6dTfHcExneDVtdz09>

December 24, 2020 - Christmas Eve with MCC

"We Believe, Even Now"

- 4 pm Christmas Eve campfire vespers
- 5 pm Quiet Service, a contemplative, prayerful worship
- 7 pm Christmas Eve Worship Service with Children's Message
- 11 pm Christmas Eve Worship Service (same content as 7pm)

Please RSVP for which in-person Christmas Eve worship service you and your household plan to attend:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0d44a8ac22a2fb6-christmas>



A **pre-recorded Lessons & Carols** service will be uploaded onto our church's YouTube page by noon on Christmas Eve, for those of you staying safe at home to enjoy.

Outreach

St. Georges Supper / Sock Drive

Hi folks, December 21 is our last St. George's Supper for 2020, and the Covid19 protocol is still the safest way to provide this meal, so we will be providing bag lunches that Outreach will be making and delivering.

As has been our tradition in December, we'd like to provide gifts of **Socks & Scarves** to the folks we'll be serving. We are asking for new men's crew socks and kids socks (ages 5 and up) as well as scarves for men, women and children, so different sizes and patterns.

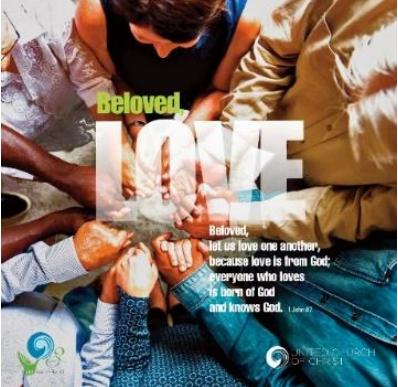
If you'd like to provide socks and scarves, please bring them to the church office by Monday, Dec. 14. Thanks so much for helping our neighbors.

Peace, Kathy

p.s. Unfortunately, there will be no Covenant to Care gift drive in December due to pandemic restrictions.



Beloved, Love MCC's 2021 Stewardship Campaign

At the Monroe Congregational Church, we give ourselves to answering God's call to love. Our annual stewardship campaign provides the resources our congregation needs to answer God's call. Generosity towards the annual pledge campaign assures that our congregation can faithfully answer God's call to love, because it enables us to plan for the next year's needs. You should have received our 2021 Stewardship Drive mailer, which includes a pledge card. Our hope is that you can complete and return it by the end of November to the church office, either by mailing it to MCC at 34 Church Street, Monroe CT 06468 or dropping it in the plate on Sunday. For contact-free submission, go to our church's donate page (www.mccucc.org/donate) and download an editable PDF to e-mail to our Receiver, John O'Rourke e-mail him at jorourke224@gmail.com.

Campaign update: as of 11/18/20, 28 pledges have been received for a total of \$91,780

Please visit our church's YouTube page to see testimonials from Don Parker-Burgard, Arlene Redmond, and Katherine & Kristina Logan.

Christian Education

Faith Formation Schedule:



Fruit of the Spirit Sunday School: Faith, Fellowship and Fun will not be gathering in person through the end of January. Out of concerns for safety we are pivoting Sunday school to a Zoom format with gatherings from 11:00 am - 11:30 am on December 6th and 20th, and January 3rd, 17th, and 31st. If you would like to volunteer to read or help with Zoom lessons or have any questions, please contact Debi.

December 6th - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82821384184?pwd=WHpjYWtaV0ZiNmFDRDhJVEpPcS9Tdz09>

December 20th - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89623920511?pwd=eDJra1hVZUtGS0ZRUjJ0Z25ncXBWUT09>



Jr. PF

12/06 – Gathering from 3:00-4:30 pm

12/13 – Gathering from 3:00-4:30 pm

12/20 – Gathering from 3:00-4:30 pm

12/27 – NO Gathering – Merry Christmas!



Adult PF is meeting via Zoom the first and third Sundays of the month. For information about Adult PF please contact Don Parker-Burgard. dpburgard@sbcglobal.net

Fellowship



MCC Book Club

December 9 th	Last Christmas in Paris: A Novel of World War I by Hazel Gaynor and Heather Webb. Host: Paula Haggstrom
January 13 th	The Accidental Empress by Allison Pitaki. Host: Linda Fracassini
February 10 th	The Book of Lost Friends by Lisa Wingate. Host: Peggy Villani
March 10 th	The Gown: A Novel of the Royal Wedding by Jennifer Robson. Host: Trees Whitbeck
April 14 th	The Children Act by Ian McEwan. Host: Arlene Redmond

Questions -contact Mary Unger (203) 268-5754

Our last meeting of the year will be on **Wednesday, December 9th at 11:15AM** in Wilton Hall where we will have a catered luncheon to celebrate the holiday season. Contact Jackie Bleakney at 203-268-5275 with any questions or comments.



Ruth Wakeley and her family want to thank the members and friends of Monroe Congregational Church for all their prayers, cards and donations to MCC after the death of Bill Wakeley.

Just for Fun – Jigsaw Puzzle Exchange

Jigsaw puzzle consumption has increased wildly during the pandemic. People have turned to tiny, brightly colored, irregularly shaped slices of cardboard to provide them with a sense of control over a chaotic world. Retailers can't keep puzzles in stock, manufacturers can't keep up with increased orders. Ravensburger isn't even *taking* orders. So, let's help each other out by having a jigsaw puzzle exchange.



Do you have a jigsaw puzzle that you no longer need, and does it have all its pieces? Do you want to exchange it for one you haven't tried yet? Bring it to MCC. We've set aside a corner of Wilton Hall as a place to find your next diversion. When you've completed your puzzle, take a picture and post it on our facebook page, MCC-UCC Conversation. Contact Pastor Jenn with any questions, or to coordinate a time to browse. Happy Puzzling!



Happy December Birthday to the following people
and to anyone we may have missed we will keep you in our prayers.

Lily	Briggs	12/02	Emily	Barnhart	12/17
Frank	Wittenauer	12/02	Tom	Briggs	12/17
Jeremy	Young	12/03	Connor	Halloran	12/18
Stefany	Mitchell	12/04	Jennifer	Halloran	12/18
Samuel	Siciliano	12/05	Joseph	Siciliano	12/18
Matthew	Colegrove	12/06	Lynda	Bauer	12/21
Larry	Wissink	12/06	Trevor	Rooney	12/22
Owen	Granello	12/08	Ashley	Lauren	12/23
Ryan	Granello	12/08	Donna	Parratt	12/23
Madeline	Wissink	12/10	Ashley	Prall	12/23
Megan	Wissink	12/10	Dana	Firmender	12/24
Bill	Allen	12/11	Christopher	McHugh	12/24
Lisa	Burke	12/11	Kirsten	Crosnier	12/27
Kiersten	Rooney	12/11	John	O'Rourke	12/27
Judy	Elmendorf	12/13	Leanne	McEvoy	12/28
Daniela	Gerhard	12/13	Adam	Briggs	12/29
James	Perrone	12/13	Annika	Stadler	12/29
Caitlin	Whiteley	12/13	Maria	Barresi	12/31
Kathryn	Maiolo	12/14	Janet	Haringa	12/31
Paulette	Obertz	12/14	Wayne	Kenyon	12/31
Ryan	Firmender	12/15	John	Telep	12/31



Happy December Wedding Anniversary the following couples and to anyone we may have missed, we will keep you in our prayers. (Number is anniversary date)

Richard & Lynn Draus⁽⁰⁴⁾ John & Cindy O'Rourke⁽⁰⁷⁾ Judy & Donald Elmendorf⁽¹⁶⁾
 Linda & David Rooney⁽¹⁷⁾ Susan & David Walker⁽²⁰⁾ Jonathan & Vida Stone⁽²²⁾
 Vinay & Elizabeth Sampson⁽²⁹⁾

MCC Community Calendar

Week of Nov. 29th

Stewardship Sunday

First Sunday of Advent (Hope)

10:00 am Worship
11:30 am Zoom Coffee Hour
4:00 pm Adult PF
4:00 pm Advent Campfire Vespers

Tue. Dec. 1st

10 am The Art of Advent -Zoom
7 pm The Art of Advent -Zoom

Wed. Dec. 2nd

6:30 pm Confirmation Class
7:45 pm Choir Catch Up - Zoom Meeting

Thurs. Dec. 3rd

9:30 am Bible Study

Week of Dec. 6th

Second Sunday of Advent (Peace)

10:00 am Worship - Communion
11:00 am Faith, Fellowship & Fun via Zoom
11:30 am Zoom Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Senior PF (Pierce Lawn)
4:00 pm Adult PF
4:00 pm Advent Campfire Vespers
5:00 pm Community Tree Lighting

Tue. Dec. 8th

10:00 am The Art of Advent -Zoom
7:00 pm The Art of Advent -Zoom

Wed. Dec. 9th

11:00 am Morning Circle
6:30 pm Confirmation Class

Thurs. Dec. 10th

9:30 am Bible Study

Week of Dec. 13th

Third Sunday of Advent (Joy)

10:00 am Worship - Communion
11:30 am Zoom Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Senior PF (Pierce Lawn)
4:00 pm Adult PF
4:00 pm Advent Campfire Vespers

Tue. Dec. 15th

10:00 am The Art of Advent -Zoom
7:00 pm The Art of Advent -Zoom

Wed. Dec. 16th

No Confirmation Class

Thurs. Dec. 17th

7:00 pm CE

Week of Dec. 20th

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Love)

10:00 am Worship - Communion
11:00 am Faith, Fellowship & Fun via Zoom
11:15 Outreach
11:30 am Zoom Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Senior PF (Pierce Lawn)
12:30 pm Trustees
4:00 pm Adult PF
4:00 pm Advent Campfire Vespers
7:00 pm Zoom Christmas Caroling

Mon. Dec. 21st

3:00 pm St George's Supper

Wed. Dec. 23th

No Confirmation Class

Thurs. Dec. 24th Christmas Eve

4:00 pm Advent Campfire Vespers
5:00 pm Quiet Service
7:00 pm Christmas Eve Service
11:00 pm Christmas Eve Service

Fri. Dec. 25th Christmas Day

Week of Dec. 27th

Christmas Casual Worship

10:00 am Worship
11:30 am Zoom Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Senior PF (Pierce Lawn)

Wed. Dec. 30th

No Confirmation Class

Thurs. Dec. 31th New Year's Eve

Fri. Jan 1st New Year's Day

The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
and St. Peter's Episcopal Church invite you to

Lighting the Christmas Tree: A Community Celebration



**Sunday, December 6, 2020 • 5 PM
Monroe Centre Green**

In order to help keep our community safe,
please follow safe gathering guidelines by
wearing a face covering/mask and keeping 6
ft of holy space from those that live outside
your household or bubble.
Dress warmly and bring a flashlight!