

# THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

# STEEPLE

34 Church Street  
Monroe, CT 06468

Tel.: (203) 268-9327  
Fax: (203) 268-3153

## Office Hours:

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

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras  
Director of Faith Formation: Debi Mastroni-Kenyon  
Music Director: Will Duchon  
Administrator/Bookkeeper: Diane Prall  
Church e-mail: [secretary@mcc-ucc.org](mailto:secretary@mcc-ucc.org)

**February 1, 2020**

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## ***It's In the Bag!***

The preacher was running around town doing errands one clear Saturday morning. Unable to turn off her brain and heart, she was mulling over what to preach the next morning. Wondering what word from on high would the Lord give her... what should she preach about? More immediately, what should she write the newsletter article about?

She pondered the various sickness and traumas that were running rampant in her congregation. There were those recovering from recent surgeries, others fighting cancer or trying to figure out what life looks like when a partner suffers dementia. She thought about the children dealing with various social and emotional obstacles at school and at home. She wondered about the youth who were making weighty decisions about their future. She pondered the situation of parents trying to raise their children in a world that seemed to be hell bent on hurting them. She remembered those who were struggling with their sobriety.

And her heart became really, really heavy.

Returning home, she pulled into the church parking lot and spotted her daughter, sitting at the picnic table. Her clothes were dirty, her face was smudged with dirt, her thick brown hair so tangled it appeared like a crown above her head. The girl had been playing outside, getting some fresh air on a mild mid-winter day. In her hands she clutched a brown paper bag. The preacher watched as her daughter shook the bag at her and giggled. What could possibly be inside the bag? Was it stink bugs? Or maybe some old slime?

With a heavy sigh, the preacher walked over to her child and sat beside her on the bench. When the child saw her mother, a grin wrapped around her head and she lifted his bag toward her and asked, "Do you want some candy?" The preacher smiled and looked at the small, dirty hand of the child holding the crumpled bag and asked, "Where is the candy?"  
*"It's in the bag!"*

There was a phrase we used when I was a kid... every time someone wanted to reassure you that everything was taken care of, they would say, "*it's in the bag*" or - in other words - it was done. I've decided to trust my daughter when she tells me "*it's in the bag*". We may not know what paths the future has in store for us, but we can rest assured that we're not left alone. Just remember to look for the kid with the candy!

Our confirmands have given me a challenge. They'd like me to preach a sermon on the questions that our folks in the pews have about faith, church, the Bible and life as we know it. So, they are going to help me gather those questions – from you – into a brown paper bag over the next few weeks. On Sunday, **February 23<sup>rd</sup>**, they will help me draw questions from the bag and preach about them. I can't wait to see what the Spirit has in store for all of us!

*In peace, Pastor Jenn*

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## **Living Stewardship**

Living Stewardship is a faith practice that involves all that it means to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. It grows out of deep caring for and joy in who we are as God's created people and the world in which we live. Living stewardship is about how we live our lives and how our lives express our values. Living stewardship is shalom: living in harmony with others and the world. As faithful disciples, we are called to live as generous creatures created by a generous God who shares responsibility with us for all creation. Stewardship involves all people because all are connected in mutually covenanted stewardship within God's original intent for creation.

On Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, the Fruit of the Spirit gathering was all about Stewardship. We had an interactive session where some of the youth looked up definitions on their smart phones and they all worked in teams to choose the best definition of "Steward". The consensus was that being a "Steward" was being a "Care taker". We then talked about what it means to be a good steward of MCC and all of the youth filled out pledge cards. I then challenged them to pledge \$50 to the church and they raised it to \$200 – so your Fruit of the Spirit, Sunday school students have made a pledge to MCC for 2020. I also repeated this with Jr. PF and they have pledged and paid \$100 for 2020.

ALL of these young people are inspiring and valuable to MCC and I am honored and thrilled to work with them each week.

*Peace, Debi*

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## ***It's In the Bag!***

*My Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*My question about faith, the Bible, church, or life as we know it is...* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Please submit this slip to a 2020 Confirmand by Sunday, February 16<sup>th</sup>.*



## 2020 Stewardship Campaign: It's a Wonder-FULL Life

To date, we have received 88 pledges for a total of \$198,198. We are only \$1,802 away from making our 2020 goal of \$200,000!

At the **2020 Annual Meeting last week**, the congregation committed to work with the Trustees on closing a 25k budget gap, decreasing our continued reliance on unrestricted endowments

and living (still generously) within our means. Here are some of the ways you can help:

- ▶ **Collection of prior year pledges = \$3,000** If you haven't completed the pledge you made in 2019, but can pay that now – great!
- ▶ **If those who have pledged in the past, do so again = \$10,000** Pledge cards may be found in the pews, at coffee hour, or in the church office – thanks!
- ▶ **If each pledger gave \$60 more this year = \$5,000** To increase your 2020 pledge, send an email to John O'Rourke at [jorourke224@gmail.com](mailto:jorourke224@gmail.com) or complete a revised pledge card – thank you!
- ▶ **Rental push = \$5,000** We've got a great space to rent! Contact Diane in the church office at [secretary@mcc-ucc.org](mailto:secretary@mcc-ucc.org) for dates and an application.
- ▶ **Raffles, fundraisers = \$5,000** If you have a great idea and the energy to organize a fundraiser, come talk to the Trustees!

Although there were voices of dissent on taking the following actions, we might also need to:

- ▶ Accept Pastor Jenn's offer to decline her 2% cost of living increase = \$2,000
- ▶ Reduce Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) from 25 to 20k = \$5,000

The Trustees will continue to monitor the situation as the year progresses. Thank you for prayerfully considering how to financially support the Monroe Congregational Church in 2020!



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!

## Christian Faith Formation



***Whatever you do DON'T miss  
Souper Bowl Sunday!***

**Souper Bowl of Caring:** In 1990, a Super Bowl Sunday prayer inspired a group of young people to do something more than celebrate a football game. They created the Souper Bowl of Caring, and have mobilized youth across the country to raise more than \$100 million for people in need. 2020 is the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Souper Bowl of Caring and the Sr. and Jr. Pilgrim Fellowships are teaming up to learn about hunger and food insecurity in the United States and collect food and money to fight hunger. Today, millions of Americans will tune in to the Super Bowl football game. There will be parties with abundant food, friendship and fellowship. At the same time, there will be people worrying about staying warm, finding shelter and a warm meal. Please join our young people as they demonstrate God's love by loving their neighbors through the Souper Bowl of Caring.

Sunday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> after worship, we will have a "Souper" Day where you can give a free will offering in exchange for a bowl of soup prepared by chefs Kelsey Kaminski (Maiolo) and Debi Mastroni-Kenyon. For more information or if you have any questions please contact Debi or Kelsey. For more information on the Souper Bowl of Caring visit [www.tacklehunger.org](http://www.tacklehunger.org). ALL donations will be sent to Spooner House in Shelton <http://www.actspooner.org/> and Bridgeport Rescue Mission <https://bridgeportrescuemission.org/>



Want to give the young people in your life the opportunity to learn more about loving God, their neighbors, themselves, and creation? Send them to a week of summer camp at **Silver Lake Conference Center**! Find session information and registration at [www.silverlakeect.org](http://www.silverlakeect.org) Once you register, contact Pastor Jenn for an FEA Scholarship application.

## February Calendars

### Fruit of the Spirit

- 2<sup>nd</sup> – Joyful Watermelons (K-2<sup>nd</sup>) Gather
- 9<sup>th</sup> – ALL Groups Gather
- 16<sup>th</sup> – ALL Groups Gather
- 23<sup>rd</sup> – ALL Groups Gather



### Jr. Pilgrim Fellowship

- 2<sup>nd</sup> – Gather from 11:00 am-12:30 pm
- 8<sup>th</sup> – SATURDAY – service to the Coffee House
- 16<sup>th</sup> – NO Gathering
- 23<sup>rd</sup> – Gather from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm



Debi at [debi@mcc-ucc.org](mailto:debi@mcc-ucc.org).

## Lenten Faith, Fellowship, and Fun for ALL Ages

**Make Room:** this Lenten season the Board of Christian Faith Formation is sponsoring another Faith, Fellowship, and Fun series entitled "Make Room". We will gather on Sundays, March 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, at 11:15 am to share a meal and experience Lent with all of our senses, seeing it as a special time for creating a welcoming space for God. Sign-up sheets are in Wilton Hall and if you have any questions please contact

## From the Board of Christian Outreach



**Save the date: The Annual MCC Tag Sale is coming!** Please mark your calendars for **April 4th from 9 am-1 pm (early birds at 8)** in Wilton Hall. Start gathering your gently used items for donation to the tag sale. **We are not able to accept anything broken or old TVs, computer monitors, large upholstered furniture or VHS tapes.** Please bring any clothing you wish to donate to the Mustard Seed.



**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](mailto:thecuseos@yahoo.com) or 203-268-0280 with any questions and thank you for your generosity.



**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

# PF's CHILI COOK-OFF

MONROE CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH

FEBRUARY 22

@5-8:30

\$10 ENTRY FEE



Try some chili, listen to the band, and rent a PFer!!

## Join in Fellowship



### **MCC's Got Talent!**

**The MCC Coffee House** Saturday, February 8th from 7-9 pm. Come chase away the mid-winter doldrums with a fun night out at MCC's Winter Coffeehouse! Refreshments will be provided for a small fee by the Junior Pilgrim Fellowship youth group for Australia Wildfire Relief, and free will offerings for the 2020 ministries of the church are welcome too! Featuring over a dozen artists, including: *Just Voices Acapella Group, The Folk Band and various other talented people!*

***The fun doesn't stop there!***

**Need some time to relax after all that excitement?  
Then be sure to sign up for this year's Women's Retreat.**



Don't miss out on a weekend designed just for you! Sign up in Wilton Hall for the **2020 MCC Women's Retreat**. Friday (evening), April 24 – Sunday (mid-day), April 26. Join us for all or part of the weekend. Payment for the weekend is due February 15.

**Learn about the "The Five Love Languages" before Valentine's Day!**



**Faith on Tap, Friday, February 7<sup>th</sup>:** Come talk about life and current events from a spiritual perspective at VERACIOUS BREWING COMPANY from 7:30 - 9pm. All are welcome. Agreement is not required, but civility is essential. Tea-totelers and soda drinkers welcome too! The February theme is "The Five Love Languages" Call/text Clark ([203-895-5604](tel:203-895-5604)) or Rev. Jenn ([203-895-5607](tel:203-895-5607)) Gingras with any questions.



**Young at Heart will meet on Thursday, February 27**



Join the **Yarn Group** on **February 10<sup>th</sup>** from 6:30 to 8:30 pm –it will leave you in stitches! Questions: Call Tress Whitbeck (203)895-0152



**Sponsor a Month of Coffee Hours** Would you like to help the people who come to worship get to know each other? What if we told you that you could sponsor a month of coffee hours at the low, low price of \$40? Our coffee is fair trade certified through Equal Exchange. You can use your sponsorship to honor loved ones – a dedication goes on a plaque and in the bulletin. Please make checks payable to MCC with “coffee sponsor” in the memo field.

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### Notes From Your Deacons

**Scout Sunday February 9<sup>th</sup>** All Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are invited and encouraged to wear their uniforms to worship on **February 9<sup>th</sup>**. Any who would like to participate in Scout Sunday at MCC, please contact Pastor Jenn ([Jenn@mcc-ucc.org](mailto:Jenn@mcc-ucc.org)) by February 5th. Scouts are needed as greeters, reader, offering collection, music...



### Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 26th

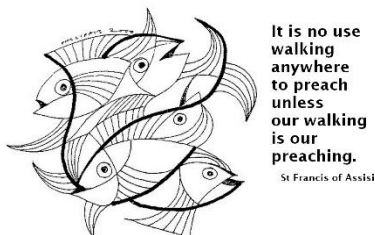
**9 am – 7 pm Labyrinth Walk:** The labyrinth will be set up in Wilton Hall, come anytime to walk and contemplate.

**11:30 am - 1 pm Ashes To Go:** In order to serve those in the community who would like to receive ashes but are

unable to attend worship in the evening, Pastor Jenn will be offering a drive-through imposition of ashes in the driveway next to the meetinghouse.

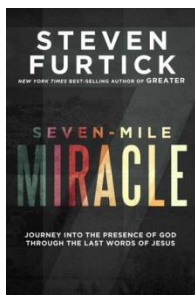
**6:30 pm Agape Soup Supper:** Join the Deacons for a light meal of soup and conversation in Wilton Hall.

**7:30 pm Worship Service:** We begin our Lenten Journey together in the meetinghouse with imposition of ashes, ending with a bonfire in front of the church



**Preaching for Everyone: A Lenten Seminar** (March 1 & 29, after worship in Dineson Parlor) If everybody has a story, perhaps in a religious context that means that everybody has a sermon! Come and learn how to preach yours in this two-session seminar. We'll explore some basic approaches to public speaking and sermon prep, taking into account the elements that all preachers must be aware of, including: appropriate handling of

the biblical text, the life and ministry of the local church, the values and suppositions of the prevailing culture, and finally the preacher's own world view. A light lunch will be served. Sign up in Wilton Hall.



**Lenten Thursday Morning Bible Study Read, 2/20/20 – 4/2/2020:**  
**Seven-Mile Miracle: Journey into the Presence of God Through the Last Words of Jesus** (available on Amazon kindle or from the church office \$12 paperback)

From time to time we all feel stuck in our relationship with God and frustrated by life's setbacks. In *Seven-Mile Miracle*, Steven Furtick explores how Jesus's seven last statements on the cross offer a proven spiritual growth path for us. Join us on Thursday mornings from 9:30-11 in the parlor as we discuss our readings and explore the companion DVD, which features scenes from the Holy Land. Experience the Easter message more personally than ever before as you engage the words of forgiveness, salvation, relationship, abandonment, distress, triumph and reunion. Questions? Contact Pastor Jenn at [jenn@mcc-ucc.org](mailto:jenn@mcc-ucc.org)



Would you like to honor or remember a loved one, or celebrate a milestone? You can do so, while also helping Monroe Congregational Church continue its tradition of fresh flowers on the communion table. Please see Ann Zeiner or **sign up on the "flower list" poster inside Wilton Hall.**

**SENIOR PF AT MCCUCC PRESENTS:**

# CHILI COOK-OFF



COME TRY SOME CHILI,  
RENT A PAIR-OF-PF'ERS,  
AND HELP RAISE MONEY  
FOR OUR MISSION TRIP!

**FEB 22**

**5-8:30**

**\$10 PER PERSON**

**MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
34 CHURCH STREET, BE THERE!**



*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: Requirements for Ministry with Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

MCC's Safe Church policy included several requirements for people wanting to serve children and youth. Our new SafeConduct policy doesn't represent a huge change in those requirements. Nevertheless, now that we have a new policy, it's a good time to review what those requirements are and why we have them.

Here's an abbreviated version of the requirements:

1. All volunteers who regularly work with minors or vulnerable adults will complete and submit MCC's Volunteer Application for Working with Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
2. Volunteers must have been regular attendees of worship and participants in church activities for a minimum of one year.
3. Before beginning their duties, all prospective staff and volunteers over the age of 18 will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal-history verification by a third-party vendor.
4. All volunteers and staff who regularly work with minors will receive orientation regarding MCC's SafeConduct policy before their involvement with minors begins. This training will be repeated annually as long as that individual works with minors.
5. In situations where participants are not readily visible to others, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with minors.
6. Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off church property and for any overnight activities.

These requirements serve three purposes: (1) they ensure that the volunteers who work with our minors and vulnerable adults are trustworthy and prepared for their work, (2) they give parents and other caregivers the confidence that they can trust MCC with their minors and vulnerable adults, and (3) they create a series of obstacles for anyone who might want to use a volunteer position to abuse a minor or vulnerable adult.



**February 8, 2010, from 7-9 pm**

**At the Monroe Congregational Church, UCC  
34 Church Street, Monroe CT 06468**

Come chase away the mid-winter doldrums with a fun night out at the Monroe Congregational Church's Winter Coffeehouse! Refreshments will be provided for a small fee by the Junior Pilgrim Fellowship youth group, free will offerings for the 2020 ministries of the church are welcome too!

Featuring over a dozen artists, including:

- Just Voices Acapella Group
- The Folk Band
- Various other talented people!



## **MCC Community Calendar**

### **Week of Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>**

10:00 am Communion Sunday  
11:15 am Junior PF Souper Bowl of Caring  
5:00 pm Senior PF  
5:00 pm Adult PF (1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays)

### **Tues. Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>**

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

### **Wed. Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm Confirmation Class  
7:00 pm Adult Choir

### **Thurs. Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

### **Fri. Feb. 7<sup>th</sup>**

7:30pm Faith on Tap (Veracious)

### **Sat. Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>**

7:00 pm Coffee House (Wilton Hall)

### **Week of Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>**

10:00 am Worship -Scout Sunday  
11:15 am Trustees Meeting  
11:15 am Deacons Meeting  
5:00 pm Senior PF

### **Mon. Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm The Yarn Group

### **Tues. Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>**

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

### **Wed. Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm Confirmation Class  
7:00 pm Adult Choir

### **Week of Feb. 16<sup>th</sup>**

10:00 am Worship  
5:00 pm Senior PF  
5:00 pm Adult PF (1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays)

### **Mon. Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>**

Office Closed (Presidents' Day)

### **Tues. Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>**

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

### **Wed. Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm Confirmation Class  
7:00 pm Adult Choir

### **Thurs. Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)  
7:00 pm CE Board

### **Sat. Feb. 22<sup>th</sup>**

7-9 pm Chili Cook Off (Wilton Hall)

### **Week of Feb. 23<sup>th</sup>**

10:00 am Worship "Brown Bag Sermon"  
6:00 pm Junior PF

### **Mon. Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>**

7:30 pm Council Meeting (Dineson)

### **Tues. Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>**

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

### **Wed. Feb. 26<sup>th</sup> Ash Wednesday**

11:30-1:00 Ashes to Go  
6:30 pm MCC Agape Meal  
7:30 pm Worship

### **Thurs. Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)  
12:00 Young at Heart (4<sup>th</sup> Thursday)

### **Week of March 1<sup>st</sup>**

#### *Lent 1*

10:00 am Communion Sunday  
5:00 pm Senior PF  
5:00 pm Adult PF (1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays)  
6:00 pm Junior PF

### **Tues. March 3<sup>rd</sup>**

1:00 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

### **Wed. March 4<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm Confirmation Class  
7:00 pm Adult Choir

### **Thurs. March 5<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)

### **Fri. March 6<sup>th</sup>**

7:30 pm Faith on Tap (Veracious)

### **Sat. March 7<sup>th</sup>**

10 am Dress A Girl

### **Sun. March 8<sup>th</sup>**

#### *Lent 2*

Daylight Savings "Spring ahead!"  
10:00 am Worship  
5:00 pm Senior PF  
6:00 pm Junior PF