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Mon. 9am – 5:30pm
Wed. (remotely) 8am - 6pm
Fri. 9am – 3:30pm

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



THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST STEEPLE

January 1, 2026



Follow the Star into 2026: STAR Words, Epiphany, and New Beginnings

January always arrives with a particular kind of honesty. The ornaments are packed away. The cookies are... mostly gone. Special parties and get-togethers settle back to a predictable schedule, and students head back to school. The calendar flips with a crisp snap, and suddenly the world looks a little more ordinary than it did a week ago.

And yet, the church begins January with a feast that insists nothing is ordinary at all: **Epiphany**. The season of the Star. The season of God showing up in surprising places, to surprising people, by surprising light. In the Epiphany story, the Magi don't get a five-year plan. They don't get a color-coded calendar invitation. They get a sign in the sky, and enough courage to begin. They step into a new year the same way so many of us do: with questions, hope, and the faintest glimmer of direction.

That's why, in January, our church practices something simple and meaningful: **STAR Words**. A STAR Word is a word or short phrase you receive and carry with you through the year; like a small, shining prompt from the Holy Spirit. It isn't a resolution you manufacture through willpower. It isn't a self-improvement project. It's more like a spiritual companion: a word to listen to, pray with, wrestle with, and notice.

Sometimes the word feels perfect right away. Sometimes it feels confusing. Sometimes it feels downright inconvenient; until, months later, you realize it was quietly preparing you for exactly what you needed.

A STAR Word is not a "to-do." It's an invitation.

A few years ago, someone shared with me that they received the STAR Word "**Begin.**"

They didn't feel particularly inspired by it at first. It sounded... obvious. Or maybe exhausting. Because when your life already feels full, when you're carrying grief, managing stress, or simply trying to get through the week, *beginning* can feel like one more burden.

But they tucked the word into their wallet anyway, and as the months passed, "Begin" showed up everywhere.

- It showed up the day they finally made the phone call they'd been avoiding.
- It showed up when they tried praying again for the first time in a long time, just a simple sentence, nothing fancy.
- It showed up when they took a small risk to join a group at church, even though they didn't know anyone well.
- It showed up when they faced something hard and realized: *"I don't have to finish it today. I just have to begin."*

By the end of the year, they said, "I thought my STAR Word was about doing something new. But it turned out it was about trusting that God still does new things in *me*."

As you receive your STAR Word this month, I invite you to treat it gently and take it seriously.

Put it someplace you'll see it.

Pray with it.

Ask God, *"Why this word? What are you growing in me? What might you be calling forth?"* And watch for the ways God's light keeps appearing—sometimes like a spotlight, but more often like a small lamp, steady and enough.

Because new beginnings don't always arrive with fireworks. Sometimes they arrive like starlight: quiet, consistent, and strong enough to guide us home.

May Christ, the Light of the World, lead us into 2026 one bright, faithful step at a time. Grace and peace,

Pastor Jenn



Dear MCC family,

Pastor Jenn, Diane, Will, and Heather are grateful for your thoughtful Christmas gifts, well wishes, and cards during this busy season. We hope your Christmas was joyful and wish you a very Happy New Year!

Church Council



Call to Annual Congregational Meeting * January 25, 2026

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 11:00 am on Sunday, January 25, 2026.

The agenda will include the following: Receiving of Reports; Electing Officers, Board Members and Delegates; Adopting the 2026 budget and any other business that must properly come before the Congregation.

Trustees



2026 MCC Stewardship Campaign

In November, we kicked off our annual stewardship campaign, "**Dreaming God's Dream,**" a season when we intentionally reflect on how our shared gifts support the ministry and mission of the Monroe

Congregational Church. Throughout worship, we've heard stories of how God is working through this congregation—how your generosity helps us serve our neighbors, strengthen our community, and make a real difference in people's lives. Each of us is invited to take part in shaping the church God is calling us to be. This is a season of great possibilities and hope for our future.

So far, 71 households have pledged a total of \$181,688.00 — thank you!

If you haven't yet responded, we hope you will prayerfully consider your 2026 pledge and return your card soon. You may mail it in, place it in the Sunday offering plate, or e-mail your intended pledge to John O'Rourke at jorourke224@gmail.com. Thank you for considering how you will help sustain and strengthen the Monroe Congregational Church in 2026.

With gratitude, Your Stewardship Committee John O'Rourke (Receiver), Diane Prall, and Rev. Jenn Gingras

Deacons



Flowers for Worship: 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. You can sign-up in Wilton Hall or online! You may choose to arrange flowers from your garden, purchase an arrangement, or send a check (\$25) to Monroe Congregational Church (memo: "flowers" & the date) or use our website to pay online, and we will order for you. If you are supplying the flowers yourself, please set them up between 9:30am and 9:45am, before worship. Thank you!

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48ADAC2CA5FEC61-flowers>
or [MCC-UCC.org](https://www.mcc-ucc.org)

Fellowship



Young at Heart will meet again at noon on **January 22, 2026** at the **Little Barn**, 901 Bridgeport Ave, Shelton CT. Our host is Juliana Lavitola, please RSVP at jsl.lavitola@gmail.com or 203-445-0284

Join us for the monthly Book Culb on the **3rd Wednesday of the month**. We will continue to meet via zoom so that all members can join from wherever they may be. Questions can be sent to Paula via email pjsh55@gmail.com or home phone or 203-452-0850.

Jan. 21 My Friends, by Fredrik Backman

Feb. 18 The Frozen River, by Ariel Lawhon

March 18 Universe of Two, by Stephen Kiernan

April 15 Gather, by Kenneth Cado



2026 MCC Women's Retreat Friday, April 10

Sunday, April 12, 2026

The Lodge at Silver Lake, details to follow.



Sacred Pause

Join us on 1st Wednesdays from 7–8 pm for a time of guided Christian meditation, prayerful stillness, sound bath and reflection. Dress comfortably, bring a yoga mat and water bottle. Everyone is welcome!

7 pm Wed, Jan 7, Rexford House

Christian Education



Join us **January 18th** in Dineson Parlor at 11:15 for ***Cheddar Together***: 45 minutes of faith, fellowship, and finger foods. We'll share charcuterie, open up a conversation about life and faith, and simply enjoy being together. Because everything really is better when we're Cheddar Together!

Weekly Bible Study ~ All Are Welcome! We gather in Dineson Parlor, on **Thursdays** from **9:30-11 am**, to learn with and through one another. After a time of fellowship and prayer concerns, we read and discuss upcoming scripture texts or other faith-related topics. Bring your favorite Bible (whatever version you prefer) and a small notebook. Come as you are!



Senior PF

Senior PF is grateful to the congregation and community for their continued love and support. December was a busy month!

We appreciate those who purchased evergreen wreaths, bows, and centerpieces, especially to Mustard Seed for the wreaths that decorate our beautiful Meeting House and Rexford! All of the funds support our summer mission trip. PFers had a lot of fun chopping, scooping, stirring and mixing to make soup to sell as well as volunteering at the Victorian Christmas Fair. Shout out to Kris Yeager (our VP Abby's dad) who led the soup making and Dave Walker who helped us cut the chicken! We're happy that individual containers of soup were shared for St. George's Supper along with the bagged lunch thanks to the McClenathans.

December 21st we had a fun night surprising a handful of MCC members by caroling at their homes, spreading the joy of the season. Thank you to Pastor Jenn for preparing our route!

We said farewell to advisors Lucas Cuseo and Amanda Cohen as they begin their next chapter in SC. We're grateful for all they have done for our group over the years. Their love and spirit will always be with us in Senior PF. Michelle, Kate and Stefanie welcome anyone interested in learning more about the role of adult advisor for the group. Mark your calendar for our annual Chili Cook-Off on Saturday, February 28th! Details to come!



We Appreciate You!

A BIG "thank you" to Gloria Ganino for making the meeting house look beautiful with all the poinsettias!

Also THANK YOU to everyone who came out and helped decorate the meeting house for Christmas, as well as our Victorian Christmas Fair!



A large pile of donated toys and books, including teddy bears, stuffed animals, and board books, next to a cardboard box. The items are mostly in their original packaging, which includes boxes for books like 'Elmore', 'Max', 'Pete Cat', and 'Spike the Unicorn', as well as boxes for toys like 'Thomas the Tank Engine' and 'Furby'. A large brown teddy bear is prominently displayed on top of the pile. A cardboard box with a shipping label is visible in the background.





New Member at MCC * January 4, 2026

Please join us in welcoming the newest member of our church community. We hope you'll take the time to get to know Mike personally.

Michael B. Ganino, Jr.

3 Canterbury Lane, Trumbull, CT 06611

Home: (203)452-9019

Cell: (203)767-0608

Email: MagicMike118@gmail.com

Birthdate: April 4

Anniversary: November 23

We are very excited to welcome Michael B. Ganino, Jr., Patriarch of the MCC Ganino family, into our church family! Michael and his wife, Pat, live in Trumbull and have been married 57 years! Mike is a retired postal worker and Vietnam Army Veteran; his interests include collecting coins, performing magic, gardening and volunteering 3 days a week at the Trumbull senior center. He is also a drummer!



Mike would like to work with outreach on food collection and peace, justice and environmental issues. He'd also like to help the office with random tasks like preparing mailings to go out. He is also looking forward to attending monthly luncheons with the Young at Heart.

And it is with a glad and joyful heart that we welcome Mike to MCC!



Dear MCC family,

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to everyone for all the help I received while I was working from home during my medical leave of absence. It was easier to try and focus on healing knowing MCC was in good hands. (Jill and Jenn -I don't know what I would have done without you.)

The love and support as well as prayers, cards of well wishes, flowers, and small gifts I received from so many you brought a smile to my face and lifted my spirits, especially on those "bad days". They mean so very much to me that I haven't yet been able to pack them away in my memory box.

With an abundance of love, gratitude, and appreciation,
Diane



Elisha's Corner

Gary Thompson, Church Historian

"And it shall come to pass ... I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." (Acts 2:17)

In the beginning I guess one could say, "I had a mission", and one actually did, to find out who we really are as a congregation; its faith based roots, and what we are to currently believe in. One would think that not only as a member, but a lay leader as well, I should have already known. Since I did not grow up within this congregation the question laid heavy; part of one's faith journey, I guess. Over the last thirteen years, our congregation responded to my "mission" by allowing me to wander through its archives, searching through its documented history, divulge what I found, place in exhibit the treasures of its past, and ignite an interest from the many that visited this "Elisha's Corner" to discuss what I found in my probing and to ask more questions with me. For those of you who enjoyed meeting me at this Corner regularly, I have been honored by your presence; history is always present and is most often exciting, useful, and actually a lot of fun. For those of you that found it less interesting, I apologize profusely for my lack of inspiring; maybe next time.

During my probing, file maintenance, recording, exposing, and exhibiting, I did find what I was looking for. This, even though some questions asked remain unanswered, or unsolved. I remain in awe of the congregations that preceded us. Their resolve, accomplishments, and legacy is inspirational, and all without our modern conveniences and infrastructure; so never complain. Most importantly I discovered that there is a valued difference between "conviction" and "convention". Our conventional values as a congregation have changed over time, and still do. But, our convictions (and its resolves) as a congregation have not. They remain the same as they were in 1762.

As you might have guessed by now, in the middle of this past year after much prayerful consideration I decided to retire from my historian position and give someone else from the next generation the opportunity to experience the abundance of joy and purpose in preserving and appreciation for our historical legacy. I will be forever grateful to this congregation for their trust and allowing me to search through their secrets. During our Annual Meeting this month, you and I will be voting to install Mike Pellegrino as our new Church Historian. And I, with your permission, ".... shall dream dreams."

Historically Faithful,
Gary Thompson



Turning the page to a well-earned new chapter, we give heartfelt thanks to Gary Thompson for his faithful service as our church historian. Through his dedication, care, and love for our story, Gary has preserved our past and strengthened our sense of who we are as a church family. We are deeply grateful for his years of service and wish him every blessing in this next chapter.

SNOW *angels*

Volunteers shoveling driveways in
Monroe, CT

Recipient Sign Up



learn more at
www.communitycrew.org
or monroeservicehour@gmail.com

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access to a
computer,
please call

203-394-7393

SNOW ANGELS

help your community by shoveling snow!

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

Chad	Bauer	01/02	Ann	Zeiner	01/16
John	Hastedt	01/04	Mary Jo	Brett	01/17
Chris	Pearson	01/04	Clark	Gingras	01/18
Ryan	Snyder	01/04	Christine	Williams	01/18
Don	Parker-Burgard	01/06	Nancy	Olofson	01/19
Katerina	Vargovchik	01/07	Rebecca	Williams	01/20
Susan	Granello	01/10	Max	Williams	01/22
Jamie	Correll	01/11	Carmela	Combs	01/23
Christopher	Hisey	01/11	Harper	Matejek	01/23
Danielle	Adams	01/12	Ariana	Moss	01/26
Joanne	Malia	01/14	Marian	Schmitz	01/26
Sara	Alvarez	01/16	Jonathan	Ganino	01/27
Thomas	Culp	01/16	Margaret	Villani	01/27
Braeden	Goyette	01/16			



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

Larry & Jennifer Wissink⁽⁰⁷⁾ and Mike & Barbara Pellegrino⁽²⁴⁾



*The Christmas Flowers
are given with love from:*



Vaughan Askue &
Arlene Redmond
Michelle Cardentey

in memory of our parents, Elizabeth &
Bill Askue and Dot & Fred Redmond
in memory of Eleanor & Joseph LaValla
& Carmelina & Jose Cardentey
Cady & Carl's 2026 nuptials

Rev. Jenn & Clark
Gingras

Cheri Irwin

in memory of my parents, Neil &
Dorothea Sterns

Mike & Jessica Pfalzgraf
David Walker
Ann Zeiner

in memory of our parents
in memory of Susan Walker
in memory of Robert, Carol, and Val



In Our Prayers

Alison Abrams (Jessica Pfalzgraf's sister); **Allie** (Colegrove's friend); **Jennifer Bittar** (Loraine Zeiner's friend); **Jackie Bleakney**; **Shari Carrano**; **Lisa Cody & Dave Barton** (friends of Julie & Rob McClenathan); **Bonnie** (Gayle Hammond's cousin); **Ed Burke**; **Carter & the Harbron Family** (Kate Goyette's friend); **Cathy** (Julie McClenathan's Friend); **Kevin Daly** (Gary Thompson's friend); **Dealmira** (Jonathan Ganino's grandmother); **Dot Dralus, Matt Duchon**; **Elaine** (Wendy Colegrove's Aunt); **Bruno Forte** (Nancy Hedine's friend); **David Fischman** (Sue Granello's Friend); **Donnajean Fredeen, Dave Fuller** (Gail Olson's brother); **Mary & Rachel Heerema** (Julia Gutierrez's mom & sister); **Bob Heffernan** (Ann Zeiner's son-in-law); **Heather Henning**; **Brian Hopkins** (Donna Konkol's cousin); **Vera James** (Jenn Wissink's mother); **John** (Donna's father); **Jonathan** (Matt Colegrove's brother); **Josh** (Mary Erdmann's 2nd cousin); **Samia Khoury** (Will Duchon's friend); **Cindy Kovacs**; **Betsy Streck & Keith Law** (Nancy Hedine's friends); **Lori** (Amy Matejek's friend), **Monica Lynch** (Bethany Dupuis' friend); **the Manuzzi Family**; **Mary** (Kate Brigg's Mother); **Mary Massar**; **Betty McKeown** (Donna Konkol's mother); **Meghan** (Mary Unger's niece); **Mike** (Janie Allen's son); **Nancy Olofson**; **Missy & Gail Olson**; **Donna Parratt**; **Diane Prall**; **Amy Reber** (Pfalzgraf family friend); **Linda Resnick**; **Regina Roberts** (Kathy Maiolo's niece); **Alfredo Rodriguez** (Osirus Gutierrez's cousin); **Noah Santiago** (Shari Carrano's great-grandson); **Palma Senatore** (Sara Alvarez's grandmother); **Carlos Serrano** (Kathy Maiolo's cousin); **Ed Simonovich** (Nancy Hedine's friend); **Bernie & Gary Sippin**; **Cliff Smith**; **Sheldon & Nancy Smith**; **Spencer** (Matthias Aough's roommate at Brown), **Christine Stadler**; **Chuck Stearns** (Cheri Irwin's cousin); **Claire Stenzel** (June & Myron Winger's granddaughter); **Timara** (Mary Unger's friend); **Tom** (Wendy Colegrove's dad); **Wayne Thompson** (Gary Thompson's brother); **Richard Turco** (Jack Fracassini's cousin); **June Wilkes**; **Natica Williams** (Will Duchon's friend); **Jim Woolley** (Jen Nealon's Dad); **Allen & Ann Zeiner**

The concerns of our world: **Humanitarian** efforts and sustained peace around the world; **LGBTQ+ children and their families** facing discrimination; **first responders** and those who serve in **law enforcement**; those who suffer **discrimination**; those who struggle with **mental illness, addiction, divorce or separation**; **Caregivers**; the **unhoused, homebound and refugees**

Silver Lake Conference Center & the historic CT Missionary Society

Those serving in the military, veterans & their families: **Lt. Col. Rachel Hoffman**, Tacoma, Washington (Vaughan Askue's daughter), **Zachary Gingras**, 395th Combat Sustainability Support, **Joel Smith**, 250th Engineering Company, **Chris Meneses** (Loraine Zeiner's friend), **Corporal Taylor Smith** (Cheri Irwin's Nephew)

January 2026
MCC Community Calendar

Week of Sun. Jan 4th

10:00 am Communion Worship & *Star Words*
11:30 am Trustees
5:00 pm Junior, Senior PF

Mon. Jan 5th

7:30 pm Outreach

Tue. Jan 6th

1:30 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Jan 7th

7:00 pm Sacred Pause (Dineson)

Thur. Jan 8th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chancel Choir

Week of Sun. Jan 11th

Penelope Alvarez Baptism
10:00 am Worship
5:00 pm Junior, Senior PF

Mon. Jan 12th

7:30 pm Deacons

Tue. Jan 13th

1:30 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Thur. Jan 15th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chancel Choir

Week of Sun. Jan 18th

10:00 am Worship
11:15 Cheddar Together
5:00 pm Junior, Senior PF

Mon. Jan 19th

Martin Luther King Jr. Day ~ Office Closed

Tue. Jan 20th

1:30 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. Jan 21st

7:00 pm Book Club

Thur. Jan 22nd

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)
12:00 pm Young at Heart,
Little Barn Shelton
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chancel Choir

Week of Sun. Jan 25th

10:00 am Worship
11:15 am Annual Meeting
5:00 pm Junior, Senior PF

Mon. Jan 26th

7:30 pm Council Meeting

Tue. Jan 27th

1:30 pm Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Thur. Jan 29th

9:30 am Bible Study (Dineson)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chancel Choir