

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE.

January 2021



CHURCH MATTERS

Publisher - Judy Albright
Editor - Elizabeth Davis

A New Thing!

Rev. Elizabeth Gleich



*"I am about to do a new thing! now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"
Isaiah 43:19*

Happy New Year, church! I don't think I'm alone in shouting for joy that the year 2020 is finally over. Let's name it: we had a hard year. It began with the tragic death of John Dale, then Dumont Rush, Tom Bechtel, and Russell Carpenter, our beloved moderator. Then in

March, COVID became a reality in the United States. We closed our church doors and had to quickly figure out how to be a church online. During this pandemic-time, we've continued to lose beloved church members: Jim Wright, Bill Campbell, Betty Thurber, Jean Foster, Dick Cramton. These were cherished people that we couldn't mourn together in person as a community. As we enter 2021, still carrying with us the many wounds of this past year, let's admit it: we're a little bruised. Some of us more than others.

However, I also feel called to name how blessed we are. It wasn't all bad, this past year. We managed to successfully navigate the technological hurdle of virtual worship. We received five confirmands and seven new members. We held four beautiful outdoor worship services. Under

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The Congregational Church of Middlebury, UCC 2 Main Street, Middlebury, VT 05753
Church Offices, 30 North Pleasant Street, Middlebury VT 05753. 802-388-7634

A New Thing, continued

incredibly challenging circumstances, our Church Council voted in a new, compassionate, and capable church moderator, Katy Smith Abbott. As a church, we decided to have meaningful conversations about race, and made the step to hang a Black Lives Matter banner in front of our church. We realized how much church, and our church building, mean to us, and how much we love one another.

While many of the challenges of 2020 still remain, I believe we do have reason to hope that God is doing a New Thing in our midst. It's hard to know what this new year will look like, but I have confidence that through us and despite us, God is working and blessing and loving. Thanks be to God.

And now, a blessing for this new year, written by my friend and colleague, Rev. Anna Blaedel:

*In threshold places, where endings meet beginnings,
we are invited to listen backwards as we move forward.
What can we learn from the year past?
What brought you deep delight, when everything was swirling?
To whom were you able to turn, and who challenged you to grow?
For some of these changes we weep and for others we rejoice
but from each we carry something forward
- a feeling, a lesson, a memory, a challenge, a call to solidarity...
Collectively, we acknowledge a closing and an opening;
A fresh start that offers only as much meaning as we need from it.
Inviting us not to wage war on ourselves,
but just to pause
and pay attention to our longings.
A new year does not need to mean "a new you."
You do not need to make demands of yourself
grounded in messages that are only meant
to make you feel inadequate or unlovable.
Your worth is ineffable,
that is a constant that carries from year to year.
Move gently with yourself into 2021,
speaking instead words of possibility,
committing to that which calls you,
letting yourself be lured by the Sacred
in the direction of your most powerful becoming.
Make only resolutions that will lead to more flourishing of life, yours and others.
Channel your growing*

*in the directions
of what we can become
of what we can create
of what we can divest from
of what we must claim
of what we must fight
of how we might love
together.
Amen.*



Love,
Pastor Elizabeth

Caregivers Group



In September we celebrated our second year together of supporting one another in dealing with spouses with Alzheimer's and dementia, aging spouses, taking care of elderly parents, and supporting grieving members who lost their spouses.

We just accepted with pleasure our 12th member. If we have more people who would like to join us, I will start a second group, with Pastor Andy's permission.

When the weather allows it, we have alternated: one week talk, either in somebody's garden or via Zoom, and the next week walk. We have become a very cohesive and supportive group for each other, not only during the meetings.

Elise Blair

Annual Meeting

- **January 17 and 24**
 - The warning and final reports will be emailed to all members. Print copies will be available to pick up at the office.
- **January 31, 11:30 a.m. on Zoom**



Children and Youth

Jennifer Smith, Director of Children and Youth Ministries

Isaiah 60:1-3

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth, thick darkness the
peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

Welcome to 2021 and the season of Epiphany! Last year, we began a new tradition with the distribution of Epiphany Star Words. As I reflect on 2020, our fun church gathering on February 25 for the Epiphany Party was one of the last events we held in person together. I hold that memory closely in my heart and draw strength from its light.



This year we will once again be offering Epiphany Star Words to all who want to participate. There will be a star made of lights shining at the back entrance to the new addition. There you will find closed envelopes with stars in them; randomly choose one. In other words, please journey like the Wise Men to reach the star and find your light. If you are unable to get to the church to pick one up, please email me and I will happily mail you one. (jsmith@midducc.org)

I look forward to embarking on this journey with you. If you are new to this program, let me explain it a bit. Everyone gets a word printed on a star. Hang it somewhere you will see it each day. Think about how this word is working in your life and how God may be speaking to you.

On Sunday, January 10, Church School children will have an opportunity to meet with me via Zoom from 9:30-9:50 a.m. to check in with each other, hear a Bible story, and share some prayers.

January tote bag items were sent home. They included a book about Epiphany and a star word for each child.

Junior Youth Group met online in December for a cookie decorating party. In January, we will begin meeting every other week via Zoom on Tuesday evenings. I continue to be amazed at the resiliency and strength that our children demonstrate.

Drawn to the light,
Jennifer Smith
Director of Children and Youth Ministries



Music Notes

James Calvin Davis

With Jessica Allen hopefully taking some much-deserved time off, I am (with her permission) offering some reflections on the music life of our church. If you are like me, the music Jessica assembled for our Advent and Christmas Eve celebrations dances in your head, reminding us that we are still in the Christmas season. Throughout this challenging year, many people have worked extraordinarily hard to maintain our Christian community while we cannot be physically together. No one has worked harder to keep us “being church” than Jessica (along with her able assistant, Jeff). Those of us who have the privilege to participate in her choirs, and all of us who benefit from her talents and leadership, know how essential she has been to salvaging some normality in this most abnormal church year.



One reason that Jessica’s work has been so important to us in this time is that music is central to who we are as church. The music we share affirms our identity as church and serves as the bond between us. Church music tells our story, connecting us with spiritual kin in different times and places and overwhelming us with the gorgeously complicated diversity that is the Christian family. Music reminds us of timeless truths while sometimes spurring us to creatively reimagine those truths. It stirs in us an appreciation for God’s beauty and majesty, inviting us to hear and feel God in surprising ways, and to draw faith, hope, joy, and love from those divine encounters.

Ultimately music reminds us that poetry, not proposition, is the church’s native language. The poetry of music invites us to mystical encounters with God that defy rational explanation, and it trains our theological imaginations to sense God’s goodness at work in the world, even when it



may not be obviously on display. This in turn makes us hopeful people, because music shapes us into people who trust in a power we cannot see and who creatively dream of the triumph of beauty and goodness even when other values seem to prevail. Aspiration, inspiration, and imagination are the virtues of poetry, and music puts these poetic impulses to movement. In sharing music together as a family of faith, we powerfully witness to our dissatisfaction with the present and our confidence in God's grace-filled future.

Martin Luther once wrote: "I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, and costly treasure." Luther appreciated music because he understood it to be nothing less than a foretaste of God's kingdom: "We marvel when we hear music in which one voice sings a simple melody, while three, four, or five other voices play and trip lustily around the voice that sings its simple melody and adorn this simple melody wonderfully with artistic musical effects, thus reminding us of a heavenly dance, where all meet in a spirit of friendliness, caress and embrace."

Music is God's poetic love put to rhythm, a heavenly dance that allows us to feel God's presence as our hearts move in time with one another, partners in God's name. Better than the spoken word, music captures the soul of Christian faith. No wonder, then, that the music Jessica and Jeff have made possible this past year has served as a light shining in our darkness, a much-needed reminder that in this moment of isolation, we are linked to each other in a community of faith, hope, joy, and love.

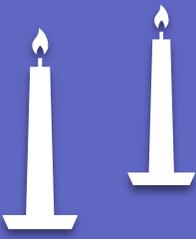
James Calvin Davis

(Adapted from *American Liturgy: Finding Theological Meaning in the Holy Days of US Culture*—coming this March!)

In the Bleak Mid-winter by Harold Darke [Sung by the Chancel Choir](#)

Many thanks to Jessica Allen and Jeff Buettner for making beautiful music happen for our church inspite of Covid restrictions!





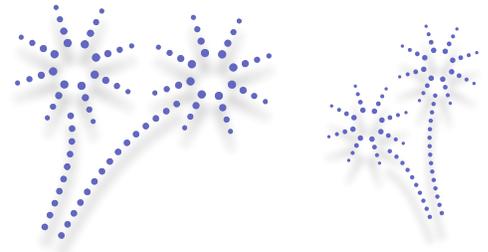
January Birthdays



Carol Chatfield	January 06	Ashlynn Foster	January 21
Erika Evarts	January 06	Bonnie Stevens	January 21
Margaret Eagan	January 09	Jeff Buettner	January 24
Jim Eagan	January 11	Lois Huldin	January 24
Alex Bleich	January 13	Ethan Kent	January 28
Lyn DeGraff	January 13	Isadora Luksch	January 28
Skyeler Devlin	January 17	Charles Jakiela	January 29
Al Stiles	January 17	Liliana Luksch	January 29
Diane Munroe	January 18	Sally Holland	January 30
Jennifer Nuceder	January 19	Jon Andrews	January 31

January Anniversaries

Ed & Mary Williams	January 1
Carole Cummings	January 2
Judy Albright & Dory Gorton	January 6
Matt & Alison Dickinson	January 7
Buzz & Angelika Brumbaugh	January 13; Celebrating 61 years!



Did you know?

At the beginning of the millennium twenty years ago, our annual operating budget was about \$232,000, and income from bequests previously given provided over 20% of the needed resources.

In 2020, the annual budget exceeded \$602,000, and income from bequests supported around 8.5% of the budget. To continue our church's ambitious programs and their growth, we need to increase our focus on bequests to the church; they do matter now and in the long run.

The Green Team and Creation Justice



The Green Team has had a busy fall preparing the way to become a Creation Justice Church (CJC). The CJC program was established in 2016 by the United Church of Christ in order to assist congregations in making the ministry of environmental justice an integral part of their faith community. In many ways, the Middlebury Congregational Church is already a church that embraces its obligation to care for the earth and all living things. The CJC program encourages us to deepen and expand our environmental ministry through our worship services, institutional life, advocacy, and community partnerships. The many programs and offerings that the Green Team provided in 2019 and 2020 were a part of this process. The sermons dedicated to creation

care and Earth Day, the deep dive into the energy usage of our buildings, the composting workshop, special speakers, and the weekly climate wake-up emails will all feature in our application to become a CJC. This fall the Green Team crafted a Creation Justice Covenant that will be discussed with the entire congregation at the Annual Meeting in January as we ask for your support in our continued efforts to pursue creation justice. We share it with you now and encourage you to reach out with any questions about the Covenant or the path ahead.

Middlebury Congregational Church Creation Justice Covenant

From the beginning, God entrusted us as stewards of God's good creation. In fashioning us in God's image, God bestowed upon us the responsibility to tend to creation as God would: with love and a respect for the needs of all living things. In affirming the divine gifts of creation and our connection to God, each other, and the world around us, the Congregational Church of Middlebury, UCC, commits ourselves to this urgent responsibility. We pledge to increase our awareness of how the abuses of creation cause environmental degradation and human suffering, and to celebrate and support work that preserves or restores ecological processes that benefit all life. We promise to fight the injustices of climate change, supporting and advocating for those most harmed by its effects. Furthermore, as we confront this growing crisis, we resolve that these deeply felt commitments will be reflected in all dimensions of our congregation's life and extend far beyond our church's walls. In this way, we acknowledge and honor God's glory and perfect intent.

Su Reid-St. John, Green Team co-chair, sureidstjohn@gmail.com

Leanna Maglienti, Green Team co-chair, leanna_maglienti@yahoo.com

January Calendar

Our church is closed during this COVID-19 crisis. However, our worship services can be watched live-stream on our Facebook page - www.facebook.com/MiddUCC or on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLXVdSpmeMbib-gTuXu6rXg> Most of our meetings are being held via Zoom.

For a detailed, **up-to-date weekly calendar** go to <https://www.midducc.org/home/calendar>

Staff meetings	Tuesdays - 1:00 p.m
Sing for Social Justice	Tuesdays - 5:30 p.m.
Junior Youth Group	Tuesdays - 7:00 p.m.
MIDD Week Morning Prayer Service	Wednesday - 9:00 a.m.
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86541232696?pwd=bzRSMFJrM2dMSmdkMkIDYTg4VkpMUT09	
Church Council	Second Wednesday of the month - 7:00 p.m.
All Boards	Fourth Wednesday of the month - 7:00 p.m.
Chancel Choir	Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.
Community Supper	Fridays - 5:00 p.m. (take out only)

January 30 - Church Matters Deadline

January 31 - Annual Meeting via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.

Membership & Communications News

Zoom Get-Togethers

On December 16, Shannon Gleason hosted an evening of Christmas trivia on Zoom. Eight people participated, and there was lots of laughter! Shannon awarded points for correct answers as well as most creative answers. Diane Munroe was the champion!



On December 19, Michele Brown hosted an afternoon of cookie decorating. Four people shared their cookie plans: cookies which had already been baked, cookies in the process of being decorated, and cookies still to be made. We shared ideas and fellowship.

More Zoom get-togethers coming in January! Join us.

Andy Nagy-Benson
andy@midducc.org

Jessica Allen
jallen@midducc.org

James Davis
jcdavis@middlebury.edu

Elizabeth Gleich
elizabeth@midducc.org

Judy Albright
office@midducc.org

Jeff Buettner
buettner@middlebury.edu

Jennifer Smith
jsmith@midducc.org

Melissa Bartley
buildingmanager@midducc.org

Cathy Chase or Irene Zaccor
treasurer@midducc.org

QUICK LINKS

SAVE THE DATE!

Epiphany Star Party

February 7th

4:00 p.m. on Zoom



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF MIDDLEBURY, UCC
30 North Pleasant Street
Middlebury, VT 05753

