

34 Church Street
Monroe, CT 06468
Tel.: (203) 268-9327
Fax: (203) 268-3153
www.mcc-ucc.org

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

Senior Pastor: Rev. Jennifer Gingras
Music Director: Will Duchon
Administrator/Bookkeeper: Diane Prall
CE Coordinator: Jeanette Cardentey-Morales
Church e-mail: secretary@mcc-ucc.org

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



THE MONROE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE STEEPLE

July 1, 2025

Demons, Detours, and the Deep End of the Pool (*Luke 8:26–39*)

If you're getting ready for vacation: bags packed, out-of-office email set, dog-sitter scheduled, bless you. You've earned it. As you start dreaming of ocean waves, mountain hikes, or simply sitting still for longer than 90 seconds, let's take a moment to talk about the weirdest vacation story in the Bible.

Jesus gets off the boat in Gentile territory, which already means he's way out of his comfort zone. Think of it like showing up to a rest stop 200 miles past where you meant to exit. And who's the welcoming committee? A man who's naked, howling, and living in a cemetery.

Not your typical getaway.

This man—the one we call the Gerasene demoniac—has been living with so much pain and isolation that even his neighbors have given up. They've chained him up and written him off. But not Jesus. Jesus steps into his chaos. He doesn't flinch, doesn't flee, doesn't write a Yelp review. He *stays*. And he brings healing—not only to the man, but to the town that had forgotten how to hope.

So what does this have to do with your vacation? Everything.

Because we all carry *something* with us when we try to get away. Maybe it's stress that clings like beach sand. Maybe it's grief, or burnout, or that persistent voice in your head that says, "You should be doing more."

Sometimes, when we finally slow down, the stuff we've been keeping chained up—the worries, the fears, the old hurts—comes running at us like a wild man from the tombs. Surprise! You brought *all* of you on vacation, even the parts you hoped to leave at home.

But here's the grace: Jesus meets us *there*, too. Not just in the sanctuary or the church basement, but in the quiet cabin, the backseat of the minivan, the lawn chair by the lake. He meets us in the mess and says: "You are not alone. You are not too much. You are worthy of healing and rest."

And just like that man in the story, when we've been seen and heard and healed, we don't need to escape anymore. We're sent back—with stories to tell. Vacation might not fix everything, but it can give us a glimpse of freedom. A taste of peace. A chance to sit at Jesus' feet and remember who we are.

So go ahead—rest, laugh, nap irresponsibly.

And when someone asks how your time away was, maybe you'll have more to say than "We had good weather." Maybe, just maybe, you'll say: "I remembered what healing feels like."

In Peace, Pastor Jenn

Thank You, Gerrit Wissink!

This spring, we were blessed to have college student Gerrit Wissink working alongside us at the Monroe Congregational Church, and we want to take a moment to celebrate his contributions—especially towards our 53rd Annual Strawberry Festival.

Over the course of five months, Gerrit dove into one of the most nuanced parts of our beloved event: the shortcake and smoothie ordering process. He listened, observed, and learned how things had been done—and then, using his gifts for organization and systems-thinking, he built something even better.

Thanks to Gerrit's newly designed fulfillment system, we were able to serve our guests more quickly and efficiently than ever before. His work helped reduce wait times, streamline communication, and made a real difference for both our volunteers and festival-goers. Gerrit, your thoughtful presence, hard work, and generous spirit have made a lasting impact on our community. Thank you for sharing your time and talents with us!

With deep gratitude,
The Monroe Congregational Church Community





Thank you all for your commitment, energy, and time to make our 53rd Annual Strawberry Festival a success!

It was amazing to see how we all came together to make this weekend such a great community event. One of the great benefits has been the various additions to our festival, expanding products, electronic ordering, and outreach each year. We had more jam (1,550) and all kinds of items from tote bags to stress balls. We averaged twenty more volunteers this year (135) than last year and we also set a record of strawberry pies, 259! The green was full of crafters (110). Please keep the creative ideas and energy flowing!

While the weather was not great on Saturday, the festival made up for it on Sunday selling 1/3 more than Saturday. Sunday from 12:30pm – 3pm was crazy busy. Everyone was in action to help those in the various lines. Wow!

Did everyone notice the golf cart transportation addition this year? Those that signed up to drive it loved it. Pastor Jenn had a great idea to make it easier and faster to bring people to and from Fireman’s Field. Thank you, Clark and Pastor Jenn, for donating the rental of the cart to our festival.

The gross revenue for the Strawberry Festival was \$83,000. Mustard Seed had a great weekend as well. The net profit will be shared with the congregation once all the expenses have been captured.

Please keep an eye out for online jam orders and ice cream coffee hours to use up our remaining tubs of ice cream.

Future Co-Chairs Owen Correll and Mike Ganino will join the leadership team as we lose Susie to her upcoming move south.

Much love from Clark, Pastor Jenn, Susie, and  Frank

THE NUMBERS

MCC Strawberry Festival Results – 2025

Event Overview: While the weather wasn’t picture-perfect, the 2025 MCC Strawberry Festival still drew thousands of attendees and produced great results. Here’s a quick recap of the numbers:

Sales Results:

· Saturday June 14 th – Net Sales	\$27,868.65
· Sunday June 15 th – Net Sales	\$33,967.95
· Pre & Post Event Sales	\$ 1,583.83
· Crafter Revenue	\$ 19,815.00
· Total Revenue	\$ 83,235.43

Top Departments: With the expanded use of Square credit card readers, over half (55%) of our sales came via credit/debit cards. The top-producing departments were the Country Store, followed by Shortcakes and the PF Food Booth. We will continue to offer Jam and other items for sale in Wilton Hall after Sunday services over the Summer.

Thanks to all for your time and efforts!
John O’Rourke



Diane is scheduled for vacation on Mondays throughout the summer beginning Monday, July 9th. She will continue to work from home on Wednesdays where she will receive your voicemail and e-mail messages. The church office will be open on Fridays.

Thank you!

Fellowship



MCC Summertime Coffee Hour Hosts: Are you interested in providing refreshments for our church members and friends following Sunday worship! All you need to do is arrive at the kitchen by 9:45 to get the coffee going (instructions found on kitchen wall). Providing baked goods or other snacks are always welcome (but not mandatory). Please sign up in Wilton Hall. (Although one can do it, it's fun to serve with a friend). Thank you!



Young at Heart will meet Thursday, July 24 Details TBD



The Mustard Seed Thrift Shoppe is looking for your help. Volunteers can come to the Shoppe on Tuesdays at 9:30am during the summer. Stay for a couple of hours to help sort, tag and hang donated merchandise. The Shoppe will be closed for cleaning after July 26th. This event will require lots of hands, so if you have the free time for the Tuesday after, please stop by and the ladies will gladly show you what needs to be done. We will reopen on Friday, August 22. Please contact Susie Cuseo at thecuseos@yahoo.com or 203-268-0280 if you like to take a shift. Many thanks to all our diligent volunteers who man the counter and take care of our donations.



Join us for the monthly Book Club on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7 pm. 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.

- July 16th *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
- Aug. 20th *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt
- Sept. 17th *Mad Honey* by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan
- Oct. 15th *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson



Morning Circle will not meet during the months of July or August. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, September 10th at 11am in Dineson Parlor. We will have Ray Giovanni from Union Savings Bank to talk about the local recent scams affecting our area. A short business meeting will follow his discussion. Our lovely group meets on the second Wednesday of the month with the exception of January and February. Contact Shari Carrano with any questions, comments or concerns at 475-342-8145.

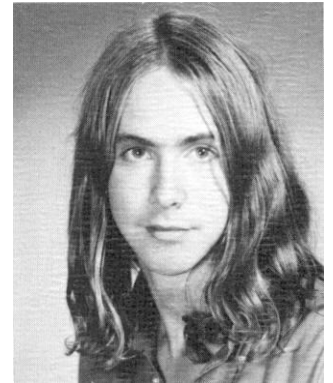
Please mark your calendars for future meetings:

- Wednesday, October 8 at 11am in Dineson Parlor - Trick or Treat Bags for Food Pantry
- Wednesday, November 12 at 11am in Wilton Hall - Bean Soup Jars for Food Pantry
- Wednesday, December 10 at 12pm - Christmas luncheon - location TBD

“Guess Who? Then & Now” – A Fun Church Photo Challenge!

We’re inviting all members to take a stroll down memory lane! As part of our upcoming “Guess Who? Then & Now” event, we ask you to submit two photos:

- One from your teen years (or a baby photo if you’re currently a teen), and
- One recent photo of yourself.



We’ll be displaying the photos— without names — on the bulletin board in Wilton Hall, where everyone can try to guess who’s who!

This is a fun way to celebrate our church family through the years, put names to faces, and share a few laughs and memories along the way.

Please email your photos to secretary@mcc-ucc.org or drop off physical copies at the church office by August 31st. Be sure to label them clearly on the back or in the email (we’ll keep the labels hidden during the guessing!).

Let’s see how well we really know each other!



Senior PF



*June brought many memorable moments with leading worship on Youth Sunday as well as Strawberry Festival berry picking and serving up food! We love creating these memories together!

*Our returnable bottle drive continues until July 13th. Collection boxes are in the entryway to Rexford.

*Sr PF is grateful for all of the love and support from our church family, especially in preparation of our annual Mission Trip. Please keep us in your prayers as we travel to Collettsville, NC July 19-27th. This trip provides a unique space and time for spiritual experiences and growth; an opportunity to discover the gifts and beauty of people, cultures, and environment; to raise awareness of the needs and poverty through discussion and physical labor; to build faith in and relationships with Jesus Christ; to do Christ’s loving work; to strengthen our group; to have fun.

Outreach



Let's feed hungry neighbors!

The **Feel The Warmth mobile community hot supper** needs 6-8 volunteers to cook a delicious and nutritious meal for 250 hungry neighbors on Thursday, July 17th.

Prep time in the kitchen is at **nOURish's** main headquarters, 2200 North Avenue, Bridgeport from 3 to 5:30 pm.

It's then transported to the Harrison Apartments on 651 State Street, Bridgeport and served to the displaced and homeless population from 6 to 7 pm.

Please join us! Sign up in Wilton Hall

Trustees



The Monroe Summer Day Camp will be renting our MCC campus again this year. The camp will provide added income for the church during the months of June, July and August. If you need to enter the building between 7:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday – Friday please stop into the office and ask Diane to notify the camp director. If the office is closed, please use the walkie-talkie provided to notify the camp director, Karen, of your presence. Thank you!



MCC Celebrates its 2025 Graduates!

Jocelyn Allen will be graduating Masuk High School and heading to University of New Haven for Dental Hygiene major.

Two grandsons of Mary Jo and Bill Brett are graduating:

Jake O'Brien - Lakeland High School, New York

Nicholas Versea - University of Connecticut at Storrs with a BS in Business.

Jack Campbell graduated this May from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music with a bachelor's degree in cello performance. Jack will be joining Hometown Logistics in Indianapolis in client services while continuing to perform part time.

Jamie Rose Correll is an Ithaca College 2025 graduate with a BS in Television and Digital Media Production.

Susie Cuseo was promoted to 6th Dan in January after an arduous five-day journey and examination. She currently teaches at Valley Karate in Shelton Monday thru Wednesday for all ages.

Michael A. Ganino, Masuk High School Class of 2021, recently graduated from Siena College with a Bachelor of Arts in Health Care Management. During his time at Siena, Michael especially enjoyed competing as a member of the Siena Valorant Esports team, proudly playing under the call sign "Yankee."

Deanna L. Ganino, Masuk High School Class of 2025, will be attending Siena College in the fall to pursue a degree in history. Inspired by a passion for the past, she hopes to one day unlock the mysteries of ancient Egypt as an archaeologist. Deanna will always treasure her time with Senior PF and the meaningful friendships she's made along the way.

Juliana Lavitola is proud to share that her granddaughter, **Courtney Litts**, earned her master's degree from the University of St. Joseph's Physician Assistant program. She has been inducted into the Pi Alpha national honor society for PAs and received the Service to the Profession award at her school hooding ceremony. Courtney has also been named PA Student of the Year by the Connecticut Academy of PAs (ConnAPA), which was awarded due to her extensive involvement in the organization as a student representative, her dedication to the promotion of the PA profession across CT, as well as her years of volunteer work as the Leadership Seminar Chair of the Connecticut Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Organization (CT HOBY). We are all so proud of Courtney, and are looking forward to watching her grow as a medical provider as she pursues a career in Orthopedic Surgery.

.....



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.monroecongregationalchurch.org)

Elisha's Corner
Graffiti in the Belfry
Church Historian ~ Gary Thompson

It is safe to say that the oldest items physically left to us by our founding congregation, the Ecclesiastical Society of New Stratford of 1764, are in our steeple belfry. The oldest is the hammer in the bell, which is the same one used in the first church bell installed in the first church building steeple in 1796. The initial congregation must have worshiped in that building for twenty-two years before the steeple was added on; attached on the west side gable end of the building. It was elected from the ground up. The second item is the yoke that held the 775 lbs. bronze bell. It replaced the original yoke in 1815. And the third item is the current bell itself, recast to a much lighter weight of 428 lbs. in 1826. The hammer was reworked to fit the smaller sized bell. All of them, though, are from the original "Meeting House" of 1796.

A few months ago while our Church Web Master and explorer of the MCC Campus, Scott Young, was in the belfry looking for the source of water leaks, he discovered (or rediscovered) graffiti on the side of the bell itself. Sure enough and it's captured on Youtube. Click on the web link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjFBntNu1y0&list=PLNf8leUY-9tKES1i5oc915mP3t3nztdRQ&index=10>

The lettering is "as clear as a bell":

H F

F G

m 8 1916

The genealogy abbreviation for marriage is "m". Yet no marriage record was found in our archive files with those initials or anyone else in 1916; not even using Paul Jones' old index cards of names. The Pastor in 1916 was Rev. George Mitchell Nicholls, a thirty-five year old Yale Divinity School student, married and finishing his studies. He and his wife, Hope, had one child, a daughter named, Grace. No "HF" or "FG" from his family. The only documents in Rev. Nicholls' file folder are source documents for his biographical sketch written by our former historian, Ken Post.

The only record of activity found for 1916 was the annual meeting minutes which were limited to the recording of the elected church officers for the ensuing year. There were no ledger accounts, vouchers or invoices found that would give a clue to construction or repair to the Meeting House or the Steeple, nor anything else on the MCC Campus. Such a record could have contained the names of those involved in the activity with the tell-tale initials. Nope. None. Looking for any account of any activity during this Victorian Era one year prior to the United States entering World War 1 came up empty, which seems quite bizarre.

Alas, what we have here is a dead end, another "cold case" mystery like that of the missing Beardsley Hall sign. The good news is Scott Young found the source for the water leak which was subsequently addressed.

Historically Faithful,
Gary Thompson, Church Historian



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

Sheldon	Smith	07/01	Charles	Smith	07/15
Betsy	Gilberti	07/02	Kate	Parker-Burgard	07/20
Griffin	Allen	07/03	Carol	Kelly	07/21
Amy	Matejek	07/04	Owen	Correll	07/24
Julia	Telep	07/04	Ann-Marie	Campbell	07/25
Jane	Allen	07/06	Bill	Stadler	07/26
Gloria	Ganino	07/08	Kayleigh	Healey	07/27
Jim	Vance	07/08	Kenny	Dutton	07/28
Jessica	Konkol	07/11	Tom	Kelly	07/28
Alexander	Gutierrez	07/12	Alexa	Sentementes	07/28
Peter	Hallgren	07/12	Caroline	Wittenauer	07/28
Therese	Zalenski	07/12	Christine	Wittenauer	07/28
Coralina	Goyette	07/14	Kathryn	Wittenauer	07/28
Mark	Malia IV	07/14	Jordan	Yang	07/30
Mike	Pellegrino	07/15			07/30



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

Mary Jo & Bill Brett⁽⁰¹⁾ Mary & Rick Erdmann⁽⁰⁸⁾ Gary & Gail Thompson⁽¹⁰⁾
 Matt & Wendy Colegrove⁽¹⁷⁾ Rich & Michelle Correll⁽²⁰⁾
 Anthony & Diane Prall⁽²⁸⁾ Tom & Kate Briggs⁽²⁹⁾
 and Dan & Meg Sullivan⁽³⁰⁾

In Our Prayers

Alison Abrams (Jessica Pfalzgraf's sister); Allie (Colegrove's friend); Jennifer Bittar (Loraine Zeiner's friend); Jackie Bleakney; Lisa Cody & Dave Barton (friends of Julie and Rob McClenathan); James Brown, Debbie Cuseo (Cliff's sister-in-law); Susie Cuseo; Kevin Daly (Gary Thompson's friend); Dealmira (Jonathan Ganino's grandmother); Dan & Laura Dimauro (Cuseo friends); 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); Brad Heines (Susie Cuseo's friend); 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); Kelti (friend of Liska Gutierrez), Samia Khoury (Will Duchon's friend); Cindy Kovacs; Monica Lynch (Bethany Dupuis' friend); Jonathan Malia; Nicole Malia; the Manuzzi Family; Mary (Kate Brigg's Mother); Betty McKeown (Donna Konkol's mother); Meghan (Mary Unger's niece); Mike (Janie Allen's son); Olivia Morrison (Donna Nickdow's niece); Pat Nugent; Ocampo family (friends of Liska Gutierrez); Nancy Olofson; Missy & Gail Olson; Donna Parratt; 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, Lori & Gary Sippin; John Skarupa (Barb Pellegrino's brother); Sheldon & Nancy Smith; Christine Stadler; 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); Allen & Ann Zeiner

The concerns of our world: The people of Gaza & the West Bank; Israeli hostages and their families, the people of Ukraine, Sudan, Syria and the Middle East; LGBTQ+ children and their families facing discrimination; those who serve or live in war or conflict zones around the world; 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 homeless, homebound and refugees.

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), Lance Corporal Taylor Smith (Cheri Irwin's Nephew)

JULY
MCC Community Calendar

Tue. July 1st
9:30 am Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. July 2nd
Diane in the office

Fri. July 4th
Independence Day -office closed

Week of Sun. July 6th
Communion
10:00 am Worship
5:00 pm Senior PF

Mon. July 7th
Diane Vacation - Office Closed

Tue. July 8th
9:30 am Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Week of Sun. July 13th
10:00 am Worship
5:00 pm Senior PF

Mon. July 14th
Diane Vacation - Office Closed

Tue. July 15th
9:30 am Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Wed. July 16th
7:00 pm Book Club

Thurs. July 17th
3-5:30 pm nOURish BPT Meal Prep
6-7 pm nOURish BPT Distribution of Meals

Senior PF Mission Trip July 19-27

Week of Sun. July 20th
10:00 am Worship

Pastor Jenn is on vacation July 21- 27

Mon. July 21st
Diane Vacation - Office Closed

Tue. July 22nd
9:30 am Mustard Seed Sort & Tag

Thurs. July 24th
12:00 pm Young at Heart

Week of Sun. July 27th
Rev. Ed Rawls, Guest Preacher
10:00 am Worship
5:00 pm Senior PF

Mon. July 28th
Diane Vacation - Office Closed

Tue. July 29nd
9:30 am Mustard Seed Sort & Tag