



CHURCH AT THE CENTER

DECEMBER 2025



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

"CENTER CHURCH"

United Church of Christ

One Church Street

South Hadley, Massachusetts 01075

(413) 532-2262

Email: centerchurch@verizon.net

Website: centerchurchsouthhadley.org/

Facebook: Center Church of South Hadley MA

Instagram: @centerchurchsouthhadley



*ALL ARE WELCOME AT CENTER CHURCH ON THE COMMON,
AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING UCC CONGREGATION,
WHERE THE SPIRIT OF GOD STIRS US TO EMBRACE OUR DIVERSITY,
DEEPEN OUR FAITH IN JESUS, SHARE OUR TEARS AND LAUGHTER,
AND EXTEND GOD'S ABUNDANT LOVE AND JUSTICE INTO THE WORLD.*

Run through the Tape...Field Days in elementary school were a blast: 50 yard dash, long jump, tug-of-war, chariot race, egg toss, and much more. Everyone participated in an event and all cheered one another on. Teachers did not have to plan for any classwork. We all won, so-to-speak.

A favorite United Church of Christ blogger, Molly Baskett, wrote "run through the tape" when it comes to doing even a little part for justice and peace. That got me thinking about 5th grade Field Day. I was in the girls 50 yard dash. The whistle was blown and we took off. I was flying like the wind ...until I abruptly slowed down at the tape. Peggy Grove whizzed by me to break the tape and win.

A lesson learned...*run through the tape*. Finish what you set out to complete. Even if it is a small project, even if something gets in your way, eventually run through the tape. It makes me think how Jesus ran through the tape to the end. He started as a fetus within Mary and grew to become our everlasting teacher and prophet.

Take a thought, work on a project, commit to an act of justice or kindness and run through the tape with it this Advent.

Joyfully, Lori

Rev. Lori will be away December 26 - January 4

The Church Office will be closed Dec. 24 (noon) - 26.

Vigil to End Deportation

December 6th - 10am

Bring a poster (but some will be available for you) and a smile!

Breakfast Conversation: Join us for a light breakfast and conversation

December 10 from 8-9am in Fellowship Hall

On Jul 8, 2025, "In a break with decades of tradition, the Internal Revenue Service said it will allow houses of worship to endorse candidates for political office without losing their tax-exempt status."

Pick up an article on the topic of "Church and State" from the table at the Church Street entrance.

Come with opinions. Come with respect. Come for a light breakfast.

Calling all children, youth (and even adults):

On December 14th, during the Message For All, we will have an impromptu Christmas Pageant. Always wanted to be an angel, Mary or what about a royalty? We have your small speaking or sound part. It will be full of the Holy Spirit. Minimal costumes will be provided.

December 14th -MOSTLY MUSIC SUNDAY with Message For All

Note: We are concluding worship by saying a rousing **AMEN!** Larry and the Deacons see all of the worship as worship, not a performance. So, we have been shouting "Amen" instead of clapping.

\$4903.35!!! That is the gross income at this point, from the **Holiday Bazaar**. There is still time to checkout Fellowship Hall. No crowds, easy parking. A nice selection of merchandise will remain available to purchase, at great prices, for a few more weeks. Kindly support Center Church.



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Once again, our sanctuary will be decorated with poinsettias for Christmas.

The deadline for placing your order will be December 8th.

Number of plants you wish to order 6 " pots \$ 10 each

____ red # ____ white

_____ Total payment enclosed.

*Please make checks payable to: "First Congregational Church"
and note "Christmas Poinsettias" on the memo line.*

*Please forward your completed order and check to the church office **on or before December 8th.***

In Loving Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

GIVEN BY _____

Please check one of the following:

☐ *I will pick up after church on Christmas Eve* ☐ *I will not be taking my plant(s).*

NAME _____



PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE IN YOUR PRAYERS

Continual:

Barbara Blank, on Hospice at Reeds Landing
 Joan Duffy
 Martha Guild's mother, June
 Eileen Halkyard
 Tom Hazen
 Eunice Howes
 Leila Mulder, attending boarding school
 Fay Paquette
 Nikki Wolf, Linda's granddaughter
 Those struggling with addiction
 Those struggling with cancer



If you have submitted one of these requests for prayer, please let us know when it is time to remove someone's name from the list.

Situational:

Cynthia Baker
 Dennis Banks, friend of Karen and Estelle Anderson, with cancer
 Robin Glossner, undergoing chemo
 Audrey Heapphy, recovering from a fall
 Elisa Morrison's step-mother Sandy, and brother Carl, with heart issues
 Elisa's young friend Elija, for addiction recovery
 Mary Nelson's father, Dave with cancer
 Katy (Daniels) Bobel's brother-in-law, Gary Nicolls, severely injured in a car accident
 Nancy Perman's cousin Katherine, in rehab
 Kendall Johnson-Smith, Preston Smith's daughter, with cancer
 Vicki Scherer's grandfather, with cancer



Christmas Eve Service
December 24, 2025 5:00pm



02 June Harris
 06 Brenda Mathieu
 11 Leland Towne
 17 Sarah Smith
 20 Jeanne (Morrell) Hough



CHILDREN'S



Faith Formation

Calling all children, youth (and even adults)

On December 14th, during the Message For All, we will have an impromptu Christmas Pageant. Always wanted to be an angel, Mary or what about a royalty? We have your small speaking or sound part. It will be full of the Holy Spirit. Minimal costumes will be provided.

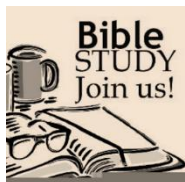
Reminder that **there is no Promise Land (Sunday School) or nursery care on December 24th, or on Sunday December 28th.** See you in 2026.



Merry Christmas to all of our wonderful youth!



Adult Christian Education



Bible Study: December 11 and 18 from 11am-noon
in the Conference Room at Loomis.
All our welcome.

December 11: The prophets Isaiah (Isaiah 2:1-5) and Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)

December 18: Zechariah, Elizabeth and John (Luke 1:18-25) and John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12)

Scriptures will be provided to "regulars"
and copies will be available on the table in the Church Street entrance,

Deacon's Notes

Advent season arrived this year on November 30th. Where does the time go? It is fitting that the birth of Jesus is at the end of year, and then a new born for the start of next year. As we follow the theme of each Advent Sunday Pastor Lori will guide through each one. The theme of the 1st one is Hope, 2nd is Peace, 3rd is Joy and the 4th is Love. Advent is a time of anticipation and reflection. As you listen to the words prior to each candle being lit, reflect on how each weekly experience is carrying you through the Advent season, anticipating the Christmas season. Hope, peace, joy and love; may you be blessed in this time of preparation for the birth of Jesus.

News from the Trustees for December 2025

Greetings heading into our last CAC 2025 month! The caveat here is always that the final financial report is never really done until we close the books in January 2026, so as usual the figures cited here lag behind by a month. Lori reported that the recently held "Voices and Roots" event was well received and many interesting personal stories were heard from all the speakers, including several from Center Church. Maybe another one will be in the offing at some point, but will not include an overnight? Treasurer John said that our October budget report shows us at 81.57% of our projected income and 78.97% of the projected expenses. Both of those figures are a little below the 83% for October, but both will continue to increase during our December time as we work toward the end of December. As always, we thank everyone who has been paying on their pledges and remind all that pledge payments are due by December 31. We will also eagerly look forward to the November bazaar numbers when they are finalized, and thank everyone who has taken part in that fund-raising event especially the very hard-working Activities Team!!!

We are continuing to fine tune the 2026 budget and will take another vote on it at our December meeting when we have a better understanding of how the pledge campaign has done. If you have not yet sent in your pledge, there is still time to do that. Current pledges are gratefully appreciated, but it is never too late to join in to help Center Church continue to grow. We will take our final vote for the 2026 budget at our January meeting. Other news included the acceptance of a new landscaper for the coming year as our current one has closed his business after two years and his graduation. In ongoing concerns about safety issues, the trustees have purchased a small safe to "safe guard" our fund-raising efforts. Thanks to our treasurer! We continue to focus on church safety and remind the congregation that, as a result of this, all doors are locked by 10:10 on Sundays, and entrance then is through the front Route 116 doors.

We wish all a safe and healthy holiday season and upcoming year. And many thanks for all the Center Church angels who help out in many ways during the year keeping our church running smoothly, especially the staff. You are much appreciated!

For the trustees, *Cindy Morrell*

IMPORTANT REMINDER:

PLEASE REMEMBER TO COMPLETE PAYMENT OF YOUR 2025 PLEDGE BY DECEMBER 31ST
SO THAT WE CAN CREDIT THE OPERATING FUND FOR 2025.

Notes from Church Council

The Council met virtually on Tuesday, November 4. Eliot Chartrand of the Trustees opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m. and called on Rachel Alldis to lead devotions. She read a passage from the Gospel of Mark 11 vs. 23. The Council then discussed various fundraising possibilities. Our early September tag sale was very successful. However, it relied heavily on a few dedicated Activities Team volunteers. We need to look into other ways to raise funds. This will be brought up during our Annual Meeting in February. Kate Hoffman joined us to inform us of the finalized plans for the Sunday, November 9 intergenerational "Celebrating the Harvest of Generosity" luncheon. This also coincided with Stewardship Sunday. Brian Lapis requested that the Council add the "Silver Lake Camp" scholarship to our next meeting's agenda. We need to agree on the amount to offer. That Zoom meeting is Tuesday, December 2. Corinne Chartrand will lead and Anita Sarro will present devotions. The various Team reports can be found in this month's *Church at the Center*.

Outreach Team



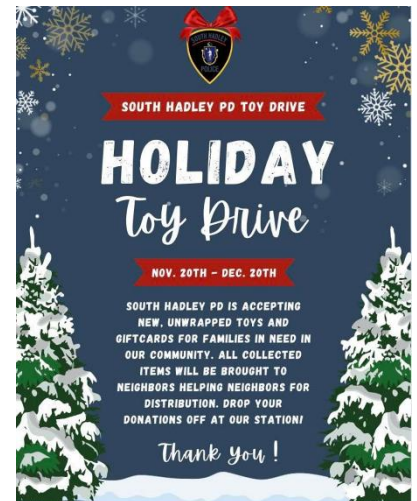
Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Inc. is a nonprofit food pantry in South Hadley serving more than 150 families a Month in both South Hadley and Granby. Support comes from food drives, fundraising, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and people like us. The pantry also provides personal care products, household products, and dog and cat food when available. Our church has a bin for pantry collections downstairs by the outside door. The bin is there year-round but we're

hoping to fill it to overflow during December to help those with food hardships. These are the same families being helped through the Secret Santa program for the children and adults. Thank you for supporting your neighbors.



It's Secret Santa time! The Outreach Team will work with the South Hadley United Methodist Church's Secret Santa Program again to purchase gifts primarily for children of Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry clients. The program will look a little different this year. A local toy collection will be the main focus of gifts for children. Other items asked for will need to

be purchased and wrapped, maybe by some of you. **No gift bags for adults this year. Instead, we hope to have at least one couch throw to give each family.** If you would like to buy a throw (reasonable at Ocean State, Dollar General), please give it to Sharyn or leave it in the office. Watch the weekly bulletin for more Secret Santa information. Thank you.



GRANBY TO GO

In January and February of 2026, the Outreach Team will collect warm clothing for those who need it in South Hadley and Granby. We hope to give things like coats, hats, scarves, gloves, sweatshirts and hoodies to Granby-To-Go as we did last year. Granby-To-Go is operated out of the Granby schools and is affiliated with Neighbors Helping Neighbors. Folks in both towns are eligible to go to the pantry for food and Granby-to-Go for clothing. So, when Christmas is over, please don't forget the folks who still need food and clothing every day. Thanks once again, for all your generosity.

On November 25th John Hoffman dropped off 103 lbs of food to the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry - Thanks to all who donated!

Happy Holidays from the Outreach Team.



Stewardship 2025

It is time to harvest our generosity to Center Church! If you have made your financial pledge to Center Church for 2026, Thank You! If you have not made your pledge to support our ministries, there is still time! Please fill out your pledge card and drop it in the offering plate or mail to the church office. Need a pledge card? There are blank pledge cards in the pews, in the crossway to the Promised Land, & in the narthex. If you would like more information about making a financial pledge, please contact Pastor Lori or the church office.
Thank you for your generosity



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ONE CHURCH STREET * SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS 01075

Ph: (413) 532-2262 * E: centerchurch@verizon.net * Web: centerchurchsouthhadley.org

October 2025

Rev. Lori J. Souder, Senior Minister

Dear Friends in Christ and Center Church,

The 2025 Center Church Fall Pledge Campaign theme is ***"Growing a Harvest of Generosity."***

For The Bible tells us...

The Holy One gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives,
robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way,
producing with us great praise to God.
You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity,
which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

2 Corinthians. 9:10-11

First...**THANK YOU** for your wonderful pledge and financial support in 2025. We are so blessed. Now, as we approach both this season of giving and harvest, it is also time once again to consider how our prayerful, impactful, and generous pledge support in 2026 can *grow* and fund the mission and ministry of Center Church. That time – that season – is upon us once more.

Our generosity goal this year is also informed by the very real budget need to increase our overall pledge support by nearly 10% over 2025. We are asking you – inviting you – to join all of us in doing what we can to help bridge that gap, so that in giving, we might also receive.

Let's sow some seeds, be *"generous in every way"*, so we can grow our harvest, together!

Your increased pledge for 2026, when combined with so many others, will help ensure Center Church can continue to provide a *full-formed* community, beautiful and welcoming sanctuary, inspiring worship, insightful preaching, joyful music, engaging community outreach, and *robust* lessons of discipleship through God's unconditional and inclusive love and great harvest.

Please join us for **Stewardship Sunday on November 9th** with your enclosed pledge card in hand so we can all participate and grow our *harvest of generosity*. If you can't be with us in person that day, you can also mail your pledge card to the church office in the envelope provided, email the church office with your confidential pledge at centerchurch@verizon.net, or by completing the online form through the QR code here.



We wish you much peace, love, blessings, and we give great thanks again for your generous support to help Center Church continue to plant and sow the seeds of God's love, so that we may increase our future harvests, and in turn be *enriched in every way*, for Center Church and others, in this season, and the next!

**Your Stewardship
and
Trustee Teams**



Adventus or Advent



Adventus is the Latin word for Advent which means “coming.” It originated in the 4th Century A.D. as a period of penance. It begins with the Sunday nearest November 30th and lasts until midnight of Christmas Eve. It is a time of spiritual renewal. It’s a time for us Christians to reflect on our lives and deepen our religious commitments. We also need to focus on remembering Jesus’ place in our lives. Sometimes it’s referred to as preparing for the “second coming of the Messiah.”

Center Church began our observance of Advent tradition many years ago. We began by decorating our sanctuary with candles in the windows and evergreen boughs. These are symbols of “Light in the darkness and everlasting life.” We also incorporated lighting the Advent wreath before worship service. The wreath symbolizes “eternity and the continuing presence of God.” There are four candles within the wreath which represent *hope, peace, joy and love*. The color for the first three candles is purple and the last is pink. The white candle in the middle is considered the *Christ* candle and is lighted on Christmas Eve. Traditionally we sing the hymn “O Come, Emmanuel” during the first Sunday of Advent. Also, traditionally we avoid hymns of joy until we celebrate the birth of Jesus!



Unique Advent Calendar

Many an Advent calendar has been produced in the Sunday School. These calendars are a wonderful way to count down the days before Christmas. Other ways Advent has been celebrated is through having a “Mitten Tree.” Our donations of warm winter items are attached to the boughs and donated to worthy causes. At one time, a “Jesse Tree” was popular. Jesse was the father of King David and was the ancestor of Jesus. Items for the tree ranged from mittens, hats, socks, toys etc. “Homemade” gifts were extra special for spreading joy! For many years during the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday schoolers would present a pageant made up of various renditions of the Christmas story. They always conveyed an underlying theme of Christian giving and loving.

By attending worship services throughout the Advent season, we are not only members, but we are family who are opening our hearts and souls to each other. Through this simple act, we will learn to experience more fully the meaning of the “joy of Christmas!”



Watching and Waiting --...

Tell Me the Stories - December 2025

Let There Be Light (NCH 589, PH 449) provides an interesting contrast in hymn tunes. The texts are pretty much the same except for some wording “updating,” but the tunes provided are very different. William Vories, an American from Leavenworth KS, wrote the original poem in 1908. It was set to music and also translated into Japanese. The poem itself was published by the American Peace Society. Vories served as a lay missionary who gave over his life to non-denominational missions work in Japan. Although he wanted to be a missionary, he did not want to be allied with any denomination, so he started the Omni Mission in Japan. This is Vories’ only hymn in both of our hymnals. The NCH tune “Pentecost” was composed by William Boyd and designed to go with a different text, *Come Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire*. Boyd was an organist as well as an ordained minister in the Church of England. At some point, the tune became attached to Vories’ text. The PH used the hymn tune “Elton,” but the “Pentecost” tune was used for the NCH version and appears twice in that hymnal. “Elton” was composed by Lowell Mason, an American, considered a “leading figure in church music and music education in the 19th century.” Mason published 84 collections and produced more enduring tunes than another American. CAC 7/13

O How Shall I Receive You (NCH 102) is the one of our Advent carols the text was written by Paul Gerhardt, a 17th century German who attended Elector’s School at Grimms and then the Univ. of Wittenberg. This hymn can be used for the first Sunday in Advent but also on Palm Sunday if it goes along with the lectionary on that day. Gerhardt wrote a number of poems, 132 to be exact, along with the numerous hymn texts, many of which stressed the “love of God” rather than Luther’s “wrathful God.” He served in several pastoral positions after entering the ministry at age 44. Gerhardt has no hymns in the PH but he is associated with five in the NCH. This text was translated by several people including Catherine Winkworth in the 1800s. The hymn tune, “Valet Will Ich Der Geben” was composed by Melchior Teschner for another hymn originally and its name came from the start of the German text. “St. Theodulph” was also associated with another Latin hymn but both names are listed with this hymn. Teschner studied theology, philosophy and music at the Univ. of Frankfurt. His career included work as a pastor, cantor and teacher. CAC J/19

Our third hymn is *To God, Compose a Song of Joy* (NCH 36), one which has not been written about here before. Ruth Duck is a well-known American composer of the 20th century who has a total of 14 hymns texts in the NCH. This song is her translation of Psalm 98. She actually translated it from the original Hebrew while taking classes in that subject. Her upbringing involved evangelical roots in the southern US. She is a UCC minister and has been involved with both hymn collections and hymnal committees. She received her B.A. from Rhodes College, an MDiv from Chicago Theological Seminary, an M.A. in 1987 from Notre Dame, and her Th.D. in worship and theology from BU School of Theology in 1989. Ruth served several churches before moving to teaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in IL. She was an early advocate for inclusive language and the NCH has 14 hymns which testify to that. She has held workshops and lectured on worship and hymnody throughout North America and her hymn writing covered 40 years and she wrote over 150 texts in her lifetime. Ruth died the day after Christmas in 2024. “Richmond” was composed by Thomas Haweis in 1792. He began studying medicine in England but gave that up to become an Anglican clergyman. He was both a minister at several English church and a composer and editor. Eventually he became the manager of Countess Selina’s chapels in the city of Huntingdon, England. He has only this one tune in the NCH and none in the PH.

The final hymn this time is *O Christ, the Great Foundation* (NCH 387) written by Timothy T. Lew in 1933 which was translated by Frank W. Price in 1953. Lew was born in China in 1892, but attended Yale, Columbia, Union Theological Seminary and Oberlin in the States. He was considered a leading Chinese educator and author. He has one other text in the NCH. After graduating, he went back to China for several years to work, but then returned to the US and taught at UNM for six years before his death. Samuel S. Wesley is the son of Samuel Wesley and grandson of Charles Wesley whose brother, John, founded Methodism. His hymn tune "Aurelia" has been attached to a number of other texts. In the NCH, it is sung with two other texts, all right next to each other. The text we know better is *The Church's One Foundation* with text by Samuel J. Stone. This tune is not listed in the PH but Wesley does have three other tunes there. Wesley composed the tune for a Latin text which translated as Jerusalem the Golden - which comes from Latin "aureus" - golden. Unlike his grandfather Charles who has 10 hymn associations in the NCH, Samuel has only three. (see above comment.) Samuel was a professor of organ who worked hard to improve the "level of compensation and respect" for church musicians. The NCH Companion lists him as the "greatest musical genius of the gifted Wesley family."

Resource used: The New Century Hymnal Companion, ed. Kristen Forman (1998)

Cynthia J. Morrell, associate in music



THE MINISTRY AT CENTER CHURCH

Ministers: All Church Members
Senior Minister: Rev. Lori J. Souder

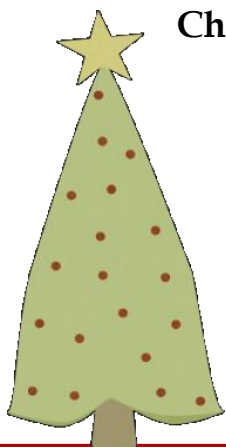


Christian Education Program

Children: Vicki Scherer, Coordinator Emily Mulder, Teacher
Youth Coordinator: Kenneth Mulder
Nursery Caregiver: Annabelle Burke

Music

Organist: Larry Schipull
Choir Director: Ben Coakley
Associate in Music: Cynthia Morrell
Office Administrator: Cynthia Jubinville
Sexton: Robert Farman



Thank you to All

*who have contributed this year to the
programs and life of Center Church
with your*

Time, Talent, and Financial Gifts.

Blessings of the Holiday Season!

*May we all have Health, Happiness,
and PEACE
in 2026.*