



CHURCH AT THE CENTER

JANUARY 2026



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.*

While we may place Christmas ornaments away, have cut up all the boxes for recycling and eaten our way through the figgy pudding, the baby Jesus is still around. Thank goodness it takes a while for a child to grow and develop...allowing us time to grow and develop with him/her/them. In fact, if you are reading this on the brink of New Year's, the 3 wise men have yet to arrive to pay homage to him on January 6th (Epiphany).

This year in 2026 I am going to give some time to reflect on the different stages of Jesus' life and not smoosh his time on earth all together. There is a reason why we liturgically run through his life year after year, because Jesus is not just about Christmas and Easter, but about coming into our broken lives, feeling our pain, and understanding our frustrations while still loving us.

Will you join me in diving deeper into Jesus' life? Happy New Year!

Joyfully, *Lori*.



Rev. Souder will be away December 26 - January 4
Rev. Barbara Kershner is available for Pastoral emergencies.
She may be reached on her cell at 570-449-8581



There will be **NO Vigil or Breakfast Conversation in January** – Lori will be out of town.



A **New Members Class** will be offered in January. Please let Lori know if you are interested in attending to learn more about becoming a member of Center Church; and if you would prefer a weekend or late afternoon weekday meeting.

Call to the Annual Meeting - February 8, 2026

**The Annual Meeting of the
First Congregational Church of South Hadley Massachusetts,
aka Center Church, will be held on February 8, 2026 at approximately 11:30 AM.**

Business shall include, but not be limited to, the hearing and acting upon reports of appropriate church committees and teams; hearing and determining the budget for 2026; and other matters relevant to the church body. All members of the church are encouraged to attend this meeting.

The 2025 Budget Report and the 2026 proposed Budget will be available January 25th. Full Report will be available February 1st.

Please submit your Team's 2026 Annual Report ASAP – deadline January 14, 2026.

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
Mary Nelsons father, Dave, with cancer
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:

Estelle Anderson, following hip surgery
Cynthia Baker
Dennis Banks, friend of Karen and
Estelle Anderson, with cancer
Robin Glossner, undergoing chemo
Gretchen LaBonte and family, on the passing
of her uncle Bob Brinkman
Elisa Morrison's step-mother Sandy, and
brother Carl, with heart issues
Elisa's young friend Elija, addiction recovery
Katy (Daniels) Bobel's brother-in-law,
Gary Nicolls, severely injured in a car accident
Bob Seems, following surgery
Kendall Johnson-Smith, Preston Smith's
daughter, with cancer
Vicki Scherer and family on the passing of her
grandfather, December 10

CHILDREN'S



Faith Formation

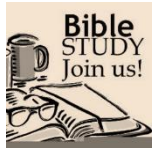
I hope everyone had a great Christmas and New Years. I want to thank everyone who has been helping to keep the promised land running while I have been home with my family. I will be away for most of January but I will be back by the end the month and I can't wait to be working with everyone again! Vicki



Some Promised Land pics from December 21
Pageant in the Promised Land



Adult Christian Education



Bible Study: January 8 and 15. We will study Matthew 11:2-11 and Isaiah 7:10-16. Join us at **11am in the Conference Room at Loomis**. Readings will be available on the table in the Church Street entrance.

Outreach Team

Granby To Go

Feeding Families & Bridging the Gap
385 East State St., Granby MA 01603 • (413) 487-7164, ext. 5200 • (413) 487-3909 FAX
www.granbytogo.org

Granby To-Go is a non-profit program for the Granby community that provides food, clothing and resources to families in need. Granby-to-Go is also affiliated with our Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry, so that people in both towns can get food from Neighbors and clothing from Granby-to-Go. This January we will start our annual **winter clothing collection** to take to Granby-to-Go. Clothes are needed for all age groups. Most needed are jeans, sweaters, jackets, hats, mittens, gloves, scarves. No underwear or socks can be accepted. So once again the Outreach Team asks for your help and support for those who need what most of us take for granted. **Thank you, Center Church.**

Activities Team

The bazaar is still winding down, with packing up happening the beginning of January. We had great donations for decorating our homes, sharing with others, enjoying for ourselves. The crafters offered merchandise that was unique and special. The lunch and cookies, as well as other food items, received many compliments. Once again attendees tell us our bazaar is not to be missed. As of this writing, the final numbers are not quite ready and will be shared at the annual meeting. Many thanks to all that volunteered with setup and the days of the bazaar. Thank you for supporting this event in whatever way you did, with donations, purchases, and especially your time. The combination made for a very successful event that supports the work of the church.

News from the Trustees for January 2026

Greeting in this new year, even though we are not totally done with the old one yet! We heard from both Pastor Lori and treasurer John Hoffman (in absentia) after we had set our counters from 12/14 until 1/11. Lori reviewed recent events and upcoming ones as well. She made it a point to *thank all of the volunteers* who have worked on the bazaar (before, during and after) and decorating the sanctuary and all those continuing to help going forward. John's email note reported that we are anxiously awaiting the final numbers for both income and expenses covering the month of December. Our task at our January meeting will be to "finish" the 2025 year with any financial corrections needed and then to set, to the best of our ability, the 2026 budget going forward. He noted that some of the income for 2025 is not coming in at the level we had anticipated, so we have our fingers crossed as we wait for December figures. John is hopeful that our total expenses will come in under budget however. We *thank the Stewardship Team* for their hard work in getting us those final 2026 pledge numbers, which are still coming in!

Ongoing information – our ancient dishwasher has recently been repaired but we learned that we need to be more careful that "unwanted objects" do not get into it and cause jams! The large refrigerator also has had some recent issues but will be repaired as well. *The Activities Team has generously offered to cover that cost and for that we are most grateful!* The Odyssey Bookshop continues to be happy to come use our sanctuary for book talks/signings. The Tree of Life (the second-floor upstairs program) students gave a musical presentation during Christmas week up there as well. We had a very good discussion about the accessibility in our sanctuary which will be ongoing. We may revisit replacing a couple of the larger pews with smaller ones to accommodate wheelchairs, as that happened previously before the wood floor was installed. Stay tuned on that! We are also trying to figure out placement of the choir so that anyone who is interested in participating can easily do so. That will be an ongoing discussion. It was noted that we should/must have two "handicapped accessible" parking spots on each side of the building and we are working on that. We will be working tidying up on a couple of our storage spots during January.

Again, our sincere thanks to everyone who helps to sustain Center Church annually through pledging, volunteer work, singing, playing instruments, counting, taking the morning offering, greeting, teaching, reading scripture, serving as deacons or on other teams....you are appreciated!

for the trustees, Cindy Morrell

Notes from Church Council

The Council met virtually on Tuesday, December 2. Corinne Chartrand of Activities opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m. and called on Anita Sarro to lead us in devotions. She referred to the *Iona Scotland Hymn Book* for a reading. The Council revisited some old business regarding the Holiday Bazaar. Council thanked the Activities Team for spearheading the successful fundraiser. For new business, Council discussed the Silver Lake scholarships that Center Church gives out. We were informed that the 2026 camp session is to be the last one. We will continue the scholarship for 2026. The amount is to be agreed upon at a later meeting. We had a discussion about accessibility/mobility issues for the choir. Also, there needs to be a broader conversation regarding support for Faith Formation in 2026. Council agreed that this is an important ministry. Team reports can be found in this month's *Church at the Center*. The next Zoom meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 6, 2026. Bobbie Ayers is to Lead and Eliot Chartrand will offer devotions.

Center Church in Transition

Death: Audrey (Hugel) Heaphy, November 30, 2025 aged 96.

Deacon's Notes

We start our meetings with a devotion that we all take turns doing alphabetically. The reading may be a poem, an article, a prayer, a short discussion, often pertaining to the season we are in, is shared. At our December meeting, on the 4th Sunday of Advent, a poem by Howard Thurman, was read by Bill Giles. We felt its message would be meaningful to share in the Church at the Center.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

I will light four candles and I will be willing to light
every taper in my life, for love asks for all that is needed
and then...for everything else,

for this is how incarnation happens, how God comes.

We light four candles or a hundred or a thousand more
whatever it takes to remind ourselves to live in love.

As ordinary and gentle as the holy welcome that turns the world upside down,
comes hope, peace, joy, and love to illuminate our Advent.

I will light Candles this Christmas, Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.

As we end the 12 days of Christmas into the season of Epiphany on January 6, may your candles be
burning all year long.



Stewardship Team

Happy New Year!

If you have not made or renewed your pledge for 2026, now is the time to make your financial gift. In late December, our total pledge amount for 2026 was approximately \$132,000. Thank you for your generous response to fund the ministry of Center Church! Approximately \$15,000 in pledges from Center Church members and friends in 2025 has not yet been committed for 2026. If you have not pledged yet, please do, and consider increasing your contribution from 2025.

If you have never made a pledge and need more information, now is a great time to express your generosity! Please contact the church office for a confidential conversation. Making a financial gift is easy and can be paid in one lump sum, monthly, or weekly, by check or electronic withdrawal.

Your money funds Center Church's ministry. The work that we do in the church, the community, the region, and the world is made possible by your generous financial contributions.

We are hoping to have a "complete" generosity story to tell at our annual meeting on Feb. 8.

Thank you for your generosity to the ministry of Center Church!

From the Church Historian – January 2026

Parish House Turns 70



THE REV. JAMES L. LANCASTER

Our once called “New Center-Parish House” was dedicated on April 29, 1956, so in this new year of 2026, it will be 70 years old. We refer to the ground floor as Fellowship Hall but it is part of the Lancaster Education Building. The building fund and effort was started in early 1954. At that time, we had a large influx of families from the former Westover Air Force Base in Chicopee. Our membership hovered around 700 and the Sunday school, headed by Director Barbara Jeanne (Bobby Jeanne...BJ) White (Cindy White Morrell’s mother)

had 300 children and we ran two sessions each Sunday! New space was definitely needed! So, BJ, along with a building committee spearheaded by Rev. James L. Lancaster (our minister from 1953-1969) went to work.



Sunday School
in the Merrill House

Rev. Lancaster came to us in the Fall of 1953 from the Congregational Church of Bar Harbor, ME. He was expected, through his reputation, to help with modernizing our church building(s) to accommodate our growing congregation. Jim Lancaster was born in Middlebury, VT in 1914. His father was a congregational minister. Jim graduated from Dartmouth College in 1936. He served in the U.S. Army from 1942-45 as a chaplain. He was discharged with the rank of Major.

Once Rev. Lancaster was settled, he began immediately to guide us in joining the United Church of Christ 68 years ago. Through him, he felt that the “quality and spirit” of our members, had the willingness to undertake the worthwhile endeavor of building a totally separate building to house our



Church Leaders

Christian Education needs. His vision “was the future” of our church home. He gathered our leaders, (such as Bissell Alderman, Dr. Carl Abbey, James White, Charles Kirkpatrick, Richard Johnson and many more at that time), to head the “far reaching” process of erecting this new building. It would be called: the New Center-Parish House. The pledge goal was \$150,000. A large percentage of the donors were in the fifty-cents to one dollar category! Once the building was completed, it had a fully-equipped kitchen to serve wonderful church suppers to help raise money. Various choir entertainment gatherings also helped. Boy and Girl Scouts also used the facility. Many Annual Meetings were held. The classrooms

were on the upper floors and there were two chapel rooms for the Sunday school to hold their own services, each with a piano.

Through the years, there have been changes. Today we still enjoy the entire building which holds our tag sale and Holiday Bazaar along with potlucks and other events. It also now houses a “day school” called “Tree of Life,” but originally there was a program called Center Church Nursery up there established by our members. There are Sunday school rooms and some rooms with small businesses. We dedicated and renamed the building the “Rev. James L. Lancaster Education Building” honoring the person who had the “vision for our future needs”. Now it has a “crossway” with an elevator connecting it to our main church building.



Tell Me the Stories - January 2026

*Who would think that what was needed to transform and save the earth
Might not be a plan or army proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision, that a child should lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.*

*Shepherds watch and sages wonder, monarchs scorn and angels sing;
Such a place as none would reckon hosts a holy, helpless thing;
Stabled beats and passing strangers watch a baby laid in hay;
God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.*

*Centuries of skill and science span the past from which we move,
Yet experience questions whether with such progress we improve.
In our search for sense and meaning, lest our hopes and humor fray,
God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.*

We sang these words on Dec 14, hymn Sunday, this year. They belong to *Who Would Think That What Was Needed* (NCH 153). As we come to the end of what has been a divisive year and begin a new one, I, for one, found these words very appropriate and also very touching. I have written about this hymn three other Januarys, the first time in 2007 when I noted that the hymn was new to us at Center Church. The text was written by two men, John Bell and Graham Maule, both part of the infamous baby-boom generation, in 1990. It is based on parts of Isaiah, Matthew and Luke, and focuses on “the surprises that Christmas brings,” bringing a different perspective to our more traditional carols. Maule actually has an architecture degree from Glasgow Univ. and they are both part of the Iona Community of Scotland. The two men have worked together for more than 15 years as “colleagues in youth ministry.” Neither has any association with the PH. While Bell has two other hymn texts in the NCH, Maule is only listed with this hymn. Even though we may not be familiar with the hymn’s words, everyone knows the hymn tune “Scarlet Ribbons” to which it was set. Although it is listed as an English traditional melody, it is felt that credit should really be given to Evelyn Danzig, a Waco TX native, born in 1902. The tune and its original words were popularized by Harry Belafonte. Interestingly, Evelyn started out her career as a pianist for radio shows. CAC 1/07, 1/16, 1/17

The second carol, *Angels From the Realms of Glory*, (NCH 126, PH 117) was written by James Montgomery and appeared first in December 1816 in *The Sheffield Iris*, the newspaper where he worked. It is said that, after Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, “no writer has made a greater contribution to English hymnody than has James Montgomery.” His parents were Moravian missionaries who went off to Barbados while leaving their six-year-old son in an Irish Moravian settlement. After their death, he went to school in England. He did not do well in school and so was apprenticed to a baker but that didn’t go well either, so he left and moved to Sheffield, England and began working for a newspaper. At age 23, he was appointed editor and remained so for thirty-one years, where he championed many causes over the years and was thrown into jail twice as a result. He was also a champion of “the cause of foreign missions and of the British Bible Society.” What we sing as the carol today first appeared as a poem in the newspaper. Later published in *Montgomery’s Original Hymns*, it was known as *Good Tidings of Great Joy to All People*. The hymn is considered by many to be one of our finest Christmas hymns. Montgomery wrote over 400 hymns in all, including *According to Thy Gracious Word*.

Montgomery has a total of 5 texts in the NCH and 12 in the PH. The tune for this carol is called “Regent Square” and was composed by Henry Smart. An organist and composer, Smart was blinded later in life and this carol was written during that period. It was composed for a new hymnal being produced by the pastor of London’s Regent Square Presbyterian Church, hence the name. Smart has 5 tunes in the NCH and 4 in the PH and his “Regent Square” tune appears in both hymnals twice.

CAC 1/06, 1/16

We next sang *Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear* (NCH 105) which was a originally German carol on Dec. 21. This version has been paraphrased from the 15th century carol to make it more accessible to congregations of today. It has normally been Mary’s words to Joseph, but the NCH changed the wording a bit to make it a dialogue between them. Carol Birkland, who paraphrased the original, is an active singer, has served as a CE director in several churches, and worked as well for both Friendship and United Church Press. She also is most interested in hymnody in general. The tune “Joseph Lieber, Joseph Mein” is based on a “15th century German melody from a mystery play.” The new harmonization was done by the editor of the NCH, Arthur Clyde. The hymn tune is also called “Resonet in Laudibus” and was sung during a medieval Nativity mystery play as a lullaby for the coming baby. This hymn only appears in the NCH. CAC 1/12

Last hymn is *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*. This is not found in either of our hymnals but it is a well- known carol. The text was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as a poem “Christmas Bells” in 1863 and originally contained seven verses. One of my sources said that the last two were omitted from the carol we know because they referenced battles going on during the Civil War in the South and it was felt they were too “dark.” Following the death of Longfellow’s wife two years before and then the serious injury of his eldest son who had been fighting in Virginia, while taking care of that son on Christmas Day in 1863, he had heard the bells ringing, perhaps of a local Episcopal seminary very nearby, and felt reassurance that God’s good will and peace would win in the end. The poem was first published in 1865. The original poem was set to music by John B. Calkin, an English organist, in 1872. There have been other melodies used as well.

Cynthia J. Morrell, Associate in Music

Resources used: Robert McCutchan’s Our Hymnody (1937); James Moffatt, ed. Handbook to the Church Hymnary (1927); Robert J. Morgan’s Then Sings My Soul, Book 1 (2003); Kenneth W. Osbeck’s 101 Hymn Stories (1982), Amazing Grace (1990); Daniel Partner’s The Carols We Love (2002); www.thegospelcoalition.org (2014); and The New Century Hymnal Companion, ed. Kristen Forman (1998).



**Christmas poinsettias on the chancel this Christmas season
were given *in honor of* the following special people:**

In Appreciation of our Activities Team - for their hard work and dedication.

Kathy and Marty Holmes by Amy, Matt, Jacoby and Avery

Her grandchildren, Brynley and Brayden by Thia Jubinville

Their grandgirls, Chloe, Lucy and Cora Hough by Cindy and David Morrell

**Christmas poinsettias on the chancel this Christmas season
were given *in loving memory of* the following special people:**

Richard Anderson by Estelle and Karen Anderson

Her Sister, Nancy Lutes by Bobbie Ayers

Her parents, Helen and Howard Ayers by Bobbie Ayers

Janet O. Bresee by Bobbie Ayers

Joy and Warren Bock by their family

Robert L. Clinton, Jr. by Dianne Clinton

Muriel and Larry Graham
by Nancy and Barry Lundquist

George (Chuck) Halkyard
by Eileen Halkyard, Thia, Kate and Laura Jubinville

Kenny Lubold
by Thia & Kate Jubinville and Laura (Jubinville) Lubold

George & Evelyn Edge and Evelyn Simpson
by Nancy and Shawn Hall

Donn & Rosemary Worth, Cathy Follo, and Gio Aurigemma
by Kate and John Hoffman

Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Hooton, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Utley,
and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ryer
by Mr. and Mrs. William Utley and Mr. and Mrs. Hitesh Shroff

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Hooton & Mr. Navinchandra Shroff
by Mr. and Mrs. Hitesh Shroff and Mr. and Mrs. William Utley

James P. and Barbara "BJ" White, by Cindy and David Morrell

Ray J. Narey by Chelsea, Kayla and Tyler

Ray J. Narey by Ray, George and Jack

Emily Bangs Orsini by Chris Orsini

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert and Emily Bangs by Chris Orsini

Mr. and Mrs. Christopher and Evelyn Orsini by Chris Orsini

Janice Robertson by Robert Robertson and family

Carolyn Baston by Bob Robertson

Joanne, Elizabeth and Arvo Solander
by Nancy Solander Miller

Their parents, Dick and Betty Souder and Morris & Mildred Baldwin,
and Jan and Lew Daniels
by Lori Souder and Winston Baldwin

Chet Towne by his wife

Ann and Richard Williams by their daughter, Wendy

happy
birthday!

04 Thia Jubinville
06 Anita Sarro
09 Randy Purinton
14 Nancy Bozek
15 Madeleine Burke
David White
25 Rookie Tipton



happy new year



THE MINISTRY AT CENTER CHURCH

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

Christian Education Program

Children: Vicki Scherer, Director; Emily Mulder, Teacher

Youth: Kenneth Mulder

Nursery Care: Annabelle Burke

Music

Organist: Larry Schipull

Choir Director: Ben Coakley

Associate in Music: Cynthia Morrell

Office Administrator: Cynthia Jubinville

Sexton: Robert Farman