



**THE BELL TREE**  
AN MCCC PUBLICATION

*A Newsletter for*  
**MARCH 2026**

*The Mount Carmel Congregational Church*  
*(A United Church of Christ)*  
*3285 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06518*



*From the Pastor's Desk...*



Hello, Church!

I have to say that writing my March newsletter after coming in from trying to shovel out from a blizzard was not on my 2026 Bingo card, but life is full of surprises.

For my Lent this year, I am channeling my mother, who tried unsuccessfully to get my brother and me to be good thank you note writers. She was great at it and hardly ever missed a chance to express gratitude for things both big and small. I am working each day to write one thank you note to someone who has influenced me. Some of those are people I know, others are writers and musicians whom I never met but I feel connected to. So far, I am finding great joy in sending my notes each day.

This year, March is the heart of our Lenten season together. We have Bible studies scheduled the first two Saturdays from 10:30-12:00, and a Taizé prayer service on Wednesday, March 11 at 7:00pm, along with our regular Sunday schedule. I hope you will participate in all that feeds your Lenten practice.

March also means we are beginning preparations for our annual meeting in mid-April, which is when we elect committee members and those who have other duties around the church. Thanks to our by-law revision last year, we are working to get back on a rotating committee system so that more people are involved and no one feels trapped or obligated to serve.


We need new folks helping with our weekly streaming, with coffee hour, and on our various committees. If you are interested, please speak up. Don't wait to be invited.

I look forward to seeing you Sunday.

Peace,  
Milton

## MARCH WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Please join every Sunday at 10am in the Church for service, followed by coffee hour in the Parlor! Note: These are lectionary passages for your own devotional purposes. Weekly scripture readings are subject to change.*

<p><b><u>March 1, 2026: Communion</u></b>  <i>Second Sunday of Lent</i>  <b>Scripture:</b> Genesis 12:1-4a                  Psalm 121                  Romans 4:1-5,13-17                  John 3:1-17</p>	
<p><b><u>March 8, 2026</u></b>  <i>Third Sunday of Lent</i>  <b>Scripture:</b> Exodus 17:1-7                  Psalm 95                  Romans 5:1-11                  John 4:5-42</p>	<p><b><u>March 15, 2026</u></b>  <i>Fourth Sunday of Lent</i>  <b>Scripture:</b> 1 Samuel 16:1-13                  Psalm 23                  Ephesians 5:8-14                  John 9:5-41</p>
<p><b><u>March 22, 2026</u></b>  <i>Third Sunday of Lent</i>  <b>Scripture:</b> Ezekiel 37:1-14                  Psalm 130                  Romans 8:6-11                  John 11:1-45</p>	<p><b><u>March 29, 2026</u></b>  <b>Palm Sunday</b>  <b>Scripture:</b> Isaiah 50:4-9a                  Psalm 3:9-16                  Philippians 2:5-11                  John 26:14-27:66</p>



**In the event of snow, please watch your email for updates. A decision regarding cancellation will be made by 8:00am on Sunday morning.**



### MARCH BIRTHDAYS



*Happy Birthday Wishes Go to the Following:*

Lynda Pedersen March 31<sup>st</sup>

*Don't see yourself on our Birthday List? Please contact the office!*

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### **Lenten Bible Study: Saturday Mornings in March**

Please join us in the Parlor for a special Lenten Bible Study on three consecutive Saturdays in Lent (March 7, and March 14) from 10:30am to 12pm.

-Rev. Milton

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### **Lenten Taizé Worship: Wednesday, March 11**

Please join us this month for our annual Lenten Taizé worship service on Wednesdays March 11. Taizé is a quiet form of worship built around music and meditation. This special evening service begins at 7:00pm and last approximately 30 minutes.

-Church Staff

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### **Outreach: One Great Hour of Sharing: Collection Sunday, March 15**

OGHS. One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital special mission offering of the UCC. It connects you to disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe. When disasters strike, or when people are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery. Our collection will take place on Sunday, March 15.

-Debbie Wooley

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### **Shirts and Skirts Bingo: Tuesday, March 24**

Please join Shirts and Skirts on Tuesday, March 24 from 5:00-7:00pm for a special covered dish potluck Bingo Night! We will also be planning our schedule for the remainder of the year, so we hope to see you there!

-Vera DeAngelo

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### **Annual Meeting Committee Reports: Due March 24**

This year's Annual Meeting is currently scheduled for Sunday, April 12, 2026. If you are a Church officer or the head of a committee, we ask that you send a typed copy of your report to Aren, preferably by email, by Tuesday, March 24, along with a list of your current members and officers and any open positions that need to be filled.

-Aren Alberico

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### **Stewardship**

Current Pledge Total: As of this writing, no new pledges have come in. It is still not too late to send in your 2026 pledge. Any amount is fine and is greatly appreciated. You can make a one time, monthly or weekly contribution. If you would like to have your pledge taken out of your bank account, let us know so we can set up VANCO.

“A person may decide either to accept or reject Christ, but once he or she accepts Christ, it is not for that person to decide whether or not to be a steward, for one becomes a steward when one becomes a Christian.” – *Luther Powell*

-Debbie Wooley

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## Faith Formation

*Church School:* Church school continues on a volunteer basis as schedules allow.

*Seasons of the Church.* Curious about Lent and its meaning for Christian life? Well, look no further than **pages 6 and 7** of this month’s newsletter, where we provide a brief overview on the origin, meaning, and symbology of Lent, as well as a brief glimpse at Holy Week!

*ARK Banks.* Please don’t forget to keep bringing in your ark banks. The monies collected go into a pastor’s discretionary fund which can be used to help people in our community who need help. If you have not picked up a bank yet, they can be found in the narthex or in the entrance to the parish hall. Keep your Ark Banks floating!

-Debbie Wooley

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## Annual Meeting and Luncheon: April 12, 2026

The 261<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Mount Carmel Congregational Church will be held on Sunday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026, following our regularly scheduled worship service. Your attendance at this meeting is very important because we need a quorum in order to approve the Annual Report.

Our next churchwide luncheon will follow our Annual Meeting. Finger sandwiches and a meat/cheese sandwich platter will be provided. The following items are needed: chips, baked beans, potato salad, coleslaw, cookies & brownies. Please let Debbie or Aren know if you can help provide any of these foods. Thank you.

-Church Staff

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## **FINANCIAL REPORT: JANUARY 2026**

Following is the financial report for January 2026. If you have any questions, Ellen can be reached at [treasurer@mccucc.com](mailto:treasurer@mccucc.com).

<b>Income:</b>	Pledges and Offerings:	\$8,940.00
	Other Income:	\$4,034.00
	Total Income:	\$17,974.00
<b>Expenses:</b>	Total Expenses:	\$19,124.00
<b>Net Income (Loss):</b>		- \$1,150.00

## **GENERAL ANNOUCEMENTS/REMINDERS**

**Volunteers Needed.** We are always looking for volunteers to help with Sunday services, whether as Ushers, Coffee Hour hosts, or by providing Altar Flowers. Signup sheets for all three are posted on the bulletin board at the Parish House entrance. For ushering, please contact Dave or Bev Jurkiewicz with any questions; for Coffee Hour or Altar Flowers, reach out to the Church Office at [office@mccucc.com](mailto:office@mccucc.com) or (203) 248-7408. Please note that flowers must be provided by you, and you will need to contact the office to include a message in the weekly bulletin.

**Bell Tree.** Do you have an event to announce? A story to share? We would love to hear it! Send us an email at [office@mccucc.com](mailto:office@mccucc.com) by the second to last Tuesday of the month and we may include your article in our next publication!

**Joys and Concerns.** If you wish to have a joy or concern announced during worship, please forward to them to Aren at [office@mccucc.com](mailto:office@mccucc.com) or call the church office at (203) 248-7408.

**Pastoral Support.** If you require pastoral support or guidance, feel free to contact our minister, Reverend Milton, by email at [Pastor@mccucc.com](mailto:Pastor@mccucc.com), or by contacting the Office by email at [office@mccucc.com](mailto:office@mccucc.com) or phone at (203) 248-7408.

**Food Bank.** Donations for the Food Bank are always needed if you are able to contribute. Non-perishable items such as canned beef stew, hearty soups, canned fish, peanut butter, mac and cheese packages, and oatmeal would be greatly appreciated.

**Prayer Shawls.** As a reminder, Prayer Shawls (lovingly handknit by members of our Church craft group and blessed by Reverend Milton) are always available to those who need them. If you or anyone you know needs one, please contact the office and we will arrange a shawl for you.

**QU Student Parking.** Please be aware that the first row of spaces in the gravel lot (closest to Whitney Avenue) has been reserved for Quinnipiac student parking. These spaces are clearly marked with signs, so please use other spots. Thank you for your cooperation!

**Directories and More.** Physical copies of the 2024 Annual Report, 2025 Revised Bylaws, 2025 Directory, and the 2026 Annual Draft Budget are available for pickup in the Church Office. If you would like a digital copy of any of these documents, please contact the office at any time.

**Church Pictures.** We are always looking for new pictures! If you happen to attend a Church event, please feel free to snap a few pictures and send them to us by email ([office@mccucc.com](mailto:office@mccucc.com)).

**Mouse Deterrents.** We have installed discreet mouse deterrent devices in key areas of the church to help maintain a clean and sanitary environment. These devices are safe and effective only when plugged in, so we kindly ask that they not be unplugged, even if they appear decorative. Thank you for your cooperation in caring for our shared space.

## Seasons of the Church: Lent

Lent recalls Jesus in temptation, suffering and death. In part, it represents Jesus' journey into the wilderness for forty days and nights, at which time he thought and prayed and grew to understand God's will for his life.

**Duration:** The season begins with Ash Wednesday and ends on the eve of Easter Sunday. It is forty days excluding Sundays before Easter.

**Focus:** Lent is the season we concentrate on confession, repentance and spiritual growth. We are reminded of the greatest act of love – Jesus' death on the cross. We prepare ourselves for the "new life in Christ" that Easter brings.

**Bible Verses:** Matthew 4: 1-11  
Mark 1:12-13

Luke 4: 1-13  
Hebrews 2:18



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### Lent: A Brief Overview

Lent is the Church Year's "springtime." Out of the cold and darkness of sin's winter emerges a people the Church—reborn in their Lord's Easter resurrection. Although Easter is the oldest Christian season, the observance of Lent appeared between 200-300 A.D. Lent was a time of preparation for persons being instructed in the Christian faith before their baptism. Following the model of Jesus' time in the wilderness, new adult converts practiced Lenten penance and prayer for 40 days while waiting to receive their baptism, confirmation and first Lord's Supper at the Saturday evening vigil before Easter.

Today Lent calls us to take time out and look back on the impact of our baptism on our lives. How are we doing, we who have died to sin and come alive to new life in Christ? In repentance we ask our Lord to clear our hearts and lives of sin's self-centeredness. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday's somber repentance and leads us to Holy Week's bitter story and Easter's joy in Christ's resurrection. These 40 days (excluding Sundays) are the first half of a larger rainbow arch, centered over Easter. The other half includes the Easter season's 50 days in which we celebrate our baptismal rebirth in Christ.

Contemporary Christians' six weeks of Lent form a journey taken annually with stops at traditional points along the way:

- Ash Wednesday (and sometimes the following Wednesdays),
- The first through fifth Sundays in Lent,
- Holy Week (*Palm or Passion Sunday* and the *Three Days or Triduum* of *Maundy Thursday*, *Good Friday*, and *Holy Saturday*) leading to the Saturday Easter Vigil and Easter Day, which open the Easter season and our celebration of the Lord's triumphant resurrection.

## Images and Words for Lent

**Lent:** An Anglo-Saxon word meaning “spring.”

**Forty Days:** The number 40 is attached to historic events: the flood, Moses’ days on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness, Jesus’ fasting and prayer in the wilderness before beginning his ministry.

**Jesus in the Wilderness:** A period of spiritual preparation just as the 40 days of Lent are to prepare us for the Easter celebration.

**Psalm 51** is a Psalm of repentance, just as Lent is a time for repentance.

**Disappearance of “Alleluia”** from our worship services beginning with the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Since medieval times some Christians have the custom of actually burying an “alleluia puppet” in a casket until Easter when the figure – and the word alleluia – are resurrected in the service.

**Mark of Ashes** on the foreheads of many Christians on Ash Wednesday. The Jews used ashes as an outward sign of repentance, a practice continued by early Christians, but discontinued by many of the reformers. So, while ashes today may remind us of dust and mortality, it is in keeping with Lent to see ashes as signs of our repentance, turning away from sin and being faithful to the Gospel.

**Self-Denial** has usually been thought of as “giving up something for Lent” rather than “practicing giving to others.” But when during Lent we give up sinful, self-serving ways, we replace them with new ways to give time and energy and forgiveness to those in need, as Christ gave himself for us, forgiving our old debts and reconciling us with God. This is the heart of the Easter message. This is the heart of Lenten preparation.

**Palms** welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

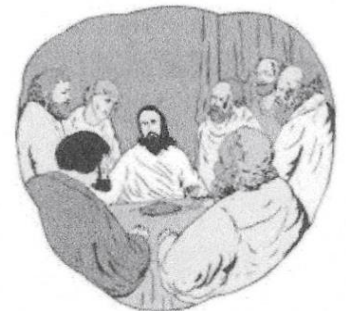
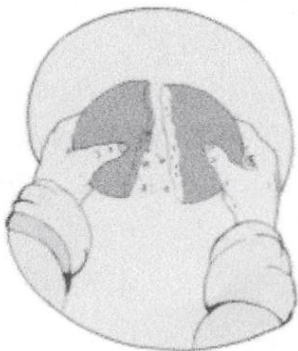
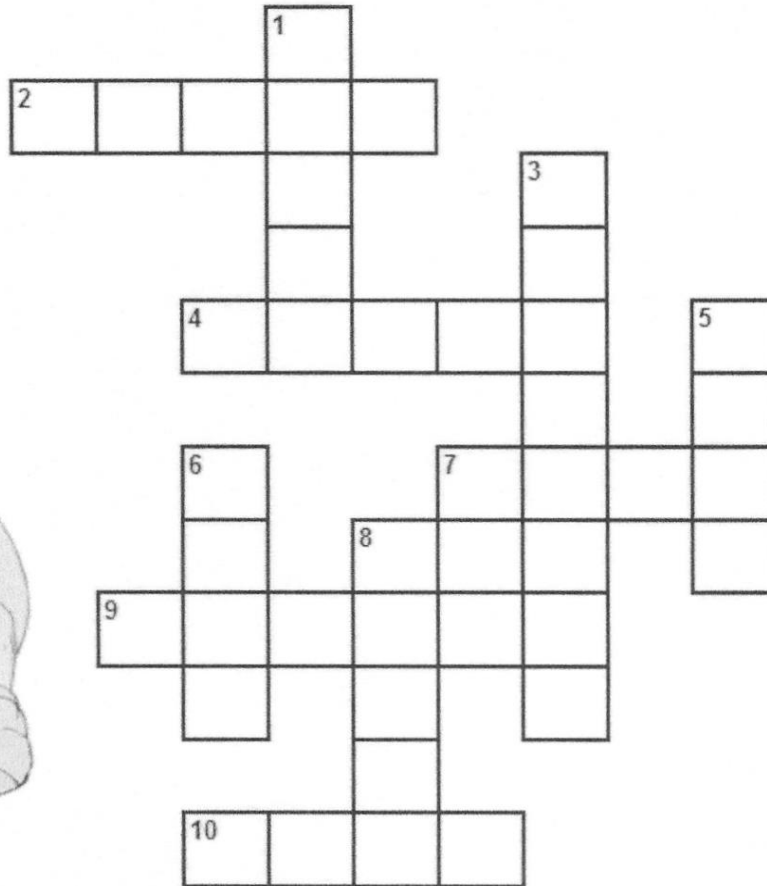
**Wheat and Grapes** representing the Lord's Supper, Wheat is the symbol of bread: Christ's body broken for us Wine is the symbol of blood: Christ's blood spilled for us.

**Purple** (violet) is the color of mourning and penitence and used for most of Lent; **Black** is the color of ashes and death (used on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday), and **Red** is the color of the blood of Christ shed for us on the Cross.



# THE LAST SUPPER

Things you might see or hear if you were present during the Last Supper. Mark 14:13-26



## Across

2. After giving thanks, Jesus broke \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Who would one of the disciples betray?
7. Everyone gathered in an upstairs \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Jesus arrived with this many disciples.
10. Jesus said the bread represented His broken \_\_\_\_\_.

## Down

1. Jesus and His disciples reclined around a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What festival were they celebrating?
5. After the meal, everyone sang a \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Jesus and His disciples dipped their bread into a \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Jesus said the wine represented His poured out \_\_\_\_\_.

Hints: BLOOD BODY BOWL BREAD HYMM JESUS PASSOVER ROOM TABLE TWELVE





## **Mount Carmel Congregational Church**

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### **Staff and Officers**

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Office Admin:	Mr. Aren Alberico <a href="mailto:office@mccucc.com">office@mccucc.com</a>
Music Director:	Mrs. Lynda Pedersen <a href="mailto:lyndal.pedersen@gmail.com">lyndal.pedersen@gmail.com</a>
Faith Formation:	Mrs. Debbie Wooley <a href="mailto:ce@mccucc.com">ce@mccucc.com</a>
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