

Center Congregational Church
474 Broad Street
Meriden, CT 06450-5897



Keep joining Pastor Connor for Virtual Worship each week at www.connorfilkins.com/virtual-worship

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The Lighted Tower

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Discernment; “And So, it Begins...”

At the risk of revealing my inner Lord of the Rings geek, I’m thinking right now of a favorite scene of mine from the film adaptation of *The Two Towers*. In the scene, King Théoden sits atop a castle, watching a massive army approach. His army is outnumbered a thousand to one, and the odds are not great. Not only is he facing the insurmountable odds, but the clouds open up and it begins to pour. It is at this moment, the king says under his breath: “And so, it begins...”

While we are definitely not facing an army of mutated monsters (don’t take this as a guarantee cause I really have no idea what to expect from the rest of 2020), we are beginning a new program year; one that will be unlike any other in this church’s history, because during this program year, we will be discerning the future of Center Church. Ultimately, in June, after a year of prayerful listening, reflection, and discussion, we will vote as a congregation on how Center Church will move forward. For now, we have reached that moment where we as a faith community can say: “and so, it begins.” For we who love this church, contemplating the future likely evokes a certain amount of fear and anxiety. The uncertainty surely feeds this feeling, and while I can’t predict an end result, I hope that the following outline of our program will help root us in a little more certainty than we currently feel.

We’ve already kicked off a period of listening, which will continue throughout the fall. Our first presentation on the lifecycles of congregations happened on September 16th and can be found in its entirety on our YouTube page. This presentation, and the two that will follow on October 14th, and 28th, will help us identify what the realities that congregations like ours are facing – because we surely aren’t alone. Our next presentation will look at how American culture has shifted since the 1950s when church-as-we-know-it was thriving. The final presentation will be a summary review of the first two, focusing on key takeaways, while also looking at how other congregations are trying to adapt. These presentations are intended to help everyone be better informed about the realities that we as a congregation are faced with, which should play a role in our final decision-making.

Our survey is another form of listening; listening to the realities present within our congregation. The survey has been developed to analyze key factors of congregational life at Center Church, and the cumulative data will also help us decide how to move forward together. This is an important thing to remember about a discernment process: it will take listening to the perspective of the whole, even if it may differ to how we feel personally. The survey information will be compiled into a report that I will deliver in January. Our one-on-one chats will also be incorporated into that same report as well. I would encourage all of you to attend the presentations and read the report when it is ready, so that we all are working with the same information while we continue on throughout the year.

As we transition from fall/winter into the new year, we will shift from a phase of listening into a phase of exploring and weighing. We will take what we've learned from the presentations and survey report and begin exploring and weighing what our options are for the future. Across several presentations, I will lay out in detail several options: "Right-Sizing", "Legacy", "Re-imagining", "Transplanting", and "Merging". As we approach the new year, more information will be sent out about these options and when the presentations will occur. Each presentation will be followed by an open discussion of the option.

These presentations will be complemented by town hall discussions about various aspects of the church: worship, programming and missions, open and affirming, inclusivity, and change in our church. These conversations are meant to be general, to help us gauge how we feel about these areas and get a sense of where we might like to improve and change. Dates and times will be announced later in the fall.

As we approach the end of the program year (in May and June) we will transition to the choosing phase of discernment. There will be three separate discussions starting in May, where all that we have learned, heard, and reflected upon will be discussed. The first two sessions will be geared toward building a consensus. The third session will include a congregational vote to narrow down our options to two. A final congregational vote will be held in June, where we will vote to decide which direction we want to take.

I hope that this offers some clarity and ground to root you in as we proceed into a space of in-betweenness. If you have any questions, please call me at the office, on my work cell at 203-626-1017, or email me at minister@centerchurchmeriden.org. While the process is in-depth and has a lot of events, I really encourage all of you to participate in as many programs as possible. The process is designed very intentionally with different steps that are all equally important. Allowing ourselves to walk the entire journey will hopefully help us to see with a little more clarity at the end of this discernment journey.

I pray that throughout this process that we can keep open minds, open ears, and open hearts. God is moving in a new way throughout our lives and the world. To listen for and discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church takes spiritual grit and an openness to something different. No matter where the Spirit is calling this faith community, one thing is for certain, it is completely within our power and ability to remain a faith community. Whether we choose to continue on or choose something else, Center Church will always live in the hearts of its people, no matter where they may gather. And so, it begins...

Peace and Blessings,
Pastor Connor

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As always, feel free to reach out to me at 203-626-1017, or at minister@centerchurchmeriden.org.

FROM THE CHURCH COUNCIL

Wonderful news!

The Church Council has approved a plan to reopen the church for in-person worship on October 11, 2020. There will be one service at 10am. Sunday School will resume on October 18, 2020.

The reopening plan includes numerous precautions that will be implemented to lower the risks associated with indoor worship. Masks will be required. Seating in the sanctuary will be spaced to allow for social distancing of 6 feet. There will be no singing, passing of the Peace, or Coffee/Fellowship time following the service. You will receive additional details about the plan in mid-September.

We know from our church survey that there will be people who are more comfortable worshipping from home. The worship service will be live-streamed from the sanctuary at 10am on Sundays. The Kindles will continue to be used for people without internet access.

The reopening of the church is for **worship only**; the church building will remain closed for meetings and other group gatherings.

Please continue to wash your hands, practice social distancing, wear your mask and pray that the numbers in CT remain low after the schools reopen so that we can move forward with this plan.

From the Deacons

Parking Lot Communion

Join us on Sunday, October 4, 2020 at 11:30 am in the church parking lot for an outdoor Communion Service (weather permitting). Bring a chair, a mask, and whatever elements you choose to use to for communion. There will be prepackaged elements for those who need them. Communion will be followed by our regular Sunday parking lot Coffee Gathering. Remember that the restrooms are not open at this time.

Correction

The bathroom on the **LEFT** side of the Federal Room foyer has been designated for use by the congregation, during Sunday worship.

Time Change---Fall Back



You know it is 2020 when the Full Moon falls on Halloween (October 31); it is a Blue Moon (second blue moon of the month) AND it is the final day of Daylight-Saving Time. Remember to set your clocks back 1 hour when you go to bed.

MISSION MOMENT

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Breadline Africa project in August. We sent them a check for \$500, and received the following note:



I am so thrilled today to receive a letter from your Mission Treasurer dated 8 September enclosing a wonderful gift of US \$500.00 for Breadline Africa.

There is so much faith and hope in South Africa and it is with support such as this that we can make a very real impact on the problems facing the poor and marginalised. Since the start of lockdown, we have provided ingredients to 44 feeding sites to prepare meals for children and elderly in 80 different communities. At the end of July, we reached the 1 million meals milestone and have decided to continue feeding as long as we can as the numbers of children in the feeding lines are not reducing - especially as so many ECD centres are unable to start back up again. The funds received from you will assist us greatly.

Thank you for supporting us during these trying times.

October is our annual Neighbors in Need offering. This year's theme is "All Children Have the Right to Simply Be Children". This UCC offering supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States, including the Council for American Indian Ministries, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects. Some of the advocacy work includes issues such as voting rights, immigration, health care, hate crimes, civil liberties, and environmental justice.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF OUR MISSION PROJECTS!!!



OTHERS

Others for October - Welcome Fall!



Others will meet at Violi's on the Hunter's Golf Course on October 8th at 6 pm. Keep an eye on the weekly Church news in case the positivity rate increases. Our birthday girl is Carol Schlauch. Others is open to all Center Church women and their friends. Looking forward to seeing you soon. Please let Ardene know if you are planning on going. If you don't feel like going out at night please join Koinonia. They would love to have you join them.

CENTERITES

Centerites, this is open to all men of the church, they will meet on October 8th at 6:30pm at East Side Restaurant, 131 Dwight Street in New Britain. Please send an email to Ken.White@snet.net if you are planning are going for their Annual October feast.

KOINONIA

Koinonia will meet on Tuesday, October 13 at Violi's. at noon. Please let Lorraine know if you plan on going. If you usually go out with Others and don't feel like going out at night please join us, we would love to have you meet with us.

CHRISTIAN ED



Sunday School will meet weekly **beginning on October 18th at 10:20 AM**, with a live Sunday school option offered and the class will be live streamed in Google meet, as well.

LOL (high school class) class will meet on **October 25th, at 10:20AM**.

Confirmation class will reconvene on **October 4th, at 1PM**. If you are in grades 7-12, and would like to be included in the confirmation class please contact Maureen: Christian.ed@centrchurchmeriden.org.



Halloween At this time, decisions about our annual Community Halloween Party are not yet finalized. It is clear we will not be hosting an indoor party this year, but the Board of Christian Education in conjunction with the CCC Youth Group, is trying to have some type of safe celebration. Stay tuned for future announcements in the Enews and during Sunday worship.



CCC Youth Group had an exciting **Chopped Quarantine Edition**, on September 27th. Given the mandatory ingredients: leeks, canned chicken, primavera boxed rice, and rainbow baby carrots, youth group members made unique creations that their families enjoyed eating. No chef was chopped by their family members, who served as our judges for the competition!

CCC Youth Group will **meet** with Chelsea on **October 25th at 11:15AM**, this will be an In person meeting with a live streamed component. All are encouraged to wear Halloween costumes for the meeting!!.

UPDATES FROM YOUR PARISH NURSES

Your parish Nurses haven't let COVID 19 stop us. We are still serving this church and the community. The way we serve might be different including more phone calls and less in person meetings. The collection for bottles and cans for the deposit money is still happening. With this money we have been able to help the Meriden Soup Kitchen with over 360 bottles of water and 110 health packages to distribute this summer. We are maintaining our Church World Service [CWS] depot and on September 8th the CWS truck picked up 30 clean up buckets, 2,000 school kits and 4,000 hygiene kits. These items will be distributed worldwide including the USA. The parish nurses are supplying the Center Congregational Church with bottles of hand sanitizer for the opening of the church on October 11th. We can do this and more due to your support and continued prayers and efforts.

Please stay safe. Wear your mask, wash your hands frequently, maintain social distancing when you are outside your sphere of people, stay home if you don't feel well. Get your flu shot! Hydrate often. Maintain contact with family, friends and the church. Please know that you are not alone. Thank you for letting us serve you now and in the future.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 4	10:00 am	Virtual-worship
Oct. 4	11:30 am	Coffee hour in the parking lot
Oct. 6	6:30 pm	Deacons via Zoom
Oct. 8	6:00 pm	Others at Violi's
Oct. 8	6:30 pm	Centerites at East Side Restaurant in New Britain
Oct. 11	10:00 am	Worship in the Sanctuary
Oct. 11	11:30 am	Coffee hour in the parking lot
Oct. 13	noon	Koinonia at Violi's
Oct. 13	6:30 pm	Zoom – Trustees
Oct. 18	10:00 am	Worship
Oct. 18	10:00 am	Sunday School at church
Oct. 18	11:30 am	Coffee hour in the parking lot
Oct. 22	6:45 pm	Zoom – Church Council
Oct. 25	10:00 am	Worship
Oct. 25	11:30 am	Coffee hour in the parking lot



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

5	Jack DePalma
	Diana Halla
7	Charlie Bielefield
8	Evan Adamowicz
10	Douglas Pellows
11	Kenneth Harnois
19	Elizabeth Warendra
20	Lindsey Donsbough Dorsey
21	Carol Schlauch
31	Robin Cusachs

IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS



Mary Volker
Betty Weiland
Jonathan Miller
Randy Stack