



middle church

JUST LOVE

New Member Booklet





You. Move. The World: It Starts with Us.

Is your heart breaking? Fascism is rising. Racist hate crimes fill our news feeds. 15 states have banned abortion. Queer rights and freedoms are under attack. There are more mass shootings than days of the year. We know a way to not only repair our broken hearts but also the broken systems that cause harm.

It takes love, the only thing stronger than hate. Come find a home in our fierce love, we are waiting for you! By joining the Love Movement at Middle Church, you answer the call to build God's reign on Earth—a world where all of us thrive. Middle is proudly antiracist, womanist and queer in both our ideals and in practice. We know that the way in which we pursue justice is just as important as the destination.

We're also deeply invested in a mission to reclaim and reframe Christianity from the extremists who have hijacked it to persecute everything that Jesus preached. We follow the One who said that all the law and all the prophets boil down to how well we love our God, our neighbors and ourselves. Love. Period. Everything else is commentary.

We believe this work starts with you, with me; it starts with us. The love movement needs your time and energy. We need your enthusiasm to volunteer, to staff programs and lead groups—to help distribute aid to those who need it. And we need your donations, as we rebuild our church and create a Center for Spirituality, Justice and the Arts.

This is the work that sets my soul on fire. I hope it's igniting yours, too.

Welcome to the love movement, Middle family. Come home to love.

Jacqui
Lewis



A Ritual for Membership

Consistory: Middle Church is a movement of love and justice, and, today, we celebrate with these new members that Middle is their church. They stand before you and before God to say they are partners in this ministry. Friends, just as you are as you come through the door, we welcome you.

Clergy: Membership means signing on for the vision of God's reign. Membership means participating in the life of the congregation. Membership means proclaiming that you belong to God and you will use your gifts generously for God's work. Membership means claiming God's claim on you.

Senior Minister: Today, we welcome to Middle Church these children of God. Friends, do you claim Middle Church as your church? If so, say I do.

New Members: I do.

Senior Minister: Will you give with your heart your gifts to this congregation and to the larger Church? If so, say I will.

New Members: I will.

Senior Minister: Will you learn and study so as to grow in faith? If so, say I will.

New Members: I will.

Clergy: And to this congregation: Do you promise to love, encourage, and support these people of God by being the gospel of God's love and by giving the strong support of God's people in prayer and in deed? If so, say we will.

Congregation: We will.

Clergy: Let us pray.

God of grace and mercy, thank you for the gifts of these new members. Thank you that we are all your children. Make us more like you in all we say and do, and help us to be your hands and feet in this world. We pray in your Holy Name, Amen.

Middle Church Vision Statement

Middle Church is a multicultural, multiethnic, intergenerational movement of Spirit and justice, powered by fierce, revolutionary Love, with room for all. Following in the Way of Jesus' radical love, and inspired by the prophets, Middle Church is called by God to do a bold new thing on the earth. We aim to heal souls and the world by dismantling racist, classist, sexist, ethnocentrist, ableist, cisheterosexist and other systems of oppression.

Because our God is still speaking in many languages, we work in interreligious partnerships to uproot injustice, eradicate poverty, care for the brokenhearted, nurture our planet, and build the Reign of God on earth. This activism is fueled by our faith; our faith is expressed in art; our art is an active prayer connecting us with the Holy Spirit. Middle Church affirms the transformative power of moral imagination, reclaiming and reframing Christianity inside our walls, on the street, and in virtual spaces around the globe.

Dear New Members,

Welcome! We’re so glad you’ve joined our movement for Revolutionary Love. Rooted in God’s radical abundance, we hope this is a place where you’ll find your spirit nurtured, your faith challenged, your connections deepened, and commitment to justice kicked into high gear!

Being a member means using your heart for care, your feet to march, your soul for prayer, and your resources to power this amazing movement we call Middle Church.

Over the next three years, Middle will raise \$15 million to rebuild and plan for our future, and we can’t do that work without you!

That’s why this year, we are leaning into God’s promise of radical abundance with an an annual offering need of \$2,000,000 from our congregation to fuel our operations and programming work in the world. And as a new member, you are a stakeholder, and your partnership—your vision, time, talent, and your donations—will help make it happen.

For some of us, tithing is the spiritual practice of giving 10% of our income to support the work and vision of the church. It’s rooted in the idea that all goods things come from God, and are on loan to us. For others, giving is tied to contributing to something larger than yourself. One might not give 10%, but choose to give another percentage of income.

Here are some examples of how tithing could look for you:



Annual Pledge	3-Year Total
\$10,000	\$30,000
\$5,000	\$15,000
\$2,500	\$7,500
\$1,000	\$3,000

Monthly Pledge	3-Year Total
\$500	\$18,000
\$250	\$9,000
\$100	\$3,600
\$50	\$1,800

Weekly Pledge	3-Year Total
\$100	\$15,600
\$50	\$7,800
\$25	\$3,900
\$10	\$1,560

Whatever you give, know that you are part of Middle Church, a movement for love and justice that will heal our souls and the world. We believe in the transformative power of #RevolutionaryLove to transform our world as, together, we live into God’s Reign. We believe God is calling us to move in the world with **Love. Period.**

Welcome home!
Jacqui, the Consistory, and Team Middle

P.S. It’s easy — Set up your donation or tithe as a recurring gift at middlechurch.org/donate

Staffing the Vision

Our Middle family, staff, and consistory are hard at work. This is the team of dedicated professionals who work hard every day to reclaim, reframe, repair, and rebuild. Our staff is organized to care for you—our 2,100 members—and to live into these strategic directions. More and more, lay teams and small groups will help us do our ministry. This page will help you know who to contact for your needs.

Contact Middle Church at 212.477.0666 or middleinfo@middlechurch.org



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About Middle Church

We are not proud of all of our story, but it is ours. Our church story begins when Dutch settlers came to Manahatta — Island of Hills — and met (not discovered) the Lenape people living here. In 1626, we bought their land for about \$24. We were not fair in our dealings with them. Some of our earliest clergy owned slaves.

At the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's arrival in Manhattan, the Collegiate (Old English for Collegial) Churches of New York apologized to the descendants of the Lenape:

As the "company church" of the Dutch West Indies Company that made New Amsterdam a "company town," Collegiate Church, speaking only for itself, wishes to acknowledge publicly the role it played in the cultural marginalization and physical dispersion of the Native Americans living here, slowly degrading them (in European eyes) from a people with their own culture and civilization to merely another resource.

Middle Collegiate Church is the oldest congregation of the Collegiate Churches of New York. Organized in 1628, the Collegiate Churches of New York is the oldest continuously-active church and the oldest corporation in the North America, established by royal charter from King William III of England in 1696. Currently, there are four ministries of the Collegiate Church: Fort Washington Church, Marble Church, Middle Church, and West End Church.

We are rooted in our history, which we can't escape, but stand boldly at the forefront of progressive theological discourse and interfaith dialogue. We are one of the leading multicultural, multiracial congregations in the United States and stand firmly for LGBTIQ+ equality, including marriage equality. We are anti-racist and believe firmly in the power of women to heal our world. We believe everyone should have enough resources to survive and thrive.

The Collegiate Churches of New York are co-affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church in America. For more information about The Collegiate Churches of New York, visit collegiatechurch.org.

About the Building

The first Middle Collegiate Church was built on Nassau Street between Cedar and Liberty streets in 1729. The second church was erected at Lafayette Place and 4th Street in 1839. The most recent church was erected at Second Avenue and 7th Street in 1891. The cornerstone was laid on May 17, 1891, at the base of the main tower and features the inscription *Nisi Dominus Frustra*, a summary of Psalm 127:1 from the Latin Vulgate— "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

The Sanctuary and Church House were designed by S. B. Reed. The facade on Second Avenue was an example of Gothic architecture built from Indiana limestone with central gable 70 feet high and two towers surmounted by spires 76 and 30 feet high. A bronze tablet giving the historic dates of the Collegiate Church was located between the central entrance and the south tower. Since 1884, an identical tablet has been placed on every Collegiate Church.

Our history has been integrally linked to many key historical events throughout American history. Our bell tower was the home to New York's Liberty Bell, which rang in the birth of our nation on July 9, 1776. Cast in Amsterdam—it is said from silver coins donated by children—and rigged at the first Middle Church in 1731. The bell was hidden during the British occupation of New York City. After the war, the bell was restored to the belfry. The bell was transferred to St. Nicholas Collegiate Church at Fifth Avenue at 48th Street when the Lafayette Place belfry was destroyed in a storm. In 1949, the bell returned home to Middle Church. It has rung for the inauguration and death of every American President. It also rings during momentous New York City events, including remembering the attacks on 9/11.





The Fire

On December 5, 2020 a catastrophic, six-alarm fire spread from the building directly to our north. Despite the FDNY's valiant efforts, our entire sanctuary was destroyed, and the remainder of our church property was severely damaged. The building we loved so dearly—where thousands were married and baptized, which housed funerals and drag shows and interfaith playdates—was gone. As we mourned and prayed for the next step, a question arose: "Where do we belong?"

This is a question familiar to so many today as they experience disconnection and isolation from their faith. Many feel lost in the wilderness of political turmoil, social unrest and oppressive hierarchy heightened through the evangelical embrace of Donald Trump and the killing of George Floyd. But as we journeyed to answer that question, it has allowed us to proclaim that we belong in the places of brokenness, hopelessness and fear. We are rooted in our local community and inspired by the digital landscape where thousands are desperately seeking an answer. So Middle is rising from the rubble to repair: Here.

We have been blessed in the ensuing years to find a tabernacle offered by friends at East End Temple. This partnership is a living representation of Middle's commitment to robust interfaith engagement that knows our futures are bound up together, that our prayers point toward the same God. That sanctuary has provided hope and rest, a place to worship and gather in the wilderness, but it is not a permanent home. It is too small for our congregation and will not support the bold new thing Middle is called to do on the Earth.

And so we are also in the middle of a three-year capital campaign to raise the necessary funds to build a new sanctuary and center for spirituality, justice and the arts—right here on our original site in the East Village, the community we have always called home. By soliciting input from experts, and working with our reparations task force to ensure a new structure also takes steps to atone for historic harm, we hope to build a model for what faith communities can be in the 21st century: Serving our members, our local community, and the wider world.

Selected Timeline of the Collegiate Church

- 1628:** Soon after the establishment of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island, the church is formally organized.
- 1640:** As the colony grows, more churches are established during the next century. Ministers work collegially, preaching in rotation at the various locations.
- 1664:** The Dutch surrender the colony to the British and New Amsterdam becomes New York. The church retains all its original privileges.
- 1696:** The Collegiate Church is incorporated under a charter granted by King William III of England. A triumph for religious liberty, it precludes any union of church and state, recognizing the rights of all Protestant Churches.
- 1729:** The first Middle Collegiate Church is built on Nassau Street between Cedar and Liberty streets.
- 1772:** Independence established from the church in Holland.
- 1839:** The second Middle Collegiate Church is erected at Lafayette Place and 4th Street.
- 1854:** Marble Collegiate Church is built at Fifth Avenue and 29th Street.
- 1867:** The name of the church is changed from "The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in America" to "The Reformed Church in America."
- 1871:** Collegiate ministers cease preaching in rotation; each has his own congregation.
- 1892:** The current Middle Church is dedicated at Second Avenue and 7th Street.
- 1892:** West End Collegiate Church is dedicated at West End Avenue and 77th Street.
- 1907:** Fort Washington Collegiate Church is established at Fort Washington Avenue and 181st Street.
- 1986:** Deacon Jerriese Johnson founds the East Village Gospel Choir at Middle Church.
- 2005:** The Collegiate Church installs its first woman and African American as a Senior Collegiate Minister, The Rev. Dr. Jacqueline J. Lewis.
- 2007:** The Collegiate Church founds Intersections International a peace and reconciliation organization.
- 2017:** On May 4, The Collegiate Church of New York officially adds an affiliation with the United Church of Christ.
- 2020:** A catastrophic fire destroys our sanctuary

Our Vision: A Bold New Thing

Because our God is still speaking in many languages, we work in interreligious partnerships to:
Uproot injustice | Eradicate Poverty | Care for the Brokenhearted | Nurture Our Planet | Build God's Reign on Earth

To accomplish this vision, we plan to build a Center for Spirituality, Justice and the Arts at our historic home at 50 E 7th St.

Spirituality:

- Created a congregational ethos that is unapologetically antiracist, womanist, queer-affirming and that demands God's economy for all.
- Became a National Teaching Center, to create a more just society, training over 10,000 ethical leaders—clergy, young adults, children, and lay leaders in just the last two years.
- Grown from a 500-member church to a global community of over 2,000

Justice:

- Created and convened a national justice conference for 17 years, with thought leaders like Parker Palmer, Van Jones, Valarie Kaur, Simone Campbell, Brian McLaren, America Ferrara, Ani Di Franco, Marianne Williamson, Jim Wallace, Ruby Sales, Traci Blackmon and William Barber, to name a few.
- Trained five cohorts of emerging young adult leaders—attorneys, philanthropists, politicians, activists, educators and artists who've learned how to create visions, manage change and conflict, and grow robust systems in an increasingly racially and culturally diverse world.

The Arts:

- Created The Village Chorus for Children and Youth as a precursor program of the Freedom School to come. The Chorus uses music and the arts to grow young leaders in the ability to navigate a multiracial, many gendered world.
- Piloted the JustArts summer camp for teens, testing the Young Adult curriculum for younger leaders.
- Curated adult artistic programming—like Juneteenth Now—to inspire a more just society.

Our Next Strategic Move

While we mourn the loss of our physical building and the turmoil in our world, we come together as Middle Rising to **Rebuild** a revolutionary space where we will continue to **Reclaim** and reframe faith so that we can **Repair** a hurting world through Fierce Love.

Rebuild

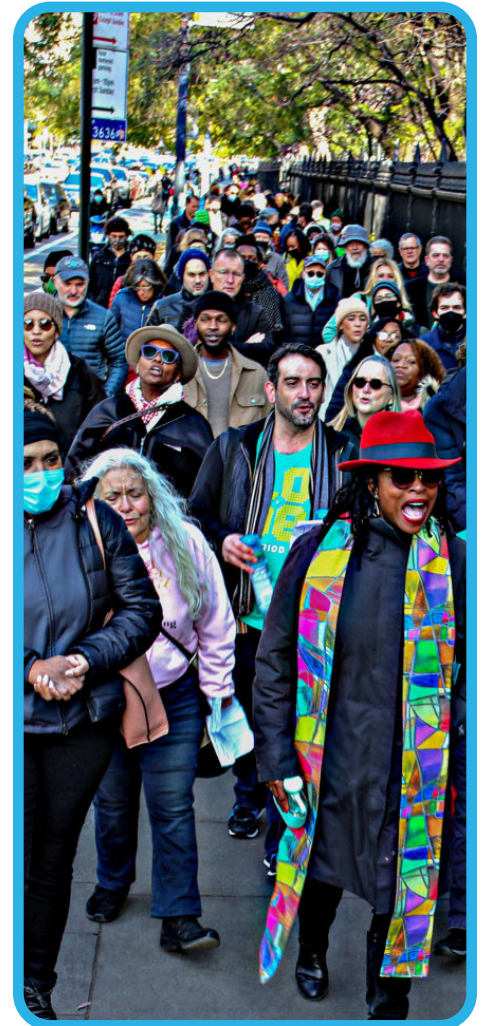
The reimagining and resurrection of our physical space on the original 1892 historic site that will accommodate our vision for a bold new thing that can support transformational ministry for centuries to come.

Reclaim

Urgently reframing what it means to be a church through established Middle programs that will advance our mission to embody a Welcoming, Artistic, Inclusive, and Bold Movement of Just Love. Period.

Rebuild

Reaching beyond Middle Church to strengthen and establish partnerships that will increase our impact in the secular space and repair a hurting world through Fierce Love.





Rehearsing the Reign of God

On earth as it is in heaven. When I was a little girl memorizing the Lord's Prayer, I struggled with phrases like "hallowed be thy name." My brain heard "how low wet" and could not understand what that had to do with God! But, on earth as it is in heaven, I got that. Even as my notions of heaven have turned away from streets paved with gold and pearly gates, I am deeply inspired by the idea of a vision of earth to which our aspirations of heaven have come all the way down. I find this passage from John's Revelation to sum up my hopes and dreams:

"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3–5

I love the vision of God living among and within human beings, comforting, healing, and making all things new. It inspires me to lean into the world as it can be, and empowers me and my congregation to actively participate in the healing of the world.

Because I serve Middle Church as Senior Minister/Minister for Vision, Worship, and Partnership, planning worship and creating public theology are in my portfolio. Worship generates public theology; it turns people on to imagine the world God desires. With that in mind, everything that happens from the top of worship until it ends helps create God talk that is transformational.

Our worship is planned a year in advance, with space to drop in details as we move along the year. We ask ourselves, "What is God calling us to 'story' this year in worship? What themes will we use, and how will the Lectionary passages help us to support those themes?"

We are intentional about themes and we are intentional every Sunday. Who greets at the door? How do they welcome those who are gathering? What do worshippers see first when they arrive? What is the story being told on the bulletin? How do hymns and musical selections offer a radical welcome to a diverse group of people? Who is sitting in the pulpit? How are we responding to the children in our midst? Who reads scripture, offers prayer, and preaches the sermon? How do we ask for the offering and invite people to join us? These are some of the questions we ask when we plan worship because the entire worship celebration tells the story of who God is and how we help God to heal the world.

We are intentional about inclusive language, and about speaking theologically about God's love shown in Jesus Christ as a wide-open door, not a litmus test that God's people can fail. Even the language of invitation to join our community is something about which we take care. For example, we decided that Middle Church is more a "movement" than a "family" and changed the language we use about membership.

We choose music from all eras of traditional Western church music, from the cultures which may be particularly appropriate for this congregation, from cultures which may have interesting and evocative traditions, and according to the specific celebrations member of the congregation may be observing. We also include appropriate selections from the Broadway canon, as well as popular music which may fit a specific theme. In other words, all styles are welcome! The hope is that each person present will find something which particularly appeals to them.

Each Sunday morning, we include a Message for All Ages, when we call the children and "young at heart" to the pulpit for a short lesson about what it means to be people of God in the here and now, and relate it to the theme of that day's worship celebration. Worship incorporates not only words, but visuals, music, movement, and touch, helping make it accessible for children and adults alike with various learning styles.

A few years ago, at a congregational meeting about justice at Middle Church, a young adult, Alex, said, "Just tell us what to do." Tell us what we can do every week to make justice happen in the world. Tell us something practical, something doable, that helps us to take what we have experienced in worship out into the streets. Tell us how we can be changed and help heal others.

And so we do. When we worship we include ideas to take the preached word and live it out loud. Sometimes the suggestion is internal, about healing our own souls. Like, "List three qualities for which you want to be remembered." "Turn your face to the light and bask in the love of God's glow."

More often the suggestions are active, such as "Sign this petition and share it with your community." "Get on the bus with us in three weeks and go to Washington to march for gun control." These suggestions are written by the preacher and are a direct extension of the sermon. The ideas are supported by the songs that have been sung and the prayers that have been prayed.

We each have a platform to change the story about what church means to the mainstream culture. Standing for marriage equality, racial reconciliation, and economic justice outside our sanctuary walls requires planning, responding, collaboration, and media. Even though our worship team plans the outline, music, scripture, and sermon titles a year in advance, they are always bringing in the text of our culture—the news stories, the injustices, and the commitment to heal the world—into the narratives shared on Sunday.

So when news breaks that intersects with our key justice issues (racial, economic, gender/LGBTI, and anti-gun violence), our worship reflects the issue on Sunday. And, at times, members of the press are invited to worship with us. It is our responsibility to tell the story of the transforming power of our worship experience outside our walls. Often, we joke that the first minister visitors meet is our web site, because most new people find us online.

Many visitors find Middle Church by searching for "gay friendly," "progressive," or "gospel music." Our website, newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube Channel, and livestream are all tools to tell the story of God's power at work in our congregation to those outside your walls.

As the worship team and I plan worship, we imagine that our offering is lavish love poured out for God, who is the object of our affection. We also imagine that in worship we are rehearsing the world as it can be; we are performing the norms of the Reign of God. We express our yearning to be in the center of God's plan for healing our souls and healing the world in our music and in our prayers. We create artistic holy spaces for listening to what God requires of us in scripture and in the preached word. And almost always there is a call for action in worship and in the bulletin that offers ways to become more closely connected to God or to serve others.

Isaiah articulates God's dream:

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:19

Worship helps us perceive God's dream, and rehearse it on earth, as it is in heaven. - Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis



Get Connected at Middle!

Middle Church's programming consists of rich and meaningful opportunities for all ages to learn, grow, and lead. Whatever your background—whether you are looking to deepen your knowledge of the Bible, actively seek justice, learn more about yourself in relationship to God, or just have fun in community—we have something for you! For more information and the current schedule, explore our detailed program descriptions at middlechurch.org/community-groups



Adult Education & Spiritual Development

AAPIDA Committee

Our Asian community and advisory group
Meets Periodically throughout the Year

Acting Class:

Join fellow thespians to put on original plays!
Mondays, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. (All Times ET)

BIBLE in the Middle

Study the lectionary text together.
Sundays, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Creative Writing

Write on a prompt and receive group feedback
Thursdays, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Hablamos Otra Vez

Our Spanish language and culture club
2nd Wednesdays, Bimonthly, 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Jerriese Johnson Gospel Choir

Make gorgeous music with our all-volunteer choir
Thursdays, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Liberating Masculinity

Masc folks healing and dismantling patriarchy
3rd Mondays, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

New Adventures

Community and connection for ages 60+
Thursdays, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

Pray to Rise

A mid-week moment for meditation and prayer
Wednesday, 8:00 - 8:20 a.m.

Queer Black Men

An affinity space for LGBTQIA+ Black masc folks
2nd and 4th Wednesday, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Queer Connections

Gather for fun with LGBTQIA+ family
Second Mondays, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Reparations Task Force

Researching Middle's history and a just future
2nd Tuesdays, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. *By invite*

Ukuleliacs

Learn to play the ukulele and have fun doing it
1st and 3rd Wednesday, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Virtual Chat & Chew

Discuss each week's sermon in community
Sundays, 12:45pm-1:30pm

Voter Reform Group

Work for fair elections and end voter suppression
2nd and 4th Sundays, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Young Adults

Community and connection for ages 20 - 40
3rd Sundays, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Children & Youth Education

Freedom Summer Camp (K-5)

Young folks learn leadership at our free camp
Week-long camp in August

Kids Enrichment (Grade K-5)

A weekly online lesson for kids before worship
Sundays, 10:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Middle Youth (Grade 6-12)

Opportunities to have fun and learn in NYC
Meets Periodically Throughout the Year

Village Chorus for Children and Youth (6-17)

Learn music together and perform in worship
Sundays 1:00 - 2:15 p.m.

Outreach & Volunteer

Butterfly Outreach Mission

Make and distribute meals for hungry neighbors
Sundays, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Ushers

Be the smiling face that greets people with love
Sundays & Special Events