



NeedhamUCC

FOCUS Newsletter • May 2023

May 2, 2023

Beloved,

Parish pastors in the throes of Holy Week busy-ness often tell ourselves that once we get past Easter Sunday everything will fine, everything will slow down, and we'll be able to catch our breath and catch up. Ha! Just because the official liturgical calendar clears up a bit doesn't mean our life as church actually gets any roomier; after all, there's Earth Day and Mothers' Day, Confirmation and Graduation, and, of course, Pentecost Sunday and Memorial Day and Pride to observe before the sliightly lighter summer schedule finally sets in in late June.

That's where we find ourselves now. Technically it's Eastertide, the season between Easter Sunday and Pentecost when, according to tradition, the risen Christ showed alive himself to his disciples before ascending into heaven and sending the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it's a good reminder that new life isn't limited to any one magical moment in the past. Resurrection is available to us here and now, and even in the most mundane circumstances—even in the busy-ness of church life (and our own busy lives).

We celebrate the holiness of life when we honor the earth and all those who show us mothering love, when we celebrate with confirmands and graduates as they move from one stage of life to another, when we remember the lives given and taken in wartime and the new life embraced by LGBTQ+ folks in coming out and taking pride in who God is creating them to be. And Pentecost, of course, well, that's a whole whirlwind festival of new life in the Spirit.

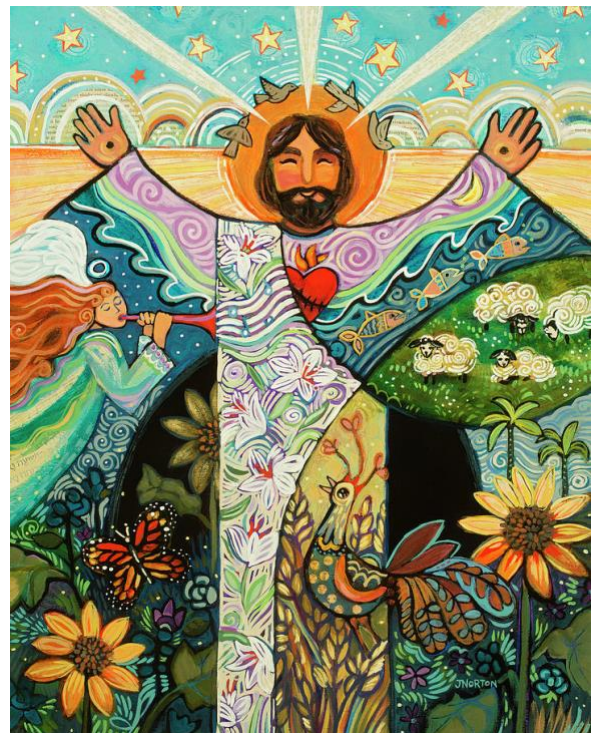
Join us as we explore the new life God offers in this season and every day. It may not be Holy Week, but it's still very much holy.

Peace, Rev. John MacIver Gage

"spring song"

by Lucille Clifton

the green of Jesus
is breaking the ground
and the sweet
smell of delicious Jesus
is opening the house and
the dance of Jesus music
has hold of the air and
the world is turning
in the body of Jesus and
the future is possible.



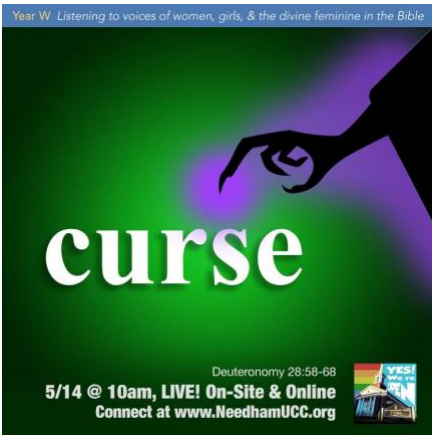


“Bless”

5/7 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

<http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

We often use the word “blessed” —if we use the word at all— as a synonym for lucky or fortunate or favored. The Bible is full of the language of blessing, and often it feels like God is offering us a strict if/then deal: “If you follow me, then I will bless you in x, y, and z ways.” So how do we square that reading with God’s unconditional love? Can we? Or is it okay to disagree with scripture? (Hint: Sometimes we need to) (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) *We will share the sacrament of baptism with Josh Doan and his parents, Ashley and Ryan. Youth Bake Sale after worship. See more below.*



“Curse”

5/14 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

<http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Cursing. Not the kind that gets you bleeped on broadcast television. The kind that causes fig trees to wither and futures to shrivel up and die. Even Jesus seemed to do some cursing—the first kind, probably; the second kind for sure. So what do we do with Biblical curses, especially ones that purport to come from God, and the curses pronounced by some Christians in our world today, maybe even against us? (Deuteronomy 28:58-68)



Confirmation Sunday: “Dive In”

5/21 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

<http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Part of our job—and our joy—as a community of faith is to accompany one another through the ceaseless changes of life and celebrate milestone moments from birth to death. We do this because we believe God is with us every step of the way. This Sunday, we’ll celebrate two of those special moments when we share the sacrament of baptism with the Mack family and their twins, Rose and Stella, and confirm the faith of two of our youth, Magdalena Krug and Anna Busby, who’ve been learning and growing in their faith with Rev. Maddie this spring. Dive in and join the celebration!



Pentecost Sunday: “The Fire Within”

5/28 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

<http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Seems we sometimes forget how upsetting our Christian faith is intended to be. It upsets our assumptions about the way the world works, or should; the domination systems of that govern our economy and politics; even our relationships with our friends, family, and enemies. As beautiful as the gospel vision may be, still it upsets our peace of mind as we labor in the gap between what is what God tells us must be. Turns out the flames of Pentecost aren’t just for show. They really do burn. (Romans 8:14-17, 22-27)

FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH



Youth Bake Sale: Sunday, May 7

Support our youth and Confirmation students service projects by purchasing homemade candy, cookies, and cakes after church on Sunday, May 7.

Youth: You're invited to bake at home and bring wrapped items with you to church on Sunday, May 7!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



Teachers needed for Sunday School & Youth Group

We are able to offer classes for both elementary children and youth with the help of volunteers! Teaching is a fun and rewarding way to minister to the youngest members of our church family – and all you need is a loving heart! Our lessons are prepared in advance, materials are provided, and the kids are fun and friendly and ready to learn and play with you! **Lesson plans can be viewed in advance here:**

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16Du8BMGIBqdsEiu5_eVabrPoiM7UrOz?usp=sharing

To volunteer, sign up online here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050e4eafad2caaff2-sunday1#/>



Sunday School & Youth Group Spring Calendar

Children of all ages are always welcome in worship! Quiet books and pew pals (soft toys) are available in the foyer (narthex). If your family needs a quieter space, our new family/nursing room just off the foyer room has chairs and couches, a big toy box, and a speaker so you can continue to listen to service. There are changing tables available in both of the upstairs bathrooms.

There is no need to RSVP for Sunday School or Youth Group. **All we need for your child to participate is a completed 2022-2023 registration form which you can print here:**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GJe91UDNK2Vqm_hjcfD0wdMkLbrGtqSm/view?usp=sharing

May 7:

*10am Worship with
Communion*

*Children remain in sanctuary,
youth bake sale prep*

11:11am Youth Group Bake Sale

May 14:

10am Sunday School (Pre-K-5)

May 21:

*10am Confirmation Sunday!
Sunday School (Pre-K-5)*

*11:11am Celebrating our
Confirmands! (Special coffee
hour)*



From our **Environmental Ministries Team**

Take a Test Drive for the Environment

5/11 @ 1-4pm at Sunita Williams Elementary School
585 Central Ave, Needham

Even if you want to make the change to an environmentally more friendly Electric Vehicle (EV), it can be difficult if not downright impossible to find one on a dealer lot to test drive.

Look no more! Come test drive an electric vehicle (EV) at this Town of Needham, Green Needham and New England Auto Association Auto Event. Auto dealers, including Quirk Auto Group of Braintree, will be on hand with Chevrolet, Kia, Ford and other EV brands for you to test drive. Members of New England Electric Vehicle Association will attend with a variety of privately owned EVs. Landry's Bicycles will be showcasing various electric bikes for you to test ride. There will even be free treats from Abbott's Frozen Custard! *Rain date will be 5/20.*



Ring Out a Warning!

for 11 minutes.

Faith communities across the country are ringing their bells at the 11th hour of the 11th day of each month to remind our neighbors that we are in the "eleventh hour" of the climate crisis and must act now as individuals, communities, and nations to moderate its worst effects. Join members of our Environmental Ministries Team at the church Thursday 5/11 @ 11am to ring the church bells

Earth Sunday Recap

For this Sunday closest to Earth Day, the Environmental Ministry Team was delighted to welcome The Rev. Noah Brewer-Wallin as our guest preacher in worship. Rev. Noah is the Assistant Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for our Southern New England Conference of our United Church of Christ denominational family. In that role, he exercises leadership particular in areas of environmental and economic justice.

You can watch Rev. Noah's sermon on the Sermons playlist on our **church YouTube channel** at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsUOPVVWcjNLOjJNjLpzXchSMDTFeMh2x> or listen to it on our podcast, "Yes! We're Open: Living Faith with NeedhamUCC," available wherever you get your podcasts or at <https://needhamucc.buzzsprout.com/>





From our Guatemala Partnership

August 2023 Delegation Seeking Travelers

Might you be interested in a first-hand experience with the Guatemala Partnership? We encourage you to consider traveling to Guatemala and our sister community of Santa María Tzejá with this year's August delegation. The trip dates are 8/2-13.

It's an opportunity to experience what life is like in a developing community by living in and participating in the daily activities of the people of Santa María Tzejá. It's a time-tested, exciting, and heartwarming experience in a friendly and loving atmosphere that many travelers -- adults and youth alike -- describe as life-changing. We are planning to organize an information session soon for people who are interested in finding out what this experience is like and may want to join this or a future delegation. Experienced travelers are also encouraged to travel again. See how much has changed -- and how much has remained the same -- in our partnership community!

Bill Garrett and Alan Clayton-Matthews will be leading the August delegation. Feel free to contact any of the following experienced leaders with your interest or questions:

Bill Garrett wgarrett@mit.edu Alan Clayton-Matthews a.clayton-matthews@northeastern.edu
Brenda Metzler bmetzler7@verizon.net Jeff Clausen clausenj@gmail.com

Spring Cleaning? Think of the Guatemala Yard Sale!

As you do your Spring (or even Summer) Cleaning, please set aside your high-quality items for the fall **Guatemala Yard Sale, scheduled for Saturday, 9/16**, on the church's front lawn. You may drop off your items the week before the sale. However, if you are moving soon and have a limited number of 'treasures' to donate, we may be able to accommodate them in a small space at the church. For questions, contact Brenda Metzler: bmetzler7@verizon.net.

Desired items: Household and kitchen items, collectible or vintage items, jewelry, musical instruments, children's gear, toys, games, and puzzles for all ages, current sports equipment for adults & children, bicycles, framed art, electronics (no TV's/computers), books/DVD's/records, or small furniture items (no clothing).

We look forward to lots of you helping with this fun event that raises funds for education in Santa María Tzejá, so watch for future details, including how to sign up to volunteer. Thank you.



Easter Parallels

On Easter morning in the Needham church, congregants entered a sanctuary with a bare cross, and over the course of the service, transformed the cross by covering it with festive, colorful flowers. Likewise, over Holy Week in Santa María Tzejá, the community decorated stations of the cross with resplendent local flowers and palm fronds. While the weather and types of flowers differed, both communities created similar collective symbols of beauty, resurrection, and joy. Despite the imposed borders and unequal power dynamics between North and Central America that threaten to divide us, our bonds of friendship and vision of mutual transformation link us together. We share values of compassion, love, peace, and well-being for all. Our Partnership reminds us that, as Maya Angelou affirms, "we are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike."



From our

OPEN AND AFFIRMING MINISTRY TEAM

Save the date for our second annual **Needham Has Pride “Rally, March, Party!”** event coming up Sunday, 6/18 @ 2-4pm, hosted with First Parish in Needham UUA and others. This is a family-sized LGBTQ+ pride event created especially for families with young children. It was a blast year and we’re looking forward to even more serious fun this year.



First Quarter 2023 Financial Update: Carol Oberle, *Finance Team Chair*

At January’s annual meeting we adopted an operating budget which anticipated revenue of \$768,927, including \$437,000 in pledges, \$147,100 in rental income and \$145,700 funded from the Endowment fund, including \$10,700 from the Konetsky trust to support music. Consistent with Year 3 of the Church’s multi-year strategy, this budget includes Endowment support at 7% of the 3-year average unrestricted endowment.

For the first quarter, pledges totaled \$179,400, well ahead of \$109,300 plan as of 3/31/23. This positive variance is largely due to members prepaying approximately \$43,000 of 2023 pledges. The church has not yet drawn funds from Endowment as funds have not yet been needed for operations. As a result, YTD revenues are \$33,400 or 17% ahead of plan overall.

Expenses are generally in line with budget as a whole. Staff payroll is below budget by \$15,000 since we have not yet hired a church administrator. Music and benevolence giving are both over budget due to timing differences. Building expenses are also over budget by almost \$6,000 due to timing differences.

Several annual inspections happened in February, our property insurance bill is paid in two installments and winter the gas bill is over budget, but will drop to almost nothing in the summer. In summary, this leaves a net surplus of \$34,700 at the end of Q1. Thank you for your continued support.

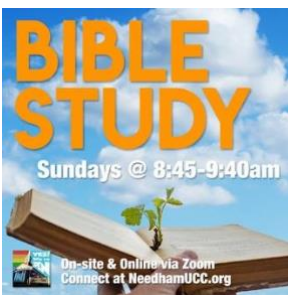


We've Simplified Worship Volunteer Sign-Ups (we hope!)

More than just the ministers, it takes a whole group of volunteers to make our worship happen each Sunday. To make it happen smoothly, we need:

- 1 x Tech Desker (to run tech for worship)
- 1 x Zoom Greeter (to welcome people online)
- 2 x On-Site Greeters (to also help with coffee hour set-up)

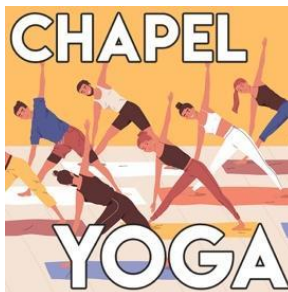
And now we have one link where you can sign up for all of these! [Simply click here](#) and type your name and email address in the appropriate blank. If you have questions about any particular task, email Rev. John [here](#). Thank you for your generosity with your time and energy to help shoulder the responsibility and joy of hosting worship for our congregation and community!



Learn, Reflect, & Imagine with Bible Study

Sundays @ 9-9:40am, On-site in the Reception Room
& Online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Our current Year W project, listening for the voices of women, girls, and the divine feminine in the scriptures is the perfect opportunity/excuse to do some Bible study together. Join us to reflect together on each Sunday's Bible passages for preaching, listening for what tradition, scholarship, and the insight of the Spirit in each of us has to say today.



Chapel Yoga

Thursdays @ 9am

One of the best things any of us can do for our physical, mental, and spiritual health is find ways to reaffirm the living connection between our body, mind, and soul. And yoga is a great way to do that. Our own **Carol Oberle, a trained yoga instructor**, is leading this **50m yoga on Thursdays @ 9am in the chapel**. This beautiful space we now share with the Charles River Ballet is perfect for yoga. **This class is free to church members and their guests.** *Participants will need bring a yoga mat and be prepared to leave your shoes and water bottles in the hallway before entering.*



Mindful Meditation ONLINE

Sundays @ 7pm LIVE! via Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88272388482>

What is mindful meditation? *It's a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress. Who couldn't use more of that?* Join longtime practitioner Sue Findlay and others Sunday evenings online via Zoom.

FOCUS newsletter contributions are always welcome!

The submission deadline for our upcoming Early Summer Issue (including events for June and July) is scheduled to go out the first week in June is:

Wednesday, May 24

Please submit materials by e-mail to office@needhamucc.org



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