



NeedhamUCC

FOCUS Newsletter • Spring 2023



March 24, 2023

Beloved,

It bears repeating: Every week is holy. Every week is a gift from God, even the hard ones, even—God help us—the very worst ones. They are holy, the world is holy because we all bear the fingerprints of the holy God who made us. This, today, is when God chooses to meet us, in the midst of our lives, week after week after week.

Holy Week, capital-H, capital-W, is a chance to remember that, to be intentional about going to meet the God who comes to us in Jesus, who was born, lived, died, and was raised again for love of us. That love is in no way limited to one special week a year. But if we pay attention to the story of this week and lay our lives alongside it, there is a hard and beautiful blessing for us here:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.
(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Peace,
Rev. John MacIver Gage

“Holy Week” by Ann Weems

Holy is the week...

Holy, consecrated, belong to God...

We move from hosannas to horror
with the predictable ease
of those who know not what they do.

our hosannas sung,
our palms waved,

Let us go with passion into this week.

It is a time to curse fig trees that do not yield fruit.

It is a time to cleanse our temples of any
blasphemy.

It is a time to greet Jesus as the Lord’s Anointed One,
to lavishly break our alabaster
and pour perfume out for him
without counting the cost.

It is a time for preparation...

The time to give thanks and break bread is upon us.

The time to give thanks and drink of the cup is
imminent.

Eat, drink, remember:

On this night of nights, each one must ask,
as we dip our bread into the wine,
“Is it I?”

And on that darkest of days, each of us must stand
beneath the tree

and watch the dying

if we are to be there

when the stone is rolled away.

The only road to Easter morning

is through the unrelenting shadows of that Friday.

Only then will the alleluias be sung;

only then will the dancing begin.



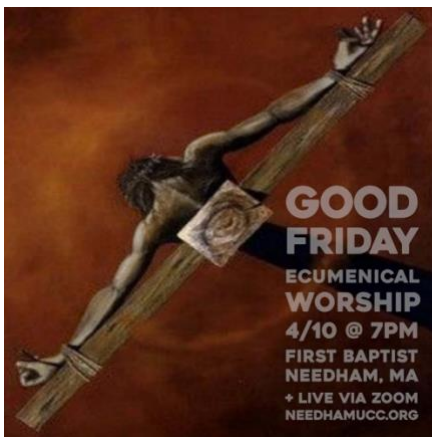
4/10 Palm & Passion Sunday @ 10am: "The unKing"

Jesus and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate enter Jerusalem on the same day from opposite sides of the city and with opposite agendas. Pilate is about the love of power, the power to dominate and demand obedience. Jesus is about the power of love, love that "endures all things" for the sake of the beloved, such love that changes the world. Why is it so hard for the crowds—and for us—to accept that Jesus didn't come just to turn the wheel but to break it entirely, for the sake of love? (Matthew 21:1-11)



4/6 Maundy Thursday @ 7pm: "All of You Is Invited"

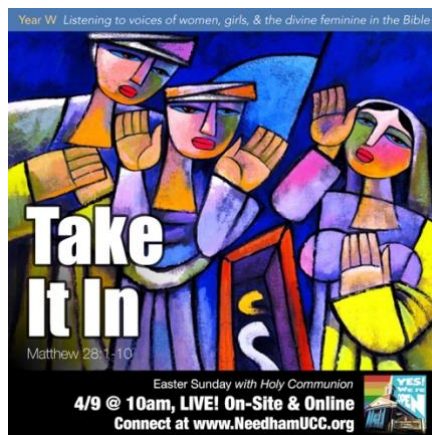
We remember Jesus' last night with his disciples, and his last supper, when welcomed them all to the table, even his betrayer, as an act of radical hospitality on the eve of his death at the hands of the state. Even in the midst of our own season of shadows, inside and out, that invitation still stands. Come and share Jesus' table, his a "new commandment" that we should love one another, and his trials, as he shares ours. *Worship will include both Holy Communion and a Service of Tenebrae or Shadows.*



4/7 Good Friday @ 7pm: An Ecumenical Service

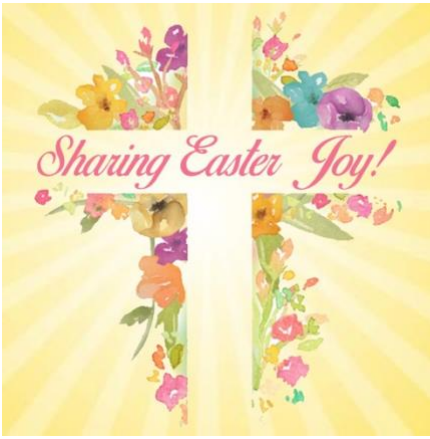
LIVE! On-site at First Baptist Church, Needham and Online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

We will share this opportunity to remember Jesus' execution on the cross with neighbors in Needham as part of an ecumenical worship service led by members of the Needham Interfaith Clergy Association and hosted by First Baptist Church, 858 Great Plain Avenue. This service will be live on-site at First Baptist and on Zoom at our usual worship link.



4/9 Easter Sunday @ 10am: "Take It In"

The women who receive the good news of Jesus' resurrection first are charged with the enormous task of being the world's very first evangelists. But before the "go and tell his disciples he has been raised," they need to stop and take it in for themselves: Jesus is alive. Death is not the last word. A better world is possible. Let's just sit with that for a moment ourselves. (Matthew 28:1-10) *Worship will include both Holy Communion and the Flowering of the Cross: Bring cut flowers (from your yard or the store) to help transform the death-dealing cross into a sign of God's resurrection life!*



Sharing Easter Joy!

Flower Delivery, 4/2 after worship

Help us share the tender good news of Easter with members of our congregation who may be going through a hard time just now or simply can't make it to worship as often as they might like. We need volunteers to help deliver 30 spring flowers and a smile around town (and just a little further) after worship on Sunday, April 2. **Please email Rev. John at revjohn@needhamucc.org to sign up.**



Just-4-Fun Egg Hunt!

Saturday, 4/1 @ 10am / Sensory-Friendly Hunt @ 9:15

Families from all over our community are invited to join our annual (non-religious) egg hunt @ Saturday, 4/1. Come for candy-filled eggs, laughter, music, a photo booth, and more at 10am. We also have a sensory-friendly offering (no music, smaller group at a slower pace) @ 9:15am.

We need volunteers! Help with set-up (beginning @ 8:30am), the event itself, and clean-up is needed. We especially need folks to lift and move play structures from our playground to the front yard, someone to take photos at our photo booth, and folks to help welcome kids and their

families. **Email Rev. Maddie to sign up.**

NOTE: All our public "tickets" are sold out. Church Families who want to attend the 10am egg hunt **DO NOT** need to RSVP. **Church families who want to attend the 9:15am SENSORY FRIENDLY hunt MUST RSVP** as space is limited. Please **email Rev. Maddie** right away.

YOUTH: Come to Youth Group (during worship) on 3/26 to stuff eggs!



Who Are We UCC?

THIS SUNDAY, 3/26 @ 11:30am after worship

Our United Church of Christ denominational family is an odd one. First, we're old... and new. The modern denomination was formed in 1957, but our roots stretch back 400 years, particularly in New England. Secondly, we're a congregational church, which centers the autonomy of local congregations, but we also believe we're bound together in covenant relationship, all our congregations together. And while "our faith is more than 2000 years old, our thinking is not." We believe God calls us not just to preserve a history but lean into a more just world for all and act on that conviction. **In this gathering for new and longtime members and friends**

of the church, we'll talk about who we are, what we believe, and how we believe it.

A Better World is Possible *with Outreach*



Family Promise Metrowest

Walk to End Homelessness

April 30 @ 1pm

Join our church team for the 2023 Walk to End Homelessness. This is the largest fundraiser of the year for Family Promise Metrowest, and it fuels their mission to transform the lives of families with

children facing homelessness across the Metrowest region. The *family-friendly* and *dog-welcoming* walk Sunday, 4/30 @ 1pm will leave from Natick High School for a 2.5-mile loop through Natick Center with food, music and activities. **To register with our church team or sponsor our walkers, go to**

<https://familypromisemetrowest.salsalabs.org/walktoendhomelessness2023/index.html> and type

“Congregational Church of Needham” in the “Search for a team by name” window. Registration fees are \$35/adult, \$20/ages 5-17, and \$100/family of 4. For more info email Vance Fernandez, our member liaison, at vancefernandez@hotmail.com or call her at (617) 816-5871.

Join Our Team of Volunteers for Family Promise Metrowest



As a **Supporting Partner Congregation** with Family Promise Metrowest, we are committed to providing volunteers to help support the families living at the Family Promise house in Natick for 4 weeks over the course of a year. **We need more adult and teen volunteers to fulfil our commitment.** A one-hour online orientation is required. The families currently in residence are three young mothers whose children are 3 months-, 2 years-, 6 years-, 12 years-, and 13 years-old. We are committed to:

- grocery shopping;
- preparing meals; and
- contributing gift cards for Target, Walmart
- dining with the families and visiting in the evening;
- or Stop and Shop;

(In addition, volunteers may provide overnight and weekend support or weekday reception/admin support for Family Promise. Email Vance Fernandez at vancefernandez@hotmail.com or call her at (617) 816-5871 with questions or to add your name to our volunteer list.



Earthquake Relief UPDATE

Earlier this year, areas of eastern Turkey and northern Syria were struck by an almost unimaginably powerful earthquake. Thanks to your generosity, along with a gift from our Outreach funds, we are making a **total donation of \$4470** to the disaster relief efforts of our United Church of Christ through our partners on the ground in the area. Thank you!



LGBT Asylum Task Force Support UPDATE

The LGBT Asylum Task Force, begun by the Hadwen Park UCC Church in Worcester, provides housing and support to queer people seeking asylum in the U.S. because they face violence and death in their home countries. In the recent storm, a tree fell on a house where many of these folks live, displacing them and costing the Task Force thousands of dollars for temporary housing and repairs. Thanks to your generosity, along with a gift from our Outreach funds, our congregation is making a **total donation of \$1690** to support housing and rebuilding efforts. Thank you!



Period Party UPDATE

When you're living unhoused, there are so many questions to think about, so many needs to be met; but there's at least one we don't often consider: *"Where am I going to get the products I need to deal with my monthly period cleanly and safely?"* So once again we partnered with **Circle of Hope** here in Needham to address this need. We collected pads, tampons, pantyliners, & hygiene wipes. On Sunday, 3/19, **30 volunteers from 8 years-old to 80 (and some not even members of our congregation!)**

came together to repack these materials into 1000 individual reusable bags to be distributed as-needed to clients at various shelters and helping agencies around the area. We're especially grateful to unexpected and very welcome **donations from Sons of the American Legion Post 440 in Newtown and the Rotary Club of Needham.** *Thanks to everyone who gave of the time and treasure to make this happen!*



FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

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

Sign up online today at <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 narthex. If your family needs a quieter space, our Reception Room (right next to the little kitchen on the way to the sanctuary) has comfy chairs and couches, a big toy box, and a speaker that broadcasts the 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 2022-23 registration form which you can print from the following link:**

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

Events/classes with an * asterisk require pre-registration.

MARCH

March 26 9am Confirmation*
10am Sunday School (Pre-K-5) & Youth Group (6-12)

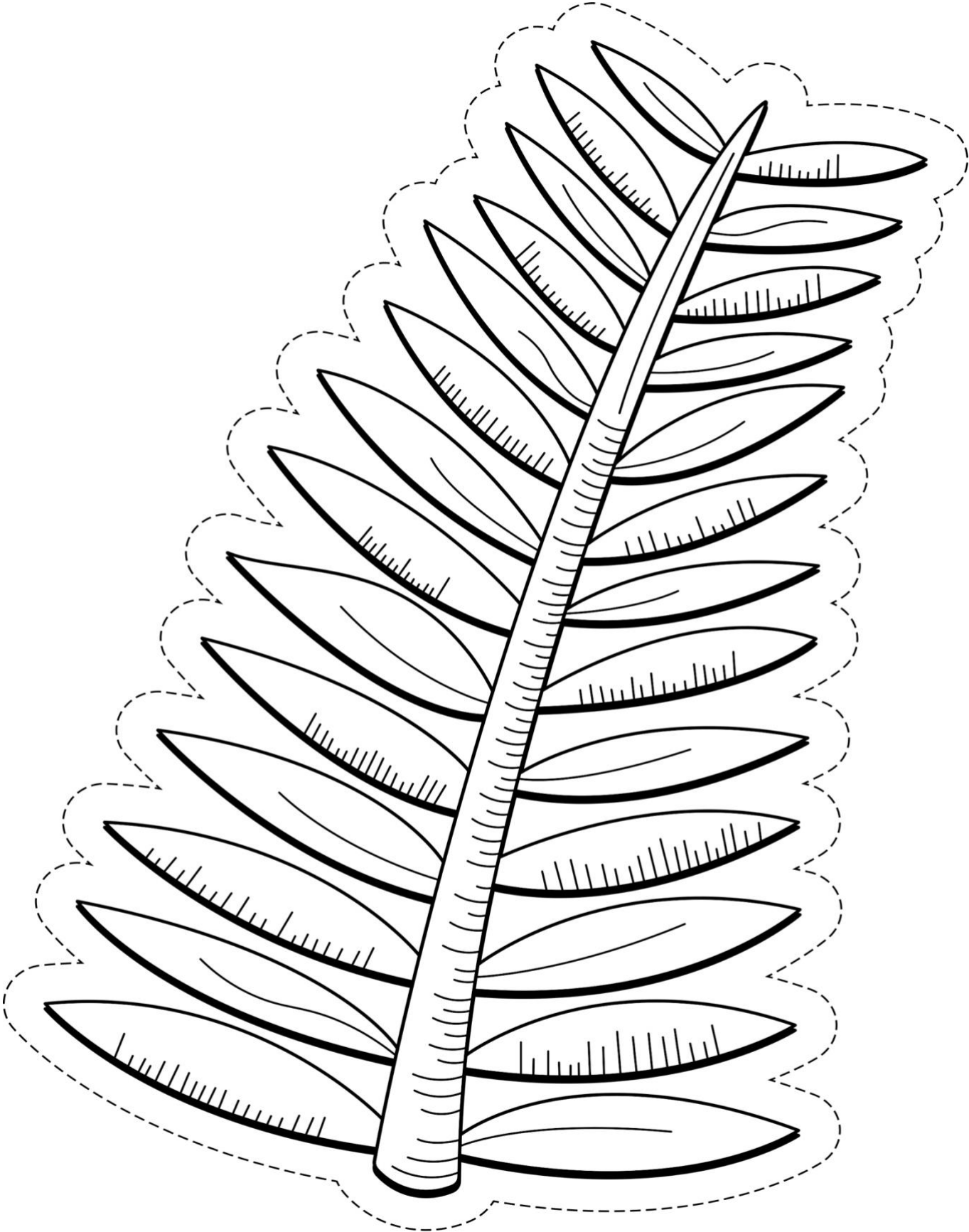
APRIL

April 1 Egg Hunt!* 9:15am Sensory Friendly* 10am Egg Hunt w/ Music & More*
April 2 10am Sunday School (Pre-K-5) & Youth Group (6-12)
April 9: 10am Easter Worship *Students in Sanctuary*
April 16 Needham Public Schools Spring Break begins (*students in sanctuary*)
April 23 9am Confirmation*
10 am Sunday School (K-5) & Youth Group (6-12)
April 30 9am Confirmation*
10am Sunday School (K-5) & Youth Group (6-12)

MAY

May 7 10am Worship with Communion *Children remain in sanctuary. Youth Group 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)

Here's your own palm frond to print out, color, and cut out for Palm Sunday, 4/2





From our Environmental Ministries Team

It's not too late to sign up for **Renewing God's Creation: Daily Meditations for Lent** from the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts.

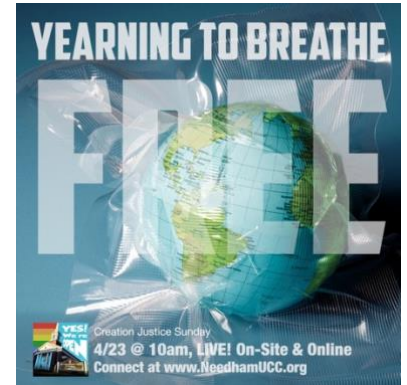
<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/nlqnl4M/2023LentenMeditations>

Looking for a Lenten activity that is also good for the Earth? **Join Earth Hour** and "switch off" to give an hour for the Earth **THIS SATURDAY, 3/25 @**

8:30pm, local time. <https://www.earthhour.org/>

EARTH SUNDAY is coming up **April 23**. The Environmental Ministry Team has invited Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin to preach in worship that Sunday with our congregation. Rev. Emma is the Minister of Environmental and Economic Justice with serving our Southern New England Conference of our United Church of Christ denominational family. You can find out more about Rev. Emma and her ministry at the link below:

<https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/conference-calls-first-minister-for-environmental-economic-justice-announces-other-staffing-changes-additions-15231163>

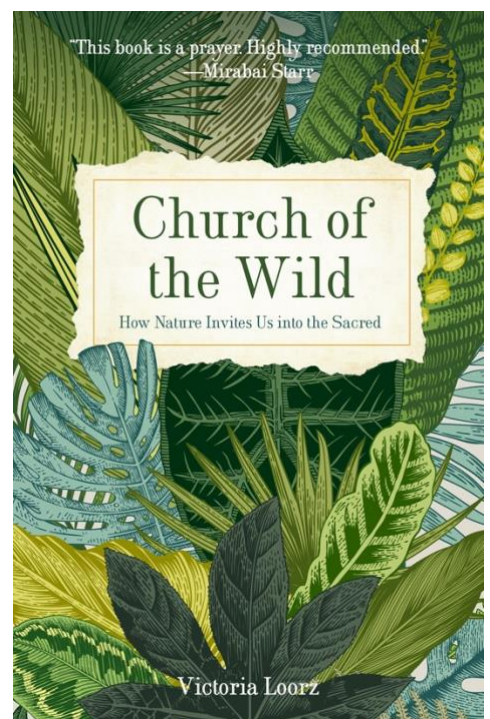


On Earth Sunday, EMT will also be hosting a **Mass Save** event from 11:11am until about 12:30 PM. HomeWorks Energy, a Mass Save partner, will do a presentation about **reducing your household's energy costs and your carbon footprint**. Come learn about and sign up for free home energy assessments, available options to decrease your household's carbon footprint and how to save money with current Mass Save rebates. Please join us!

Book Recommendation: *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us Into the Sacred*, by **Victoria Loorz**. This book "uncovers the wild roots of faith and helps us deepen our commitment to a suffering earth by falling in love with it – and calling it church."

<https://www.amazon.com/Church-Wild-Nature-Invites-Sacred/dp/1506469647>

Local green business: "Fulfilled Goods," has opened in Newton. It's a low-waste, package free market and refillery, designed to simplify your sustainable lifestyle. Bring your own (or purchase) reusable containers to purchase food, dry goods, personal care products and sustainable cleaning products. <https://fulfilledgoods.com/>





From our Guatemala Partnership

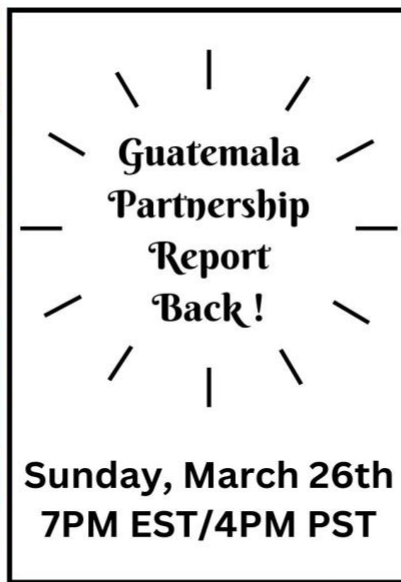
Our February delegation just returned from a spectacular visit to our sister community! We invite you to the upcoming Report-Back, to be held virtually, to hear about these highlights:

- Long-awaited, much celebrated, life-changing arrival of running water in the community
- Hike to the Cantil Reserve where we learned about the site's history, spiritual importance, and biodiversity
- Workshop Wednesday at the middle school with sessions on health, science, English, and games
- Library Fair with read-alouds, games, and a youth-led treasure hunt
- Hands-on workshops by community members on weaving and chocolate
- Sunday lunch with the new cohort of scholarship students
- Tour of ongoing projects at the farmers market and the soccer field

February Delegation Report-Back

Sunday, 3/26 @ 7pm EDT LIVE! via Zoom at

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81702211238?pwd=ajZoS1VxaDFieDRXUzdxdWtVEVVGtMQT09>



PARTNER FAMILY LETTERS

If you write with a partner family in Santa María, be on the lookout for your letter in the coming weeks. If you don't have a partner family but want one, please contact Alan Clayton-Matthews at a.clayton-matthews@northeastern.edu



From our

OPEN AND AFFIRMING MINISTRY TEAM

Embraced as we are by God's *amazing grace*, it's time for us to face some *hard truths*...

Transgender Day of Remembrance (11/20) was founded out of the grief of a community suffering relentless violence, people needing to remember and mourn their dead when no one else would. Over time, **Resilience** was added as a theme, because transgender and gender-nonconforming people are nothing it not resilient in the face of a world determined to deny and diminish their lives. But even that felt too limiting, like a closed loop, while friends and chosen family were being killed, swiftly, by violence and suicide, and slowly, by neglect. What was needed was **Visibility**.

So March 31 was set aside as Transgender Day of Visibility and dedicated to *celebrating* transgender and gender non-conforming people, their lives and their contributions to society, as well as raising awareness of the discrimination they face daily worldwide just for being who God created them to be.



The Current Situation

One year ago, 15 states in this country had already restricted access to gender-affirming care or were currently considering legislation to do so, imposing severe penalties for health care providers and, in some cases, even parents seeking to provide gender-affirming care for their children. At that time, the Williams Institute estimated the number of transgender youth at risk of losing access to gender-affirming care under these bills at 58,200. Given the documents disproportionate risk of suicide among gender-nonconforming youth who don't receive such care, that means legislators were putting 58,000 kids at risk of death.

(<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu>)

But these days it's getting worse—far worse: The dam of respect and tolerance has broken, and lawmakers in statehouses across the country are seizing this moment to pass hateful, harmful legislation at a staggering rate. 428 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced in state legislatures in the first three months of 2023. *Them*, an online queer magazine, documents that in just one week this year, from February 25-March 3, there were more than 50 bills under active consideration to end gender-affirming health care for children *and adults* and threaten individuals' employment, education, artistic expression, ability to play sports, even just their basic right of self-determination and safety. (<https://www.them.us/story/anti-lgbtq-legislation-bills-tracker-us>) Even here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, families attending drag queen story times at local libraries are being harassed by neo-Nazis (<https://www.heraldnews.com/story/news/2022/12/15/neo-nazis-were-in-fall-river-to-protest-drag-queen-story-time/69727920007/>).

We strongly encourage you to read this article by Michael Streib, Queer Justice Advocate for our Southern New England Conference of our United Church of Christ denominational family, to learn more and find out how you can take action to fight for justice for our transgender and gender-nonconforming kin:

Jesus' Guest List is Under Attack - Statement on the Massive Rise in Anti-LGBTQ

<https://www.sneucc.org/blogdetail/jesus-guest-list-is-under-attack-statement-on-the-massive-rise-in-anti-lgbtq-legislation-17357293>

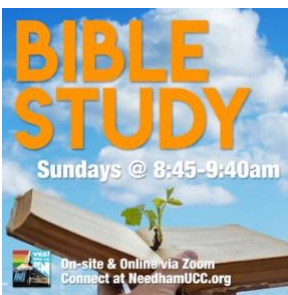


We've Simplified Worship Volunteer Sign-Ups (we hope!)

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)

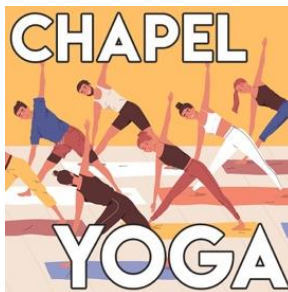
And now we have one link where you can sign up for all of these! [Simply click here](#) and type your name and email address in the appropriate blank. If you have questions about any particular task, email Rev. John [here](#). Thank you for your generosity with your time and energy to help shoulder the 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.* **Note: There will be NO YOGA 4/20 during school vacation week.**



Mindful Meditation ONLINE

Sundays @ 7pm LIVE! via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

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 Late Spring issue (including events for May and scheduled to go out the third week in April is: **Wednesday, April 12***

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



Rev. John MacIver Gage, *senior minister*

revjohn@needhamucc.org

Rev. Maddie Foster, *minister for Christian education & youth*

revmaddie@needhamucc.org

Valerie Becker, *music director*

musicdirector@needhamucc.org

church office

office@needhamucc.org

Cindy Sullivan, *finance administrator*

finance@needhamucc.org

Board of Directors

board@needhamucc.org

Tom Mollerus, *moderator*

moderator@needhamucc.org

Board of Deacons: Linda Bauer, *chair*

deaconchair@needhamucc.org

Pastoral Relations Committee

prc@needhamucc.org

The Congregational Church of Needham (MA), United Church of Christ

1154 Great Plain Ave, Needham MA 02492

Tel 781.444.2510 • www.NeedhamUCC.org • Instagram @NeedhamUCC